



## OFFICE OF DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

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### PRESS RELEASE

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#### **ODPEM Launches New Earthquake Preparedness Guidelines for Places of Worship**

Jamaica experiences approximately 200 earthquakes annually, according to the Earthquake Unit at the University of the West Indies, Mona. Historical earthquakes in 1692 (Port Royal) and 1907 (Kingston) caused widespread destruction, including damage to places of worship.

Recognising the risks posed by seismic activity, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), in collaboration with the Earthquake Unit, the Jamaica Fire Brigade (JFB), and Swallowfield Chapel, has developed a crucial new resource: the Earthquake Preparedness Guidelines for Places of Worship.

This initiative aims to provide leaders and members of Jamaica's faith-based communities with practical tools to enhance resilience and protect lives and property during an earthquake. The guidelines are customised to address the specific risks and structural features of religious spaces, which are often large, open areas with minimal protective furniture.

With 69 per cent of Jamaicans affiliated with a faith community (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2011), and more than 850,000 people—or roughly 30 per cent of the population—attending weekly worship services (Jamaica Observer), the development of this guide was classified as a national priority. This resource is an essential tool for faith-based organisations to improve their preparedness and response capabilities.

Preparedness is vital for reducing risks and saving lives, and the booklet provides clear, actionable recommendations, including:

- Developing or updating an earthquake preparedness plan
- Conducting annual building inspections and routine maintenance
- Training members, volunteers, and staff
- Conducting earthquake drills and establishing effective communication plans

The guidelines were compiled by a multidisciplinary committee chaired by ODPEM's Deputy Director General, Ms. Michelle Edwards, with significant input from the Earthquake Unit, the JFB, and Swallowfield Chapel, who initially requested the resource.

The Earthquake Preparedness Guidelines for Places of Worship are available for free download on the ODPEM website [www.odpem.org.jm](http://www.odpem.org.jm) as of July 28, and will also be published on partner platforms, including the Jamaica Information Service (JIS). A limited number of printed copies will be distributed through municipal offices nationwide.

ODPEM urges all places of worship to act promptly to strengthen their preparedness and protect their congregations by developing or updating their plans and protocols.

Together, we can build a safer, more resilient future, one congregation at a time, as Faith in Action is Preparedness in Practice.

**END**

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