

## Preserving water-damaged materials

*(Information provided by Lisa L. Fox, Senior Conservator, Missouri State Archives, and a member of Grace Episcopal Church, Jefferson City, MO.)*

First, if the parish has commercial insurance, the first step -- before diving in to save things -- is to take lots and lots and lots of photographs to document the extent and type of damage!

Affected organizations can call this non-profit organization for disaster recovery advice: SOLINET serves the Southeastern US, including Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The Preservation staff is at 404-892-0943 or 800-999-8558.

Both SOLINET and its western counterpart AMIGOS receive NEH support, which requires that they help other cultural organizations, not just their members. When I was head of SOLINET's program, I expected to hear from churches in the aftermath of a disaster like this.

Once folks get back into the church and need recovery advice, the following may be helpful:

- I prepared rather exhaustive step-by-step recovery guides for the U.S. Navy libraries, archives, and museums. It's available thru <http://matrix.msu.edu/~disaster/sampleplans.php> in either PDF or HTML format. It includes (pp. 190-213) instructions for salvaging about any kind of item a church would have -- furniture, vestments and other textiles, photographs and works of art, papers and books, etc.
- SOLINET has several good resources at [http://www.solinet.net/preservation/preservation\\_templ.cfm?doc\\_id=71](http://www.solinet.net/preservation/preservation_templ.cfm?doc_id=71) -- especially Mike Trinkley's summary (at [http://www.solinet.net/preservation/preservation\\_templ.cfm?doc\\_id=154](http://www.solinet.net/preservation/preservation_templ.cfm?doc_id=154)) of critical steps to take the day after a hurricane.
- The AIC (American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works) has several good information leaflets at <http://aic.stanford.edu/library/online/disaster/index.html> -- including one on recovering textiles, such as vestments that may be damaged.
- Some basic information is available at <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/news/isabelafter.htm>

In a nutshell, the key is to get things cool and dry as quickly as possible. (Unfortunately, those are also two of the most difficult things to achieve during summer in the South.) Strangely enough, for most items, the best way to achieve this is by getting them frozen as quickly as possible; to reduce the risk of mold, that needs to be done within 48 hours. Parishes might be able to transport damaged items to a location that still has electricity to support air-conditioning or -- better yet -- freezers. Once the items are frozen, the parish can assess the extent of damage and plan the recovery operation. A simple "at-a-glance" summary is at <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/waac/wn/wn19/wn19-2/wn19-207.html>; it

explains which media can be frozen (almost everything except computer media), and how to dry them.

If no freezer or refrigerator is available, the best ways to (somewhat) reduce the risk of mold are to maximize air circulation -- e.g., open all windows [assuming there are any windows left] -- and to expose the items to sunlight (because UV radiation tends to prevent mold growth).

If many items are water-damaged, the simplest solution is to contact one of the many respected salvage companies now available throughout the country. Several of these are listed at <http://www.solinet.net/emplibfile/dissuppl.pdf> and on our website (<http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/localrecs/conservation/vendor/disasterrecovery.asp>). Companies like Belfor, Blackmon-Mooring, Document Reprocessors, Munters, & SOLEX have a nationwide presence; many have designed their equipment so it can be transported in the cargo hold of commercial jets, so they can be on the spot very quickly. In fact, Munters almost made it to Miami before I could get there from Atlanta.

Incidentally, many of those companies also have dehumidification capabilities that can save much expense. They may be able to dry walls, floors and carpeting in situ. Oftentimes, insurance companies call in such companies in order to minimize their losses.

And those in need of explicitly Episcopalian sympathy, in addition to recovery advice, are welcome to call me.

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