A person is walking through shallow water, splashing. They are wearing dark pants and shoes. They are holding a large, light-colored umbrella over their head. The background is a blurred reflection of the person and the umbrella on the water's surface. The overall color palette is teal and blue.

Why texting is one of the most important forms of communication during disasters

Bonus: The 5 texts to send before, during and after a tropical storm or hurricane

The Atlantic Hurricane Season usually starts at the beginning of June and lasts until the end of November. An article in the National Geographic informs that during the 2017 hurricane season, there was an all-time high of 28 storms which caused a record \$200 billion in damages—up from the last record of \$159 billion in 2005. It makes sense to be ready.

The US government website on hurricanes provides detailed information on how to prepare. We've organized it into an acronym:

H-ALEERT

H Have supplies on hand

The recommendation is for 3 days. Would all your congregation shelter in the church? If only some, how many would be most likely? Think about items that go bad vs. items that have longer shelf lives. In addition to food and water, consider bedding, toiletries, medication, children's toys, etc. If you are in a very high risk area, perhaps each church member or family should keep an 'H-ALERT' pack in their vehicle with the things they would need for 4 days not 3 (some spare just in case). In an emergency, people would be able to quickly go out to their cars and retrieve their packs.

A Assure protection to important documents and your property

For church documents, think about waterproof solutions and more than one copy—including password-protected digital copies. With regard to property, make sure your church's drains and gutters are clear; check out plumbing valves so no backups occur; see that your church building/contents insurance is up-to-date.

L Learn your area's hurricane risk

Even in low risk areas, it may be worth creating a plan just to be on the safe side.

E Enroll in a community warning system if available.

Two other options are the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio. Find out how to access them.

R Rehearse evacuation

Make a plan for either evacuating or sheltering in place. Then, drill your plan so it becomes automatic, second nature, not subject to interference from any natural panic that will arise. Yes, that means your entire congregation is going to have to practice the plan at least a few times.

T Tailor your transport

Even if your plan is to shelter in place in your church, things change. Organize transport for your congregation, and tailor it to their needs. Think about things like walkers and wheelchairs; infant and child seats; the possibility that an injured person might need to be lying down in a van, say. Make sure these designated vehicles are in good working condition with full tanks of gas...and needless to say, valid documents including driving licenses.

Let's break this down a little further...

H-ALERT Information Supplement

Most of this information will be useful during any tropical storm or hurricane. At the bottom of the document is some region-specific information.

I. Hurricane Watches and Warnings

What's the difference? What should you do? Scroll down the [page](#) and click on 'Warnings' or 'Watches' to find out.

II. Planning for a Hurricane

A. Property readiness

- A1. Rain gutters and downspouts—clear and unclog; refasten any loose sections.
- A2. Trees and shrubs—trim as needed, paying attention to rotting or dead areas.
- A3. Glass windows and doors—buy enough plywood and shielding materials for boarding up if needed.
- A4. Utilities—find out how to shut off your water, gas and electricity.
- A5. Insurance policy—make sure it is up-to-date and includes flood insurance if desired.
- A6. Outside equipment—Make a plan for your boat, tractor or anything else which is usually stored outside.
- A7. Vehicles—Make sure all vehicles are working well and that their insurance is up-to-date.

B. Personal readiness

B1. Food and drink—Buy edibles that will keep (canned, dry, etc.) and do not require cooking; buy bottled drinking water. Plan on having supplies for about one week.

B2. Daily medication—Measure out two weeks worth and seal in waterproof containers.

B3. Other essentials—Think about things you and your family use daily: baby diapers, toilet paper, pet food, etc. Store a week's worth.

B4. Emergency equipment—Check your supply of flashlights, generators, battery-powered NOAA Weather Radio with All Hazards and cell phones. Make sure everything is working and that you have enough batteries for one week.

B5: Contact person—Arrange to be in touch with someone every day during the hurricane or storm. If you do not check in, plan what that person should do to get you help.

B6: Important documents—Make official copies and store offsite or get duplicate originals.

B7: Drivers' licenses—Are they valid?

Tip #1: Here are some guidelines for an [emergency kit](#).

C. Emergency plans

C1. Evacuation routes—Find out what these are. Drive them several times in varying weather conditions (clear day, night, rainy day, etc.) as things look different at different times.

C2. Pet safety—Will pets be coming with you? Should they be transferred earlier? Make a plan. Remember: most public shelters do not allow pets other than those used by the handicapped.

C3. Official shelters—Learn where they are and how to get to them. Practice driving as in C1.

C4. Other shelters—Where else could you shelter? Your church? Your friend further inland? Make a list of options. Laminate or put in a waterproof container.

III. During a Hurricane

A. During a Storm/Hurricane **Watch**

- A1. Keep updated via mobile phone, radio, television, or NOAA Weather Radio.
- A2. Vehicles—Keep gas tanks full.
- A3. Extra cash—Have some on hand.
- A4. Check supplies—Food, water, medications, batteries, equipment, etc.
- A5. Lightweight outside items—Bring inside items such as lawn chairs, garbage cans, toys, etc.

Tip #2: You should be thinking of evacuating if you live in a mobile home (unsafe in high winds no matter how securely fastened); on the coastline, an offshore island, near a river, or near a flood plain; in a high-rise building (the winds get stronger at higher altitudes).

B. During a Storm/Hurricane **Warning**

- B1. Keep updated via mobile phone, radio, television, or NOAA Weather Radio.
- B2. Board up/shield glass windows and doors.
- B3. Comply with instructions from local officials, including evacuating immediately if told to do so.
- B4. If evacuating, tell your contact person your plan.
- B5. Consider carrying out your pet evacuation plan.
- B6. For those staying at home...
 - 1. Stay indoors and away from glass windows and doors.
 - 2. Lower the temperature of your refrigerator to 40 degrees F or lower and keep closed.
 - 3. Unplug any small appliances
 - 4. Turn off utilities if advised to do so by local officials.
 - 5. Turn off any propane tanks.
 - 6. Fill bathtubs and large containers with water. If tap water stops, use this water for flushing and cleaning but NOT drinking.

C. During strong winds...

- C1. Move to the most interior section of your home.
- C2. Shelter on the lowest floor possible.
- C3. Lie on the floor under a sturdy object such as a table.

IV. After a Hurricane

A. Keep updated via mobile phone, radio, television, or NOAA Weather Radio.

B. If you have evacuated...

- B1. Do not return until your area is officially safe.
- B2. Do not travel on closed or flooded roads.
- B3. Do not travel on weakened bridges and washed out roads.
- B4. Choose firm ground. Avoid watery areas. Just 6 inches of moving water can sweep you off your feet. Still water might be electrically charged.

C. When you arrive home...

- C1. Check damage to exterior structure and utility lines/pipes. Take pictures for insurance claim use if needed.
- C2. Use a flashlight to check damage to interior. Using candles and open flames inside is dangerous. Take pictures for insurance claim use if needed.
- C3. Do not use the tap water until it is officially safe.

Tip #3: Get more information about what to do after a storm or hurricane at [this link](#).

Here are some ideas of how your church can use texting and a cloud-based text messaging platform during hurricane season.

These templates are focused on helping you communicate effectively and don't cover all the things you should do to prepare for the Hurricane Season. However, communication is sometimes overlooked. Below are some real examples of types of texts that were set during previous hurricanes for you to consider using. The information is also organized (some in hindsight) into what you can do throughout the season to be even more prepared.

As always, local laws and agency warnings and advice should be heeded in lieu of our advice below.



During such times, texting can be invaluable. During hurricanes Harvey (Texas) and Irma (Florida), many churches used PastorsLine to stay in touch before, during and after. Churches in communities not affected by these storms used texting to drive donations and share how they could help. A few included voice broadcasts using our software.

Here's why texting is one of the most important forms of communication during emergencies:

- Almost everyone has a cell phone that can receive texts. In the 18-49 age group, 98% have cell phones. Numbers are high for the older generations, too—88% for those aged 50-64 and 74% for those 65 and above. And because cell phones do not depend on 'pole and line' technology but on weather-sturdy cellular towers, cell phones are more likely to keep connecting during a hurricane.
- It's not just the young folks at all. Even senior members typically read (and send) text messages. A recent article reported that in the 55+ age group, cell phone users send and receive 16 texts a day on average.
- Texts don't require a data plan or a smartphone to send and receive. Even if a person can not afford a data plan, a text is likely to go through. During congested times due to high data usage, a text is more likely to go through than a call. It takes less data and can be queued / processed over time. It might be delayed, but it's likely to go through over a call.
- Texting is more efficient as people can send when they can, and the people on the other end can receive and respond when they can. You can multitask, too.
- A text is more likely to be read that an email and responded to than a call, especially among those under 50.

Now let's look at specific templates you can use and actions you can take to help you communicate most effectively via text. These are all based on recent experience working and serving churches affected by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

Before an actual Hurricane or Hurricane alert

REMINDER

Send text messages to each group to remind them that they are a member.

TEXT

Hi [name], This is Jason (from Fellowship Church). Just to remind you that you are part of the [name of group] Group. This group [info about group]. We will use this number to be in touch. Remember: any message you send will come just to me and my team. Use (link) for centralized info and updates and to access our "help form".

REMINDER

Send a text message to your congregation reminding them of your webpage and help form, and encouraging them during this challenging time.

TEXT

"Hi [name], Jason here, encouraging you to keep praying as we can rely on God's strength in times of trouble. Just to remind you that our hurricane info page (link) will keep you updated. This link (link) will bring you to a help form in case you or anyone you know need any assistance. If you don't have Internet access, you can always just reply to this text as well. We are always here for you and with God's grace, we will overcome this challenge.

ACTION

Your congregation might have 'shut ins': people who don't often make it in to church for one reason or another (physical difficulties, transport issues, etc.). Do they have supplies to shelter in place? Do they need help to evacuate? Since many of your shut ins could belong to the 'pre-text' generation, combine a voice broadcast with text for maximum effectiveness.

VOICE BROADCAST

"Hi [name] This is Jason. Just reaching out to see how you are and remind you that we are praying for you during this challenging time. Do you have supplies to shelter in place? Do you need help to evacuate? An elder has been assigned to follow in person if possible. In the meantime, please call or text me back to let me know. I am also going to send you a text message. In that message is a link to our hurricane info page to keep you updated. Please keep praying and putting your faith in the strength of God."

ACTION

If your community will not be affected but your sister/twin/etc. community is in a high risk area, find out how you can help. (Send to the area leaders.)

TEXT

"Hi [name]. Jason here (of Fellowship Church). We heard that you are at risk during Hurricane (name). How can we help? Here is a link to our help form (link). We are praying for you and want to give you as much support as we can."

During an actual Hurricane or Hurricane alert

Keep the encouragement and advisories going, reminding about the help form.

Communicate with your groups as needed. For example, during local hurricanes: Are volunteers checking that the church drains are clear and monitoring the progress of the rising water level? Are there enough supplies for anyone sheltering in church?

Stay in touch with your 'shut ins'. Do they need practical help which you can give or alert someone else to give?

ACTION

If your area was affected so that it's unsafe for people to make it to the weekend services, consider hosting a Facebook live event to encourage and minister.

TEXT

"Hi [name], Our weekend services have been postponed but we are going live on Facebook for an online service. Join us if you can by visiting <link>. Where a few are gathered in His name, He will bless. Let's call upon the name of our Lord in this time of trouble. See you then and stay safe."

ACTION

If the hurricane is not local, organize donations for communities affected by the storm.

TEXT

"Hi [name], Jason here. Praise God we were not affected this time but the community of (name) was. They are in desperate need of (donations needed: food, clothing, shelter, etc.). Please reach deep into your hearts and see how you can help."

After an actual Hurricane or Hurricane alert

Text a prayer of thanks to God but reinforce that recovery is usually the most important action needed. It's a great way to attend to those who suffered loss of any kind and provide practical help or specific resources so families and communities can rebuild.

Check in with your congregation. Is everyone accounted for? Does anyone need assistance of any kind?

ACTION

If your church was affected by the hurricane, carry out your action plans for recovery, communicating with your different groups as needed.

TEXT

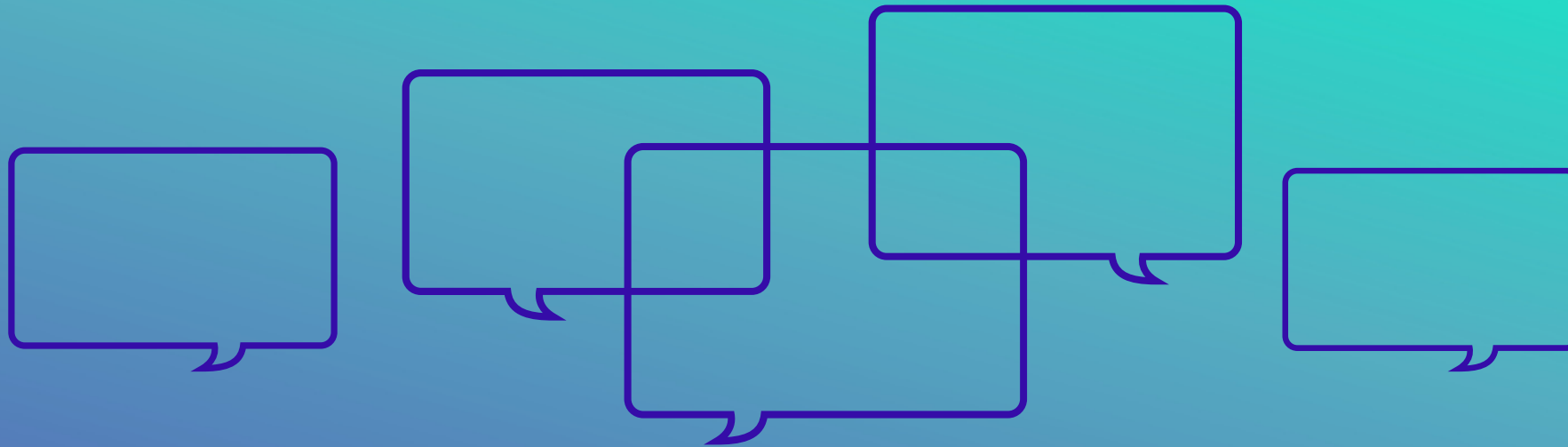
"Hi [name]. Jason here. As part of the [name of group], Group, we will be meeting on [day] at [time] at [place] to organize our recovery action plan. We hope we can count on your help."

ACTION

If your church was not troubled by the hurricane, make a last push for donations and then deliver them where needed. If you have volunteer teams, contact the members to send them where they can help.

TEXT

"Hi [name]. Communities affected by Hurricane (name) are still in need of (donations needed). Please dig deep and give generously. There are collection boxes in the church lobby. We will make sure your donations get to those in need. Blessings, Jason" and/or "Hi [name]. Communities affected by Hurricane (name) are still in need of volunteers to (action). Please dig deep and think about donating some time. We will organize transportation for volunteer groups. Hoping to hear from you. Blessings, Jason"



As shown above, we are only giving you a few ideas and samples. We know this isn't going to work for all cases and may not address every curve ball. But being prepared and using texting when you can is the most effective way to drive action and get your message across, especially during emergencies. In many cases, effective communication can save lives.

Although **“Man proposes but God disposes”**, texting can ease hurricane season for yourselves and others. The PastorsLine, church-centered, bulk texting system is priced for all types of church budgets. After you check out the details [here](#) (so you know you'll be able to afford it), try us out for 14 days, for free (no cc required).

We've peaked your interest, right?

If you are not already using texting (or want to see how PastorsLine compares with the app you currently have) use the invite code **HALERT** to get a free 30-day trial with 500 additional credits.

Our standard free trial comes with 500 credits, so you will have 1000 credits to use. No CC required.

[SIGN UP](#)

Pastorsline.com/register



Reid Adams

Connections Director
First Baptist Orlando

A tool like [PastorsLine] that allows us to efficiently and effectively have a personal contact with dozens or hundreds of first time guests or new members at our church has been a game changer for us as we seek to interact personally with the people who come to our church and have a one-on-one ministry with as many people as possible.



Cara Saliby

Director of Administration

A few of the initiatives we did with [PastorsLine]: Annual Picnic Registration - text 'PICNIC' to register—our church's intro to texting; Parent Survey - text 'PARENTSURVEY' to respond —50% of those responding took the survey; Baptism Worship Service Reminders - bulk texting—we were blown away by the number of people who showed up.



Dr. Matthew Robinson

Pastor

[PastorsLine is] a huge answer to something we've been looking for. I was able to send a template with a field merge by scheduling it, and I've loved the [PastorsLine] interface on the webpage and from my phone with the app in being able to respond. This is an immediate asset to our church.