NBCUSA H.O.P.E.

WINTER PREPAREDNESS TOOLKIT

A Faith-Rooted Guide for Families, Churches, and Communities

WINTER 2026–2027

BE PREPARED AT HOME

PROTECT OUR CHURCHES AND COMMUNITIES

PROMOTE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

SUPPORT OUR VULNERABLE MEMBERS

STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH IN ACTION



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Healthy Churches. Stronger Families. Safer Communities.

NBCUSA H.O.P.E.
WINTER PREPAREDNESS TOOLKIT

Winter 2026–2027 | Updated Edition

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PREPARE • PLAN • PROTECT • PRAY TOGETHER

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Healthy Churches Begin with Healthy Choices

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About this 2026–2027 Update

This edition updates the NBCUSA H.O.P.E. Winter Preparedness Toolkit v. 2 for the 2026–2027 winter season. It preserves the original emphasis on household supplies, food and heating safety, mental health, congregational readiness, vulnerable neighbors, and faith-rooted encouragement. It adds clearer generator safety, individualized medical power plans, accessible communication, winter travel decisions, and a church response worksheet.

Educational resource only. Follow current local emergency management, National Weather Service, public health, utility, and healthcare guidance. This resource does not replace professional medical, legal, emergency, or facilities advice. Verify local warming center hours, eligibility, transportation, and shelter availability before sharing.

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Trusted Sources and Update Notes

Use the most current instructions from:

- ☐ Ready.gov (winter weather, power outages, generators)
- ☐ weather.gov (local alerts)
- ☐ CDC.gov (carbon monoxide, respiratory viruses)
- ☐ FoodSafety.gov (food safety during outages)
- ☐ RedCross.org (emergency kits)
- ☐ 988lifeline.org (crisis support)

Local officials' instructions take precedence.

1. Household Emergency Supplies

Be Prepared Before the Storm Arrives. Winter storms can develop quickly, leaving families without electricity, heat, safe transportation, or access to essential supplies. For that reason, household preparedness is one of the most important steps we can take to protect ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities.

The **NBCUSA H.O.P.E. Winter Preparedness Toolkit 2026–2027** encourages every household to maintain emergency supplies sufficient for at least three days, with additional provisions whenever possible.



Seven Essential Areas Deserve Our Attention

Preparing for emergencies does not have to be complicated. By focusing on a few key areas before a storm, power outage, or other unexpected event occurs, individuals and families can strengthen their ability to remain safe, healthy, and connected. The following seven essential areas provide a practical framework for building readiness and resilience for households of all ages and abilities.

1. **Water:** Store at least one gallon per person per day for a minimum of three days. Consider additional needs for infants, medical conditions, and extended outages.
2. **Food:** Keep at least three days of nonperishable, ready-to-eat food, including supplies for special diets, infants, and pets. Remember a manual can opener.
3. **Warmth:** Have coats, layered clothing, hats, socks, blankets, and dry bedding available if heating systems fail.
4. **Lighting and Communication:** Keep flashlights, battery-powered lanterns, spare batteries, charged power banks, a weather radio, and written emergency contact information. Choose flashlights instead of candles whenever possible.

5. **Health Supplies:** Prepare first-aid materials, necessary medications, prescription information, medical records, glasses, hearing-aid batteries, and personal hygiene supplies. Consult healthcare professionals about medication reserves and storage.
6. **Home Safety:** Make sure smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms are working properly, including their battery backups.
7. **Accessibility:** Plan for mobility equipment, backup batteries, communication assistance, service animals, and trusted individuals who can provide support.

A Faith-Based Call to Action. Preparedness is not an expression of fear; it is an act of wisdom, stewardship, and love. Proverbs 22:3 reminds us that the prudent recognize danger and take precautions. As churches, we can encourage every family to prepare an emergency supply kit, help older adults and vulnerable neighbors obtain essential items, and organize volunteers to check on those who may need additional assistance.

Our Household and Church Challenge
Before the first winter storm arrives:

- Check your emergency supply kit and ensure you have at least three days of water, food, medications, and essential household items for every family member.
- Test flashlights, weather radios, smoke detectors, and carbon monoxide alarms, and replace batteries as needed.
- Charge power banks and identify backup plans for communication, transportation, and medical needs during an outage.
- Confirm that older adults, people with disabilities, and families with young children have the supplies and support they may need during severe weather.
- Encourage your church, ministry, or neighborhood group to conduct a preparedness check-in and identify volunteers who can assist vulnerable households.

Remember: Preparedness is a ministry of stewardship and care. When households are ready, churches are stronger, neighbors are safer, and communities are more resilient.

2. Power Outages and Food Safety

When the Power Goes Out, Food Safety Matters. Winter storms can interrupt electricity for hours or even days. While losing power creates challenges for heating, lighting, and communication, it also presents a serious concern that families sometimes overlook: **the safety of food stored in refrigerators and freezers.**

The **NBCUSA H.O.P.E. Winter Preparedness Toolkit 2026–2027** reminds us that food safety must be part of every household emergency plan. Food that looks or smells normal may still contain harmful bacteria when it has been stored at unsafe temperatures.

Five important food safety practices can help protect your family:

1. **Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed.** An unopened refrigerator generally keeps food safe for approximately four hours. A full freezer can maintain safe temperatures for about 48 hours, while a half-full freezer generally provides about 24 hours.
2. **Monitor food temperatures.** Use an appliance thermometer whenever possible. Perishable refrigerated foods that have remained above 40°F for two hours or longer should be discarded. After four hours without electricity, refrigerated perishables generally need to be thrown away unless their safety can be verified.
3. **Check frozen foods carefully.** Foods that still contain ice crystals or have remained at 40°F or below may be safe to refreeze or cook. Consult current FoodSafety.gov guidance for specific food categories.
4. **Never taste food to determine whether it is safe.** Harmful bacteria cannot always be detected through appearance, smell, or taste. Remember the simple rule: **When in doubt, throw it out.**
5. **Protect food and drinking water from contamination.** If flooding occurs, follow local instructions concerning drinking water and food disposal. Boiling water can address certain biological hazards, but it does not remove chemical contamination.

A Faith-Based Call to Action. Preparedness is part of responsible stewardship. We honor God's provision not only by being thankful for our food but also by handling it wisely and protecting the health of those who share our tables. In John 6:12, Jesus instructed His disciples to gather the remaining food so that nothing would be wasted. That lesson reminds us to value our resources. Yet, responsible stewardship also means recognizing when food has become unsafe and must be discarded.

Churches can help families prepare by sharing food safety information, encouraging the use of refrigerator and freezer thermometers, and identifying community resources for households that lose food during extended power outages.

Our Household and Church Challenge
Before the next winter storm:

- Place an appliance thermometer in your refrigerator and freezer.
- Keep a supply of shelf-stable foods that require no refrigeration.
- Review the four-hour refrigerator and 24-to-48-hour freezer guidelines.
- Identify local food assistance resources for families affected by extended outages.
- Share these safety reminders with older adults, caregivers, and families in your congregation.

Remember: Food safety is family safety. A little preparation today can prevent illness tomorrow.

3. Safe Heating and Carbon Monoxide Prevention

Staying Warm Without Putting Your Family at Risk

When winter temperatures drop and power outages occur, keeping our homes warm becomes a priority. However, some emergency heating methods can create serious dangers, including house fires, burns, and carbon monoxide poisoning.

The **NBCUSA H.O.P.E. Winter Preparedness Toolkit 2026–2027** reminds families that staying warm must never come at the expense of staying safe. Carbon monoxide is especially dangerous because it is an invisible, odorless gas that can cause serious illness or death. It can accumulate when fuel-burning appliances and equipment are improperly installed, ventilated, or operated.



Six important safety practices deserve our attention:

1. **Use space heaters carefully.** Keep portable heaters at least three feet away from curtains, furniture, bedding, and other combustible materials. Place them on stable surfaces, plug them directly into wall outlets, and turn them off before sleeping or leaving the room.
2. **Never use ovens or grills to heat your home.** Gas ovens, charcoal grills, camping stoves, and outdoor heaters are not substitutes for properly installed home heating systems. Using them indoors can cause fires or deadly carbon monoxide buildup.
3. **Operate generators outdoors only.** Portable generators should be placed at least 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents, with exhaust directed away from the building. Never operate a generator inside a house, garage, basement, or enclosed porch.
4. **Install and maintain carbon monoxide alarms.** Place alarms near sleeping areas and on appropriate levels of the home according to manufacturer instructions and local requirements. Test alarms regularly and replace them when recommended.

5. **Recognize warning signs.** Carbon monoxide poisoning can cause headaches, dizziness, weakness, nausea, confusion, and other symptoms. If an alarm sounds or poisoning is suspected, move everyone to fresh air immediately and call 911 or emergency services. Do not reenter until emergency personnel say it is safe.
6. **Prepare for loss of heating.** Keep extra blankets, warm clothing, hats, and socks available. Identify a safe alternative location, such as an officially designated warming center, if your home becomes dangerously cold.

Faith-Based Call to Action
Scripture reminds us in Proverbs 27:12 that the prudent recognize danger and take precautions. As people of faith, we understand that protecting life is part of our responsibility to God and one another. Preparing for winter emergencies demonstrates wisdom, compassion, and responsible stewardship.

Churches have an important role in sharing safety information, checking on older adults and vulnerable neighbors, and helping families locate safe shelter when heating systems fail. Our concern must extend beyond the walls of our sanctuaries. We must remember those who live alone, those experiencing homelessness, and families who may not have adequate heating resources.

Our Household and Church Challenge
Before the next winter storm:

- Test smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms.
- Inspect portable heaters and review their safety instructions.
- Confirm that generators can be operated safely outdoors.
- Identify members who may need assistance during heating emergencies.
- Locate nearby warming centers and emergency shelter resources.
- Establish a church communication plan for checking on vulnerable households.

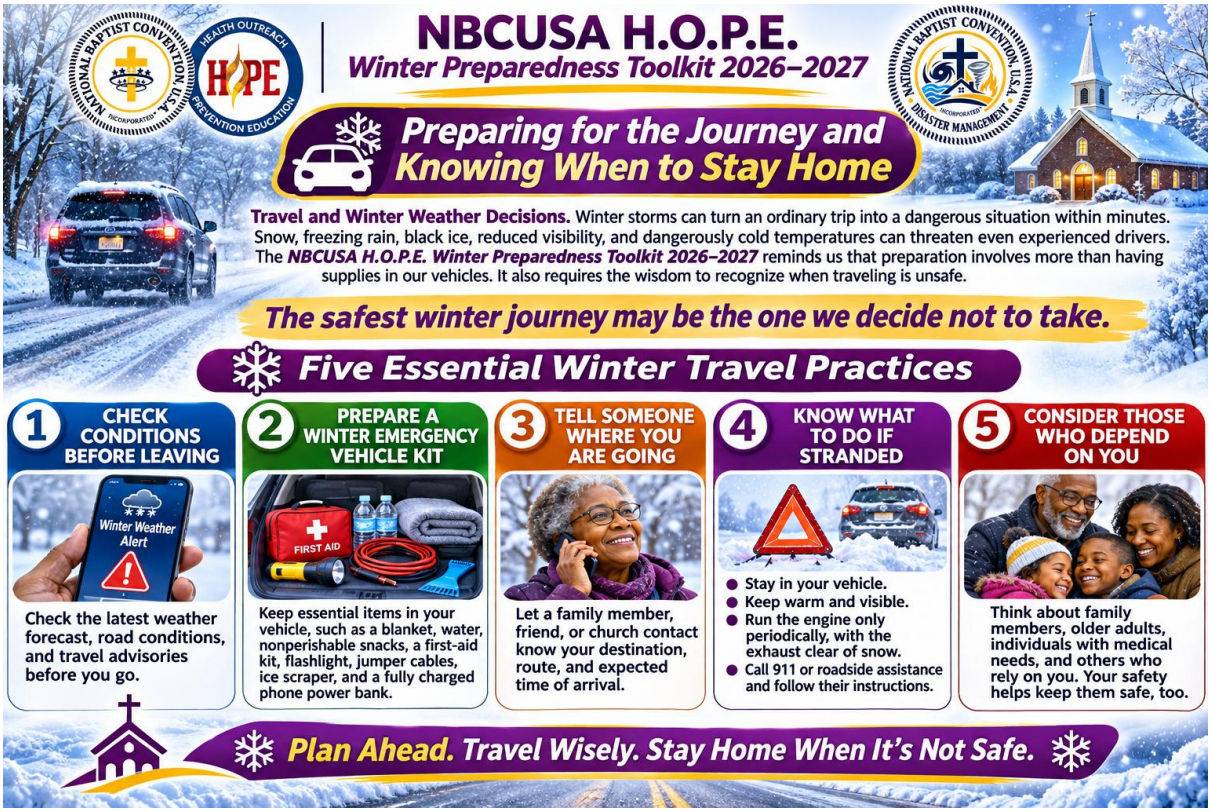
Remember: Staying warm is important, but staying alive and safe is essential.

4. Travel and Winter Weather Decisions

Preparing for the Journey and Knowing When to Stay Home

Travel and Winter Weather Decisions. Winter storms can turn an ordinary trip into a dangerous situation within minutes. Snow, freezing rain, black ice, reduced visibility, and dangerously cold temperatures can threaten even experienced drivers. The **NBCUSA H.O.P.E. Winter Preparedness Toolkit 2026–2027** reminds us that preparation involves more than having supplies in our vehicles. It also requires the wisdom to recognize when traveling is unsafe.

The safest winter journey may be the one we decide not to take.



Five Essential Winter Travel Practices

1. Check Conditions Before Leaving

Before traveling, review National Weather Service forecasts, road closures, and local emergency alerts. Pay attention to winter storm warnings and changing road conditions.
Postpone nonessential travel during ice storms, blizzards, and other hazardous conditions.

2. Prepare a Winter Emergency Vehicle Kit

Every household should consider keeping these essential supplies in its vehicle:

- Blankets and extra winter clothing
- Drinking water and nonperishable snacks
- A charged phone and vehicle charger
- Flashlight and spare batteries
- First-aid supplies and essential medications
- Ice scraper, small shovel, and traction material

These items can provide important protection if a vehicle becomes disabled or travelers are delayed.

3. Tell Someone Where You Are Going
Before departing, share your intended route and expected arrival time with a trusted person. Make sure your vehicle has sufficient fuel or battery charge and carry essential medications. A simple communication plan can make a significant difference if an emergency occurs.

4. Know What to Do If Stranded
If your vehicle becomes stranded during severe winter weather:

- Call for assistance and provide your location.
- Make your vehicle visible to emergency responders.
- Conserve phone and vehicle battery power.
- Follow instructions from first responders.
- If running the engine for warmth, keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow and slightly open a window to reduce carbon monoxide risk.

Do not attempt to walk through dangerous weather unless emergency personnel direct you to do so.

5. Consider Those Who Depend on You
Church leaders, caregivers, volunteers, and families should carefully evaluate travel decisions involving older adults, children, people with disabilities, and individuals requiring regular medical care. Never pressure members or volunteers to travel on hazardous roads simply to maintain a scheduled church activity.

A Faith-Based Call to Action. Proverbs 22:3 reminds us that prudent people recognize danger and take precautions. This principle speaks directly to winter travel.
Faith does not require us to ignore warnings or take unnecessary risks. Instead, faithful stewardship calls us to make wise decisions that protect our lives and the lives of others.

Our churches must demonstrate that same wisdom when deciding whether to hold in-person worship, Bible study, meetings, or community activities during severe weather.

Protecting people must always take priority over preserving a schedule.

Our Household and Church Challenge.
Before the next winter storm:

1. Inspect your vehicle and assemble an emergency travel kit.
2. Identify reliable sources for weather and road-condition alerts.
3. Establish a family communication plan.
4. Review transportation needs for older adults and vulnerable members.
5. Establish clear procedures for canceling or moving church activities online.
6. Remind members that remaining home during dangerous weather is an act of wisdom, not a lack of faith.

Remember

- Winter preparedness is not simply about reaching our destination. It is about making decisions that allow everyone to return home safely.
- **Prepare before you travel. Check before you leave. Stay home when conditions are dangerous.**
- The next section is Section 5: Mental Health and Spiritual Care, addressing isolation, emotional distress, congregational connections, and compassionate support during winter emergencies.

5. Mental Health and Spiritual Care

Caring for the Mind, Body, and Spirit During Winter Emergencies

Winter storms affect more than our homes, roads, and electricity. They can also affect our emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. Extended power outages, dangerous temperatures, isolation, disrupted routines, and uncertainty can create stress and anxiety. Older adults, caregivers, individuals living alone, and those already experiencing emotional difficulties may be especially vulnerable. The **NBCUSA H.O.P.E. Winter Preparedness Toolkit 2026–2027** reminds us that winter preparedness must include caring for the whole person—mind, body, and spirit.

Five important practices can help churches and families provide compassionate support.



1. Recognize Signs of Emotional Distress

Pay attention when someone experiences noticeable changes in behavior, including:

- Withdrawal from family, friends, or church activities
- Unusual sadness, irritability, or emotional distress
- Significant changes in sleeping patterns
- Confusion or difficulty managing daily responsibilities
- Repeatedly missing scheduled calls or check-ins

These signs do not necessarily indicate a mental health condition, but they may signal that someone needs additional support.

Never assume that silence means someone is safe or doing well.

2. Maintain Meaningful Connections
Isolation can become particularly difficult when severe weather prevents people from attending worship or visiting loved ones.

Churches can strengthen connections through:
- Prayer partners and telephone prayer groups
- Congregational phone trees
- Virtual worship and Bible study
- Daily check-ins with older adults and members living alone
- Regular communication with family caregivers

Sometimes a simple telephone call can provide encouragement, reassurance, and an opportunity to identify practical needs.

3. Listen Without Judgment
- When someone shares feelings of fear, loneliness, grief, or emotional exhaustion, our first responsibility is to listen.
- Avoid dismissing their concerns or suggesting that stronger faith alone will resolve their difficulties.
- Instead, offer compassion, practical assistance, prayer when welcomed, and encouragement to seek qualified professional care when appropriate.
- In the United States, individuals experiencing a suicide or mental health crisis can call or text **988** for crisis support. For immediate danger or a life-threatening emergency, call **911**.

4. Encourage Healthy Daily Practices
Even when families must remain indoors, simple routines can support emotional and physical well-being.

Encourage:
- Safe indoor movement and stretching
- Adequate rest and consistent sleep routines
- Taking medications as prescribed
- Regular communication with family and friends
- Prayer, Scripture meditation, and gratitude practices

These activities can provide encouragement and structure, but they should not replace needed medical or mental health treatment.

5. Develop a Congregational Care Network
- Every church should consider establishing a small team responsible for checking on vulnerable members during severe winter weather.
- This team might include deacons, trustees, health ministry volunteers, Sunday School teachers, and other trusted congregational leaders.
- Assignments should be clear, contact information should be protected, and volunteers should know when to involve emergency responders or qualified professionals.

The goal is simple: **No member should feel forgotten during a winter emergency.**

A Faith-Based Call to Action
Psalm 46:1 reminds us, *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."* That assurance provides comfort during difficult seasons. Yet God also calls us to become instruments of comfort in the lives of others. Our prayers should be accompanied by compassionate action.

When we telephone an isolated senior, encourage an exhausted caregiver, help a struggling family, or connect someone with professional assistance, we demonstrate God's love through practical ministry.

The church should be a place where people can acknowledge emotional struggles without shame and receive support without judgment.

Faith and professional mental health care can work together in supporting healing and well-being.

Our Household and Church Challenge.
Before the next winter storm:

1. Identify members who live alone or may need additional emotional support.
2. Establish prayer partners and a confidential congregational check-in system.
3. Encourage caregivers to identify trusted individuals who can provide relief and encouragement.
4. Share the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline information with ministry leaders.
5. Develop ways to maintain fellowship when in-person gatherings are canceled.
6. Remind members that asking for help is a sign of wisdom, not weakness.

Remember. Winter preparedness is not complete until we consider the emotional and spiritual needs of our families and neighbors. **Check on one another. Listen with compassion. Pray with sincerity. Connect people with the help they need.** A caring church can become a powerful source of hope during life's most difficult seasons.



6. Church Winter Readiness and Response

A Faith-Based Call to Action. Churches are often among the most trusted institutions in a community during times of crisis. By preparing before storms occur, we position ourselves to serve wisely, care compassionately, and reflect Christ's love in practical ways. Preparation today can become ministry tomorrow.

Before a storm

- Assign a winter response coordinator and backup; keep an updated emergency contact and volunteer roster.
- Create a confidential, consent-based check-in list for older adults, members with disabilities, caregivers, and people dependent on electricity-powered medical devices. Protect personal health information.
- Review roof/drainage, pipes, heating, fire alarms, exits, accessible entrances, ice treatment, emergency lighting, and building insurance.
- Decide who may cancel worship, close the building, authorize spending, and issue official messages. Prepare telephone, text, website, and social media templates.
- Confirm local emergency management, utility outage reporting, shelters, and warming centers; do not describe a church as a warming center without staffing, safety, accessibility, and operational approvals.

During and after a storm

- Activate buddy calls and prioritize unanswered high-risk contacts; escalate urgent concerns to appropriate responders.
- Provide accurate safety messages, including generator precautions and where to find verified assistance.
- Do not send volunteers onto icy roads or into unsafe buildings. Coordinate relief with local officials and NBCUSA Disaster Relief channels.
- Inspect facilities for electrical, structural, water, and heating hazards before reopening; document damage and expenses.



7. Infants, Children, Older Adults, and People with Disabilities

Some members of our communities face greater risks during emergencies and disasters and may require additional planning and support. By preparing ahead of time and considering the unique needs of infants, older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers, families and churches can help ensure everyone remains safe, connected, and cared for when unexpected situations arise.

- Infants: maintain feeding supplies, diapers, safe sleep space (firm, flat surface without loose blankets), and safe warmth without placing heaters near the child.
- Older adults: arrange medication access, fall prevention, warm clothing, and regular check-ins.
- People using oxygen concentrators, powered wheelchairs, ventilators, refrigerated medications, or other critical equipment should make an individualized power-outage plan with clinicians, equipment suppliers, utilities, and emergency management before a storm. Do not assume utility medical registries guarantee restoration priority.
- Plan accessible transport and communication, including language interpretation, large-print instructions, and backup ways to reach people without internet.
- Caregivers should identify relief contacts, transport options, medication instructions, and emergency respite resources.



Our Household and Church Challenge
Before the next winter storm:

- Identify any infants, older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, or medically vulnerable individuals in your household or congregation who may need additional assistance.
- Develop individualized plans for medications, medical equipment, transportation, communication, and emergency contacts.
- Review backup power options and emergency procedures for critical medical devices.
- Ensure that important instructions, contact information, and emergency plans are accessible to everyone who needs them.
- Organize a church check-in team to regularly contact vulnerable members before, during, and after severe weather events.

Remember: Caring for vulnerable people is not just an emergency preparedness task. It is a ministry of compassion. When we plan for those most at risk, we strengthen the entire community.

8. Respiratory Illness Season

As respiratory viruses become more common during the fall and winter months, churches and community organizations can play an important role in promoting healthy practices that help protect members, especially older adults, young children, and those with underlying health conditions. Staying informed and taking practical precautions can help reduce the spread of seasonal illnesses and support the well-being of the entire congregation.

- Discuss current flu, COVID-19, RSV, and other recommended immunizations with a healthcare professional using the season's applicable recommendations.
- Stay home when sick when possible; improve ventilation and air filtration; use well-fitting masks when appropriate, especially around vulnerable people.
- Keep handwashing supplies, tissues, thermometers, and tests as recommended and available.
- Church leaders should consult current CDC and local public health guidance rather than using a fixed vaccination or isolation schedule printed months in advance.

Our Household and Church Challenge
Before respiratory illness season peaks:

- Review current recommendations for flu, COVID-19, RSV, and other immunizations with healthcare professionals.
- Restock handwashing supplies, tissues, thermometers, and other health essentials for your home and church.
- Encourage members to stay home when ill and participate virtually when available.
- Evaluate ventilation and air filtration in church facilities and meeting spaces.
- Share trusted health information from the CDC, healthcare providers, and local public health agencies with your congregation.

Remember: Protecting one another's health is an expression of love and stewardship. Small actions taken today can help safeguard families, ministries, and communities throughout the season.



9. Faith-Rooted Encouragement

Winter preparedness is more than gathering supplies and developing emergency plans; it is also about strengthening our faith and caring for one another. When storms bring uncertainty, isolation, and fear, God's Word reminds us that we are never alone. Our faith calls us to prepare wisely, pray faithfully, and serve compassionately. These scriptures offer reassurance that God remains our refuge, our strength, and our constant source of hope in every season.

- Psalm 46:1. God is our refuge and strength.
- Isaiah 41:10. Do not fear, for God is with us.
- Philippians 4:6–7. Bring concerns to God in prayer.
- Psalm 121. God watches over our coming and going.

Prayer: Lord, give our families wisdom to prepare, our leaders courage to act, and our churches compassion to care. Protect neighbors facing cold, isolation, and uncertainty. Help us serve safely, share generously, and remain connected in hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Our Household and Church Challenge
As you prepare for the winter season:

- Commit to praying regularly for your family, church, community leaders, first responders, healthcare workers, and those facing hardship.
- Memorize or reflect on a Scripture passage that provides comfort and encouragement during difficult times.
- Reach out to someone who may be lonely, isolated, grieving, or struggling with anxiety during the winter months.
- Participate in church outreach efforts that support families affected by severe weather or other emergencies.
- Encourage your household to combine practical preparedness with faith, gratitude, and service to others.

Remember: Winter storms may challenge our plans, but they cannot diminish God's presence. As we prepare wisely, care generously, and trust faithfully, we become living examples of hope in our homes, churches, and communities.



Appendices

Winter 2026–2027 Checklist

Household essentials

☐ Water and ready-to-eat food for 3+ days
☐ Flashlights, radio, batteries, charged power banks
☐ Warm layers, blankets, first aid, hygiene supplies
☐ Medication/medical device contingency plan
☐ Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms tested
☐ Paper contact list and accessible communication plan

Home and travel

☐ Heating equipment inspected; no indoor generator use
☐ Generator placed 20+ feet outdoors if used
☐ Food thermometers and outage food-safety plan
☐ Pipes protected; local alerts enabled
☐ Vehicle winter kit and travel decision plan

Church and neighbors

☐ Response lead and backup designated
☐ Accessible evacuation and communication procedures
☐ Buddy/check-in roster maintained with consent
☐ Facility, pipes, exits, ice treatment reviewed
☐ Warming centers and emergency contacts verified
☐ Volunteer safety, outreach, and reopening plans reviewed

Church Response Planning Worksheet

Church / ministry: _____

Winter response coordinator / phone: _____

Backup coordinator / phone: _____

Local emergency management / utility: _____

Communication channels and message approver: _____

Members needing check-ins (secure list maintained by): _____

Verified warming location / transportation partner: _____

Backup worship / facility closure decision: _____

Date of plan review and practice: _____

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Faith • Preparedness • Care • Community

Equipping families, churches, and communities to prepare, plan, and respond to winter weather and related emergencies with practical guidance, trusted information, and the enduring hope of God's Word.

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