

DISASTER MINISTRIES



MAINE CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Winter Storms: Dealing with a Flooded Lower Level

Basement Flood: If you find that the lower level is flooded, take some safety precautions. Make sure that the church is structurally safe to enter. Take a page from the Ark and go in two by two, rather than alone. In case of emergency, you'll need someone to help (or to call for help).

Turn off the electricity at the breaker as long as you don't have to stand in water to do so. From your dry location, you can use a wooden stirring spoon to open the panel, then to flip the switch. If the breaker panel or main circuit breaker is in the basement, call the power company or an electrician. Electrocutation is a very real possibility even in nominal amounts of water. Even if the power company has shut off power to the street, make sure your panels are off as you have no way of knowing when they'll reactivate the power (and you could be standing in water at the time).

Depending on the location and severity of the situation, you may want to turn off the gas or fuel oil. Flashlights and extension cords will come in handy as you begin the cleanup. Your situation will dictate whether you may need a sump pump, generator, or a heavy-duty gas engine pump. Gas powered generators should never be inside as they create hazardous exhaust.

Cleaning Up: Mop or wet-vac, but don't use a regular vacuum cleaner to remove water. Depending on the scope of the water damage, you may need to engage a water damage restoration company that will remove water and bring in heavy-duty fans.

Items that are wet are much heavier than when they are dry. Be aware of this as you clean up. You may want to fill several small bags than fewer large bags.

Once the water has been removed, ventilate the area well with fans (using outlets that haven't been submerged) to prevent mold and mildew. If your chapel floor was flooded, you can place styrofoam blocks, wood blocks, or tinfoil under the legs of the communion table or other precious compromised furniture.

Disinfecting: You may need to disinfect the ladies' society tea sets if the kitchen has been flooded. Clean all surfaces (including the inside and outside of cabinets) with a heavy duty disinfectant that specifically says it kills germs. Kitchenware may be cleaned with a solution of 2 tablespoons of chlorine bleach for each gallon of hot water. Soak your china, glass and plastic dinner sets for ten minutes; then let the dishes air dry. Boil flatware and metals for ten minutes to disinfect.

How Secure Are Your Important Documents? If your important historical documents such as baptism and wedding records are kept on the basement level, they'll be safest in plastic tubs and elevated off the floor. (Have they also been scanned to the cloud?) If these papers and pictures do sustain damage, you can freeze them in plastic baggies until you have time to dry and clean them.

The Maine Conference Disaster Resource and Response Team regularly shares resources for dealing with disasters and traumatic events. Learn more at [Disaster Ministries - Maine Conference United Church of Christ \(maineucc.org\)](http://DisasterMinistries-MaineConferenceUnitedChurchofChrist.maineucc.org). - Rev. Estelle Margarones, Maine Conference Disaster Coordinator