



Bonus Resource

Coming Together to Prepare
for Natural Disasters

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**chalice
press**

Saint Louis, Missouri

An imprint of Christian Board of Publication

Introduction¹

A Curriculum Resource

By Eric H.F. Law

In 2017, a week after Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, I was visiting a relative in Lake Arrowhead, located in the San Bernardino Mountains in Southern California. Across from my relative's home was a house surrounded by heavy wrought iron fences. Right behind the gate was a huge sign that said, "Liberal Free Zone." Flying in front of the house was a large American flag. My immediate reaction was "Oh, I'm not welcomed in that house. But how would they know I'm a liberal? Do I have a sign on my forehead that says: "I'm a liberal!" Then a sadness came over me. This meant that the people in this household only wanted to be with people who were like them. Even if I wanted to have a meaningful conversation with them to achieve mutual understanding, the chance of that happening was minimal. Perhaps the sign on the fence is a sign of our times. It signaled to me that the fear-exploiters had successfully isolated people, fostering fear and phobia of the other to the point of ignoring history and factual truth, creating many fear-conquerors who strike back in ways that strip others of their constitutional rights, targeting scapegoats like the immigrants and forcing the poor and powerless to be fear-bearers.

While I was feeling self-righteous about what I just wrote, I realized I might be as guilty as the person who put up the "Liberal Free Zone" sign. Have I not also isolated or insulated myself from those who are politically different from me? Even though I don't have a sign that says, "Conservative Free Zone" in front of my house, or my church, I wonder if I do have an invisible sign that

¹Introduction is an excerpt from Eric H.F. Law, *Fear Not: Living Grace and Truth in a Frightened World* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2020), 116–17, 124, 125–26.

says just that. I, too, have a fear of the others that causes me to insulate myself and not hear and know the others' truth. How many conservative friends do I really know?

The people of the United States are so polarized that it is almost like we live in separate countries. All one needs to do is look at the map of the 2016 election results. We listen and are influenced by totally different sets of "truths," which are more like a litany of fears of the other. Some are imminent and most are not. Most people are so overwhelmed by the nonstop projections of fear that we stop trying to discern which are imminent and which are mostly a distraction.

Back to Lake Arrowhead where I was standing in front of the house with the "Liberal Free Zone" sign when a question came to me: "If a super storm or a huge earthquake hit Lake Arrowhead and my house was destroyed, would the people in this house help me, even though I am not like them? Or if their house was destroyed, would they let me help them?" The answer is, of course, yes.

Natural disasters, destructive as they are, tend to unify communities and even nations. A storm like Hurricane Harvey didn't care whether one was a Republican or Democrat, rich or poor, citizen or immigrant, documented or undocumented, gay or straight or transgender. The storm just blew wind and poured rain on everyone. A natural disaster brings out the need for compassion and cooperation in order for people in any community to survive together.

Even the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U. S. Customs and Border Protection understand this. Both departments issued a joint statement before Harvey made landfall the first time: "The Department's law enforcement components will be at the ready to help anyone in need of assistance. . . . Routine non-criminal immigration enforcement operations will not be conducted at evacuation sites, or assistance centers such as shelters or food banks." The full statement was translated into Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. They wanted to make sure that people who don't speak English got this message. Similar statements have been issued before other hurricanes since Harvey too.

The good news in the midst of the bad news is this: despite any preemptive strikes on unity, people across the country and especially in Texas have stayed united in helping each other

through the storm and in the recovery process. So one way to counter these divisive forces is to gather people in community for disaster preparedness. I call this movement a preemptive strike on divisiveness. We can start a movement by facilitating Community Disaster Preparedness events in every local community across the nation.

In addition to sharing vital information on what to do in case of a disaster, invite people to connect with each other on a most basic human level. Invite them to consider what they would share in order to help the community survive together. Through this conversation, we might find opportunities to share our love for this land, and share our experiences of what different divisive forces are doing to our personal lives and our communities. In the process of sharing our truths, we might find the common truth that we can speak together and from which to take action to return our country to its original calling: people are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. This is not going to be easy. It requires us to take down our visible and invisible fear-based signs that say “conservative free zone” or “liberal free zone” and become vulnerable. It will feel like we might lose our lives if we open ourselves up to listen to another who has a different and even opposing view on life, community, and nations. Yet that’s what is required of us in Jesus’ call to love our neighbor as ourselves and to love our enemy. The following dialogue session can help us heed Jesus’ call.

Building Bridges Now¹: Disaster Preparedness

Topic: Disaster Preparedness

Objective: To invite participants into a gracious time and space to experience a constructive dialogue on disaster preparedness on a personal and community level in response to the increasing frequency of natural disasters in recent times.

Type of Group: Adults from diverse backgrounds (race, ethnicity, age, gender, economic status, political affiliation, etc.)

Size of Group: Six to twelve, if the group is larger than twelve, you will need to have additional trained facilitators – one facilitator per group of six to twelve participants.

Setting: A bright, large room with empty wall space for posting chart paper. Chairs for participants should be arranged in circles of six to twelve, with a clear view of the chart paper and video screen.

Material: Session handouts, sturdy writing surface (such as a cardboard or clipboard for each person), pens/pencils. Setup for video presentation. Chart paper and dark markers (water-washable are best).

Time Required: Two to three hours depending on the size of the group

Preparation:

Before participants arrive:

Post pieces of chart paper on the wall (Conocimiento Chart) with the following categories across the top:

Name

The last disaster I experienced/witnessed . . .

One important thing I learned from that experience is . . .

¹Building Bridges Now is a carefully designed dialogue online curriculum provided by the Kaleidoscope Institute. It consists of two major areas of dialogue: 1) topics on race relations such as Race and Children, Lives Matter, and Immigration, and 2) topics to explore what it means to live in the United States such as Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights, Voting Rights, and Post-Election Dialogue. See www.buildingbridgesnow.com for information.

With whom or what group have I had a conversation about disaster preparedness?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how prepared am I for a natural disaster?

Write reflection questions for the first and third videos on chart paper (a worksheet will be used for the second video):

- a. For first video:
 - *What were the things that stood out for you as you watched this video?*
 - *What challenged you?*
 - *What was affirmed for you?*
 - *What are you going to do in order to be ready?*
 - *Personal*
 - *Family*
 - *Friends*
 - *School/Workplace*
 - *Other organizations such as faith community, neighborhood association, etc.*

- b. For the third video:
 - *What were the things that stood out for you as you watched this video?*
 - *What are the different neighborhoods in your community and what might be the differences in disaster preparedness among these neighborhoods? (If you don't know, what would you do to find out?)*
 - *What would you do to help the different neighborhoods to be prepared in case of a disaster so that what happened at the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina will not happen in your community?*

Set Up the Videos:

- “Disaster Preparedness From Ready.gov ” Contact the Kaleidoscope Institute office, kscope@kscopeinstitute.org, to get a password to the link to the video on our website. You can also download this video from YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CTj5KZk7eg>
- “A Secret Weapon for True Disaster Resilience” Contact the Kaleidoscope Institute office to get a password to the link to the video on our website. You can also download this video from YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQxryNvZnbl>

- “New Orleans after Katrina: A Tale of Two Cities”
Contact the Kaleidoscope Institute office to get a password to the link to the video on our website. You can also download this video from YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=602rez0ZA60>

Overview of Dialogue Process:

- Gathering, opening reflection, and setting parameters for dialogue
- Introduce (or review) Respectful Communication Guidelines
- Focusing Text: Excerpt from Speech by UN Secretary-General
- Introduction using Conocimiento chart and Mutual Invitation
- First Dialogue Process: Disaster Preparedness
- Second Dialogue Process: A Secret Weapon for True Disaster Resilience
- Third Dialogue Process: New Orleans after Katrina: A Tale of Two Cities
- Commitment to Future Participation
- Closing and Sending

How to Proceed:

1. As participants arrive, invite each one to take a marker and complete the Conocimiento charts.
2. Welcome and Opening Reflection:

A facilitator invites participants to sit in the circle of chairs and read the following welcome statement:

Welcome to Building Bridges Now. This program is sponsored by _____ and the Kaleidoscope Institute to provide a gracious space to have constructive conversations in our community on race relations and other important issues of our time. The purpose of dialogue is to bring together people with diverse backgrounds, viewpoints and experiences to have meaningful conversation on a common subject.

We invite you to enter into a time of dialogue, remembering that:

- *Dialogue does not force anyone to change. It is not a debate in which we try to convince others that we are right. It is about mutual understanding.*

- *Dialogue is NOT about finger pointing, demonizing, or punishing individuals or groups. True dialogue invites each one of us to commit to sharing his or her truth while being willing to listen deeply to another's truth.*
- *Dialogue does not avoid our history and present differences, pretending that everything is okay. Dialogue acknowledges our history and our present differences. By sharing our different experiences, we can achieve greater understanding of the issues and move toward potential reconciliation, fostering constructive change within our community.*

3. Respectful Communication Guidelines²

Hand out copies of the Respectful Communication Guidelines. A facilitator gives the following explanation: (Note: an abbreviated version can be used if there are no new members joining the group since the last gathering.)

We, people from different cultural backgrounds, bring with us different assumptions about communication styles. Sometimes, these different assumptions may cause communication breakdown. Therefore, before we begin our dialogue, I invite you to consider a set of Respectful Communication Guidelines. They are written in the acronym from the word "RESPECT."

Two or more facilitators may take turns reading the following explanations of the Respectful Communication Guidelines.

R = take *RESPONSIBILITY* for what you say and feel without blaming others

Avoid judgmental language, which can cause defensiveness and cut off communication. Instead, use "I" statements. Begin what you want to say with "I," claiming what is yours. For example, I feel, I know, I believe, I think, I notice, I wonder, etc.

E = use *EMPATHETIC* listening

Put yourself in the other person's shoes and attempt to see and experience the issue from the speaker's perspective. This is a commitment that we make to try as hard as we can to understand each other, knowing our limits. Therefore,

²I first published the Respectful Communication Guidelines in Eric H. F. Law, *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996), 87. You can also find the guidelines in Spanish, French, Chinese and Korean in the Kaleidoscope Institute website: <http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/free-resources>.

it is okay to ask clarifying questions. It is also okay to give feedback to check if you have understood what the speaker was saying.

S = *be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles*

When someone behaves differently from you, don't simply interpret that behavior using your own assumptions about what is good communication. Remind yourself that this person might be communicating in a very different way and there might be opportunities to learn more about how the other communicates.

P = *PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak*

Think before you speak.

E = *EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions*

As you ponder, ask yourself what caused you to feel, think, or react in a certain way. Where might these ideas come from for you? If you are able to notice your own assumptions, you are more able to take responsibility for your own thinking and feeling.

C = *keep CONFIDENTIALITY*

In order to uphold the well-being of each person in this group, I invite you to keep the personal information shared here in confidence.

This way, we can feel safer in talking about real issues that concern our lives and our communities without the fear that they might be shared outside without the full benefit of the trust developed in this group.

T = *TRUST ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong.*

In order to address these issues constructively, we must be willing and able to listen to each other's different experiences and points of view even though at times, the ambiguity might be uncomfortable for some of us. By listening empathically without judgment and debate, we, as a community, may gain a fuller description of the issues we are trying address. In this way, instead of being divided, we can move forward, working together to find constructive ways to address them.

After the reading of the explanations, a facilitator asks participants if there are questions and then poses the following question:

Do we have an agreement to uphold these guidelines for the rest of our time together? I need a sign or gesture from all of you to indicate that you agree.

If nobody disagrees, the facilitator can continue with the dialogue process. If there are questions, discuss it until there is an agreement, and then continue with the dialogue process.

Problems to anticipate in this section:

Be prepared to give concrete behavioral examples if there are questions about the meaning of the guidelines.

In this dialogue session, we will have opportunities to dialogue on disaster preparedness on personal and community levels. To help us focus our time together, I would like to read an excerpt from the speech by former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, at the opening of the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015:

Now we must respond to the world's growing needs by empowering individuals, supporting communities, and backing promises with resources. We must especially help the poorest and most vulnerable people. Climate change is intensifying the risks for hundreds of millions of people, particularly in small island developing states and coastal areas. Disasters put persons with disabilities and older persons in grave danger. Nine out of ten disaster fatalities are in low- and middle-income countries.

. . . But disaster risk reduction is in everybody's interest—and it is everybody's business. In this globalized economy, our world is smaller than ever. An earthquake in one country shakes up financial markets in another. Tropical storms in one region cause economic turbulence in another.

. . . The global annual price tag in damage now exceeds \$300 billion. We can watch that number grow as more people suffer. Or we can dramatically lower that figure and invest savings in development.

. . . Resilience is not just a matter of strong buildings that can withstand earthquakes. True resilience comes from strong bonds among countries and communities.³

4. Introduction Process:

A facilitator gives the following instructions to introduce the process. (Note: if there are not new members joining the group, simply remind participants that we will be using Mutual Invitation again for the next process and skip the detailed instructions. If the group is bigger than twelve, you will need to divide the group into smaller groups of no more than twelve with a facilitator for each group giving the following instructions.)

In order to help us get to know each other better, I invite you to introduce yourselves using the categories on the wall chart, which you filled out when you arrived.

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share HAS the opportunity to speak, we will use a process called Mutual Invitation⁴:

The leader or a designated person shares first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Try not to invite the person next to you so that we won't move into the habit of going around in a circle. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege of inviting another to share.

If you are not ready to share, say "I pass for now," and we will invite you to share later on. If you don't want to say anything at all, simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

³United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-moon, "General Secretary's remarks at opening of Third UN World Conference on disaster risk reduction," March 15, 2015, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2015-03-14/secretary-generals-remarks-opening-third-un-world-conference>

⁴I first introduced Mutual Invitation in Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 79–88. It is now one of the principal gracious skills in all our dialogue processes. You can find this process described in Spanish, French, and Chinese at the Kaleidoscope Institute website, <http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/free-resources> .

We invite you to listen and not to respond to someone's sharing immediately. There will be time to respond and to ask clarifying questions after everyone has shared.

Any questions?

A facilitator may decide to demonstrate the Mutual Invitation process by inviting the group to share "What is your favorite ice cream?"

We have set aside about ____ minutes for this process. That means each person will have ____ minutes to share. I will ask you to respect other people's time as you share. Are there any questions?

Facilitator then begins the process by introducing him/herself.

When everyone has introduced themselves, the facilitator debriefs the group by asking participants to complete the sentences:

I noticed. . .

I wonder . . .

Problems to anticipate in this section:

People sometimes forget to invite others after they finish speaking. Do not invite for them. Simply remind them they have the privilege to invite the next person.

Break (Facilitators set up the video, ready to be played.)

5. Dialogue Using the Video: "*Disaster Preparedness from Ready.gov*"

Facilitators invite participants to return to their seats arranged for viewing the video.

Facilitators play the video.

Give a moment of silence. [A facilitator refers to the reflection questions on chart paper for all to see.]

I now invite you to ponder these questions, which are also on your handout:

- *What were the things that stood out for you as you watched this video?*
- *What challenged you?*
- *What was affirmed for you?*
- *What are you going to do in order to be ready?*
 - *Personal*
 - *Family*
 - *Friends*
 - *School/Workplace*
 - *Other organizations, such as faith community, neighborhood association, etc.*

Give participants time to ponder the questions.

Using Mutual Invitation, let's share our responses to the questions.

Break (Facilitators set up the second video, ready to be played.)

6. Dialogue Using the Video: *“A Secret Weapon for True Disaster Resilience”*

Facilitators play the video.

Facilitators guide participants in working through the worksheet: Building Capacity for Disaster Preparedness.

In the video, Lucie Ozanne talked about the four capacities that were developed through the Timebank⁵ in Christchurch, New Zealand.

They are:

- *Communication – That is, in case of a disaster we need to have an effective way of communicating information.*
- *Social – that is, do we have a working network of trusting relationships that can provide mutual support for people during and after a disaster?*
- *Cultural – that is, do we have a shared culture that supports the recovery effort?*
- *Community Efficacy – that is, do we know how to work together to solve problems as they arise?*

On your worksheet, I invite you to reflect on the following questions for each of the capacities,

- *What is already in place in your community that establishes and practices this capacity?*

⁵Learn more about Timebank at the Timebanks USA website: <https://timebanks.org>.

- *What does your community need to do to increase this capacity?*
- *What resources are you willing to offer to develop this capacity in case of a disaster?*
- *When you have finished filling in the boxes, consider the last question: What are your thoughts on the community “Timebank”?*

(Pause and let participants write.)

In a moment, we will use Mutual Invitation and invite each of you to share your insights from this exercise.

Give time for participants to reflect and/or write on the worksheet.

We’ve set aside ___ minutes to share our reflections from this worksheet. We’ll use Mutual Invitation. Please share only what you are comfortable sharing with the group. Each person will have about ___ minutes to share.

When everyone has shared, the facilitator debriefs the group by asking participants to complete the sentences:

I noticed . . .

I wonder . . .

Break (Facilitators set up the third video, ready to be played.)

7. Dialogue Using the Video: “New Orleans after Katrina: A Tale of Two Cities”

Facilitators invite participants to return to their seats arranged for viewing the video.

Facilitators play the video.

Give a moment of silence. [A facilitator refers to the reflection questions on chart paper for all to see.]

I now invite you to ponder these questions, which are also on your handout:

- *What were the things that stood out for you as you watched this video?*
- *What are the different neighborhoods in your community and what might be the differences in disaster preparedness among these neighborhoods? (If you don’t know, what would you do to find out?)*

- *What would you do to help the different neighborhoods to be prepared in case of a disaster so that what happened at the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina will not happen in your community?*

Give time for participants to reflect and/or write on the worksheet.

We've set aside ___ minutes to share our reflections from this worksheet. We'll use Mutual Invitation. Please share only what you are comfortable sharing with the group. Each person will have about ___ minutes to share.

When everyone has shared, the facilitator debriefs the group by asking participants to complete the sentences:

*I noticed. . .
I wonder . . .*

8. Reflection on the Experience

Invite participants to recall what they learned from the last several hours and to consider the question:

What are you called to do in the next week or month?

Invite participants to share using Mutual Invitation.

9. Commitment to Future Participation

Facilitators invite participants to take up different tasks for the next dialogue meeting:

- host(s) at the meeting location
- person(s) responsible for refreshments
- If a meal is involved, assign responsibility for different parts of the meal
for example, meat, vegetable, fruit, drink, dessert, . . .
etc.
- person(s) responsible for communication
- transportation coordinator(s) if needed

10. Closing:

Facilitators invite participants to take part in reading the excerpt from the speech by former Secretary-General of the United Nation, Ban Ki-moon, at the opening of the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015:

Now we must respond to the world's growing needs by empowering individuals, supporting communities and backing

promises with resources. We must especially help the poorest and most vulnerable people. Climate change is intensifying the risks for hundreds of millions of people, particularly in small island developing states and coastal areas. Disasters put persons with disabilities and older persons in grave danger. Nine out of ten disaster fatalities are in low- and middle-income countries.

. . . But disaster risk reduction is in everybody's interest—and it is everybody's business. In this globalized economy, our world is smaller than ever. An earthquake in one country shakes up financial markets in another. Tropical storms in one region cause economic turbulence in another.

. . . The global annual price tag in damage now exceeds \$300 billion. We can watch that number grow as more people suffer. Or we can dramatically lower that figure and invest savings in development.

. . . Resilience is not just a matter of strong buildings that can withstand earthquakes. True resilience comes from strong bonds among countries and communities.

A facilitator invites participants to complete the sentences:

- *I am thankful today for . . .*
- *My hopes are . . .*

A facilitator invites participants to share their sentences using Mutual Invitation.

11. Sending Forth:

A facilitator reads the following to send participants out to the world:

*Nourished by understanding
 Warmed by friends
 Fed by loved ones
 Matured by wisdom
 Tempered by tears
 Made holy by caring and sharing
 Go forth in peace!⁶
 Adapted from Leonard Nimoy*

⁶The first five lines are from a poem by Leonard Nimoy. **Leonard Nimoy Poetry, Photography, Quotations and Tweets**, <http://www.thehypertexts.com/Leonard%20Nimoy%20Poet%20Poetry%20Photographer%20Photography%20Picture%20Literary%20Bio.htm>

12. Donation Request:

If you appreciated this dialogue process, please make a donation to the Kaleidoscope Institute so that they can continue to develop more dialogue sessions and offer the Building Bridges Now resources to more people, including those who have limited financial resources.

Excerpt from the speech by former Secretary-General of the United Nation, Ban Ki-Moon, at opening of the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015:

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Reflection questions for the video: “Disaster Preparedness From Ready.gov ”

What were the things that stood out for you as you watched this video?

What challenged you?

What was affirmed for you?

What are you going to do in order to be ready?

- *Personal*
- *Family*
- *Friends*
- *School/Workplace*
- *Other organizations such as faith community, neighborhood association, etc.*

Capacity Building for Disaster Preparedness

	What is already in place in my community that establishes and practices this capacity?	What does my community need to do to increase this capacity?	What resources am I willing to offer to develop this capacity in case of a disaster?
Communication Capacity			
Social Capacity			
Cultural Capacity			
Community Efficacy Capacity			

Respectful Communication Guidelines

R = Take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = EMPATHETIC listening

S = Be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C = Keep CONFIDENTIALITY (Share Constructively to uphold the well-being of COMMUNITY)

T = TOLERATE ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

(from *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed* by Eric H. F. Law)

I agree to uphold these guidelines for the time we have together.

Signature

Date