

# **EARTHQUAKE PREPAREDNESS GUIDELINES FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP**



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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A special note of appreciation goes to everyone who graciously allowed us to use their images as illustrations.

We are confident that this booklet will serve as a useful earthquake preparedness resource for faith-based communities across Jamaica and beyond.

# WHY PREPARE?

Places of worship are not exempt from the devastating effects of natural disasters. Jamaica has long faced challenges from hurricanes, floods, and, to a lesser extent, earthquakes. Earthquakes are unpredictable, strike without warning and pose serious risks, including fires, tsunamis, landslides, and structural damage making preparedness essential to reducing vulnerability, injury, and loss of life.

Jamaica lies within a moderate earthquake zone and experiences approximately 200 earthquakes annually. The 1692 Port Royal earthquake and the 1907 earthquake of Kingston are historically the most devastating. The latter caused widespread destruction which severely damaged several churches across the island, including the Kingston Parish Church, Mount Fletcher's Wesleyan, St. Andrew Coke Methodist, Holy Trinity Cathedral, Cedar Valley Presbyterian, Morant Bay Episcopalian, and Black River Parish Church.

In more recent history, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti caused large-scale destruction to churches and claimed around 300,000 lives.

Given these and other risks, earthquake preparedness is a priority for all. Developing a comprehensive plan ensures safety, awareness, and readiness. Annual building inspections, maintenance, training, communication, and drills are essential steps in strengthening resilience.

This booklet provides tailored guidelines recognising the unique characteristics of places of worship which are typically open spaces often without furniture under which to take cover for protection.

It also provides essential tips on how to develop your earthquake preparedness plan, actions to take before, during, and after an earthquake, and practical steps to enhance safety.

We urge you to create or update your plan and, most importantly, implement it. Preparedness protects property and saves lives.



# HOW TO PREPARE

**Develop Earthquake Management Plan:** Your plan should cover what to do before, during, and after an earthquake. It should consider everyone including visitors and people with disabilities.

## Things to Consider:

**Emergency Management Committee:** Create a team and appoint an Incident Coordinator.

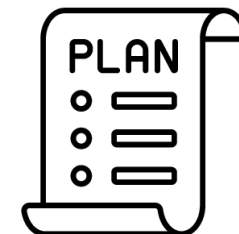
**Develop Relationships:** Reach out to local authorities such as the **Jamaica Fire Brigade**, the Jamaica Constabulary Force, Parish Disaster Committee at your local Municipal Corporation, and ODPEM. These agencies will provide you with guidance and input.

**Effective Communication:** Actively engage your congregation; provide regular updates on your plan and evacuation procedures.

**Structural Integrity/Risks of Buildings:** Beyond the geology of an area, understand structural risks or threats to your building/s, structural integrity, construction material, age, and maintenance as these variables determine the vulnerability of your facilities. Contact the Building Department of your Municipal Corporation for assistance in your planning.

**Safety Wardens:** Appoint wardens as they will play a key role in helping you to implement your plan such as building evacuation, assisting individuals with disabilities, special needs, or the elderly, and ensuring everyone is accounted for.

**Training:** Organise training and certification with the **Jamaica Fire Brigade** for designated individuals such as Ushers, Elders, or others selected to support. Contact your nearest **Jamaica Fire Brigade** office and the Parish Disaster Coordinator for more details.



## HOW TO PREPARE CONT'D

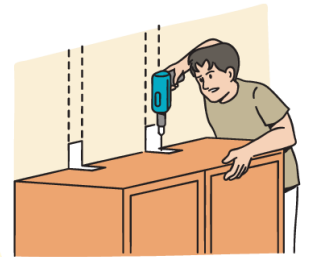
**Risk Assessment:** Schedule an annual inspection of your building/s, perimeter walls, and surrounding areas to identify potential risks and hazards. After the hazard hunt, quickly address issues to mitigate risks to ensure a safe environment.

**Secure Your Space:** Severe shaking can move or throw around almost anything, even large or heavy equipment. Ensure instruments such as organs/pianos are firmly bolted/secured to the floor or wall as they can cause severe injuries. Secure filing cabinets, projectors, audio-visual aids, screens, and speaker boxes based on the required standard and have them inspected annually by the **Jamaica Fire Brigade**. Do not place seats beneath heavy-hanging objects or hang heavy items from balconies and guardrails.

**Protect Records and Sensitive Equipment:** Safeguard important documents such as membership lists, financial records, and historical files from water or fire damage (keep e-copies). Protect sensitive equipment such as audio-visual, musical instruments, and sacred artifacts.

**Keep All Aisles and Exits Clear:** All aisles and exits are to be kept clear from obstructions such as cameras and tripods, audio-visual, lighting equipment, electrical cords, extra chairs, or other potential obstacles.

**Safety Announcements:** Incorporate safety tips in your regular weekly announcements and other activities to build awareness around evacuation and other protocols. Please see a sample announcement on page #19.





## HOW TO PREPARE CONT'D

**Erect Signs:** Ensure visible signs are in place for evacuation routes, emergency exits, and assembly points using luminous paint, tapes, reflective strips, or light so that they can be seen at night.

**Erect Lights:** These should be battery-powered with auto turn on in the event of power failure.

**Fire Extinguishers:** Install and properly maintain fire extinguishers; train people how to use them. If bulk fuel is stored for standby generators, check with the **Jamaica Fire Brigade** on how to mitigate the risk of a large fire—a possible occurrence after major earthquakes.

**Emergency Supplies:** Store emergency supplies such as flashlights, batteries, megaphone, first aid kits, and non-perishable food items. Continuously check expiration dates and replenish accordingly.

**First Aid Centre:** Identify a designated area where Medical or First Aid volunteers can assist the injured; those needing attention from the sudden onset of panic, anxiety, or asthma attacks, etc.

**Tsunami Caution:** Ensure the plan addresses unique situations such as proximity to coastal waters as tsunamis could occur based on the magnitude and location of the earthquake.

**Regular Training and Drills:** Ensure designated individuals know how to respond by conducting regular training in first aid, evacuation, and other procedures. Conduct drills at least twice per year.



# HOW TO CONDUCT AN EARTHQUAKE DRILL

**PARTICIPATION:** Designate dates for your drills; encourage full participation to build awareness

**ALARM:** Decide on the use of a bell or alarm that is known and understood by all.

**RESPONSE:** Upon hearing the bell/alarm at the end of the mock shaking; whether indoors or outdoors you are to:



**DROP:** To avoid being knocked down; to become a smaller target for flying or falling objects.



**COVER:** Under furniture, if available.



**HOLD:** Until the shaking stops.



**FOETAL POSITION:** If no furniture is available under which to take cover, DROP, use your arms to COVER your head and neck, bend over to protect your vital organs. Crouch as low as possible to the floor or ground based on your physical ability.

**EVACUATION:** Upon hearing the bell or alarm, proceed in an orderly manner to the designated assembly points using established evacuation routes. Safety Wardens are responsible for checking (sweeping) all areas, including bathrooms, nurseries, offices, classrooms, etc., to ensure complete evacuation and **prevent re-entry**.



# HOW TO CONDUCT AN EARTHQUAKE DRILL CONT'D

**ASSEMBLY\*:** People should assemble according to their location. Confirm that everyone has safely evacuated.



**ROLL CALL:** At the assembly point/s, determine if everyone has evacuated. If anyone is missing, notify a safety warden or another authorised person designated in your plan. Taking note of persons sitting nearby helps in this process. Be neighbourly.



**EVALUATION:** Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the exercise and identify areas for improvement.

**\*SELECTING AN ASSEMBLY POINT:** An assembly point is a safe, spacious location away from the building and potential hazards.



# BEFORE AN EARTHQUAKE



**Ensure** roles and responsibilities are clear to everyone executing the plan.



**Ensure** your plan is understood and operational; not locked away but is a 'living' document. Plan to be safe.



**Ensure** you conduct drills at least two times per year.



# DURING AN EARTHQUAKE

- Remain calm
- Do not run
- Stay away from glass windows and doors
- Follow given instructions and announcements from the designated personnel

## Places with Pews

For places of worship with pews (wooden benches): DROP between the rows of benches, use your arms to COVER your head and neck to protect yourself from falling or flying objects, and try to make yourself as small as possible. Where possible, take cover under the bench if they are high enough to do so.



## Places Using Plastic, Folding, or Other Types of Light Chairs

DROP where you are, COVER your head with your arms and neck to protect yourself from falling objects, and make yourself as small as possible.





## Places Using Metal-Framed Chairs

DROP between the rows, use your arms to COVER your head and neck to protect yourself from falling objects, and try to make yourself as small as possible.





## Places That Don't Use Chairs

If chairs are not normally used in your place of worship, DROP, use your arms to COVER your head and neck to protect yourself from falling or flying objects, and try to make yourself as small as possible.



## People in Wheelchairs or with Mobility Challenges

- Persons in wheelchairs should always have the wheels locked when not moving as there will not be enough time for you or anyone to lock the wheels once the shaking begins. You are to remain seated, and COVER your head and neck with your arms, a large purse, or bag, if possible. Always remain close to whoever provides assistance.



- If mobility issues do not allow you to DROP, you should remain seated and use your arms to COVER your head and neck.



## Gatherings in Rooms with Desks or Tables

Where children or teens are in separate areas furnished with desks or tables, they should DROP, take COVER under the furniture, and HOLD until the shaking stops.





## How to Protect Infants

Cradle the infant, DROP, use your other arm to COVER your head while using your body as a shield.



## Vulnerable Individuals

Pregnant women, individuals with special needs, and the elderly are to be given extra support. Please include in your plan.



## Administrative Staff

- DROP, take COVER under a desk or table and HOLD on to the furniture; or brace against a wall
- Stay away from glass windows or doors.
- If access is gained through electronic entry and exit, please install a manual backup system in the event your electricity supply is disrupted.



## If Outdoors

Stay away from trees, utility poles, or other potential hazards. DROP and COVER. Do not try to run into the building as you may get injured.





# AFTER AN EARTHQUAKE

***“A false sense of safety is worse than none at all,” (Jamaica Fire Brigade).***

Activate your emergency plan.

Adopt the mantra, ***“If there is a shake, evacuate”***.

Evacuate as soon as the shaking stops. It's better to err on the side of safety than remain in a building without knowing if the shaking was due to a foreshock (a quake that occurs before a larger seismic event) or an aftershock (a smaller quake that follows a larger one).

Suspend activities, check for structural damages, assess the overall situation, then reconvene once “all clear” is given by the designated authorised personnel/s.

Orderly evacuate the building and proceed to the predetermined assembly points using your Safety Wardens and other designated personnel to assist.

Do not stop to collect belongings; instead, follow the “grab and go” approach, taking only essential personal items.

Check for and attend to injuries. Assist the vulnerable, those with special needs, and mobility challenges.

Account for everyone. Be neighbourly and notify a Safety Warden if someone is missing.

No one should leave before being accounted for. This will avoid unnecessary searches that could put others at risk.

Be mindful of aftershocks. If large enough, they could cause further damage to buildings and other infrastructure.

**Building Re-Entry:** A competent, certified engineer or authorised person (predetermined in your plan) must give the official “all clear” before re-entry.

The designated individual named in the plan should conduct an assessment for new hazards, gas leaks, damage to water pipes, electrical wires/poles, or building/s damage. Report on damage to be then sent to your Municipal Corporation.

Where applicable, file insurance claim/s to secure necessary funds for repairs.

**Consider People's Emotional Well-Being:** Persons may experience shock, become anxious, their sense of safety may diminish, or become preoccupied with their homes or families and are therefore unable to be re-engaged.

# **SAMPLE SAFETY ANNOUNCEMENT**

In the event of an emergency, your safety is our top priority. Please remain calm and follow these instructions to ensure an orderly evacuation.

Take a moment to locate the nearest exit in your area. Emergency exit signs are illuminated and clearly marked throughout the building.

In the event of an evacuation:

1. Follow given instructions and announcements from authorised personnel.
2. Identify and use the nearest exit.
3. Proceed to the designated assembly point/s and wait for further instructions.

Thanks for your co-operation.

*Courtesy of Swallowfield Chapel*

**\*\*If you have audio-visual equipment, we suggest you display photos of your emergency exits during this announcement which can also be recorded and used as an audio or video clip during your gatherings.**

# PARISH COORDINATORS, DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS	ADDRESS	TELEPHONE
Kingston & St. Andrew	24 Church Street, Kingston	876-967-3329   876-922-0254
Portmore Municipality	1 Cookson Pen, Braeton Parkway, Portmore,	876-740-0789   876-740-7440-2 876-618-7601
St. Catherine	Parade Square, Spanish Town	876-984-3111-2   876-907-0296 876-907-1795
Clarendon	Sevens Road, May Pen	876-986-2216   876-986-2234
Manchester	32 Hargreaves Ave., Mandeville	876-962-2278-9   876-962-0612 876-961-6361
St. Elizabeth	58 High Street, Black River,	876-965-2256   876-570-6269
Westmoreland	96 Great George Street, Savanna-La-Mar	876-955-2654   876-955-2798 876-955-2527
Hanover	Church Street, Lucea, Hanover	876-956-9703   876-956-2958



# PARISH COORDINATORS, DISASTER PREPAREDNESS CONT'D

MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS	ADDRESS	TELEPHONE
St. James	19A Union Street, Montego Bay	876-952-5500-2
Trelawny	Water Square, Falmouth	876-954-3228
St. Ann	St. Ann's Bay P.O, St. Ann	876-794-9331-2   876-972-2615-6
St. Mary	13 Hodgson Street, Port Maria	876-994-2212   876-994-2648
Portland	1 Gideon Ave., Port Antonio	876-881-0670
St. Thomas	11 Church Street, Morant Bay	876-982-9366

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