

Becoming a Red Cross Church Shelter

Guidelines

The Red Cross typically sets up shelters in high schools or convention centers to handle the initial influx of survivors. After a few days, when the storm subsides, the majority of survivors will return home to check on the status of their homes. Some will decide they are not going back and will linger longer in Austin. After 4 or 5 days, the Red Cross will try to vacate the school or convention center and, at this point, they will transfer survivors to local church shelters. For your church to be a Red Cross shelter you should have the following:

- a. Gymnasium or multipurpose room where survivors can sleep
- b. Kitchen area to dispense meals
- c. Toilets
- d. Showers
- e. Side room to house dog kennels

The Red Cross will typically provide a shelter manager and volunteers to staff the shelter, but since they may be coming in from other parts of the country, your church should be prepared to staff the shelter during the first 24 hours. You should have a volunteer who has taken the Red Cross shelter manager course and several volunteers who have taken the Red Cross shelter worker course. Your shelter workers should be prepared to volunteer for the duration as they will be more familiar with where things are in their church. The Red Cross will arrive within the first 24 hours with a trailer full of blankets, paper plates, plastic utensils, cereal, milk, orange juice, coffee, towels, dog food, and kennels. However, your church should also store most of these items in order to operate the shelter until such time as the Red Cross arrives with their trailer.

The Red Cross insists on feeding the survivors, so don't plan on having church members show up with casseroles, etc. The city of Austin provides cots and will typically send in fire fighters to mark off your gym floor, with tape, creating a personal space around each cot, usually 20 square feet. Pillows and blankets are not provided by the city. Survivors will be at your shelter all day. They will need outlets to recharge their cell phones, probably toiletries, towels, blankets, and pillows. Some entertainment for the children would be greatly appreciated.

The Red Cross will typically reimburse the church for any expenses/damage they incur so keep records. Once your church houses survivors, you do not get the use of those rooms back for Sunday services. They belong to the Red Cross until the last survivor has left.

If your church plans to become a shelter, you have to be surveyed by the Red Cross. They will determine how many survivors your church facility can accommodate. Contact the local Red Cross for more details. Once approved, your church goes into a database and can be called on whenever disaster strikes. Volunteer workers who complete the Red Cross training also go into a

database and can be called on to serve at shelters other than your own church. Of course, you always have the option to decline.

Managing a shelter can be rewarding but also challenging. You may have homeless people show up, looking for a place to sleep, shower, and eat for a few days. Shelters are chaotic, dogs barking, kids running around, and adults frantically making phone calls all day and all night. Volunteer workers can stress out after manning 12 hour shifts. Your shelter manager has to be a “take charge” type of person who lays down the law and lets people know when they are out of line. The majority of survivors are grateful and will not be a burden, however, there is often the one exception who feels he/she is entitled and insists on better service. There may be a few lingering survivors who need encouragement moving on from the shelter to a more permanent residence. You may feel the need to employ the services of several ADRN chaplains and ADRN-trained shepherds.

Note: For collecting information on local Church / Facility Shelter-Storage-Distribution availability you may wish to use the [D22-T03-N003 ADRN Church Network Shelter-Storage-Distribution Availability Form-Call Log](#), or, verify that the information has already been collected by the Call Center.

For a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) see the [D22-T02-N008 ADRN FAQs - Becoming an Intermediate Church Shelter](#) document