

**N.B.** This case study considers only one possible approach, which will not be suitable for every church. Always seek professional advice.

## Key Points

- St Laurence Priory acted as an emergency flood relief centre during the flooding of the town, being used to house, feed, and provide clothing and shelter to the community and emergency service workers.
- As a result of the extensive size of the church building, and despite the presence of fixed pews, there was a large amount of available space allowing for sectioning of activities.
- The clergy had previously participated in emergency response training, that helped with both media and practical responses.



- 1** View of St Laurence Priory from road that was flooded.



- 2** The kitchen enabled much of the response, providing hot drinks and meals for those displaced.

- 3** The area of the church that housed beds during the immediate aftermath.

## The context

On February 6th 2021, floods affected the bottom half of the town of Snaith, in Sheffield Diocese. As it was situated on higher ground, St Laurence Priory was used as the “bronze level” relief point for the emergency response. This meant the church functioned as an emergency relief centre for 3.5 weeks (until COVID lockdown) provided support and resources during that time for over 500 people.

For further information visit the church’s [website](#), or see its entry on the [Church Heritage Record](#).

## Previous Level of Preparation

- The clergy had previously participated in emergency response training that aided in media and practical responses.
- The church also maintained close links with the wider community and was able to draw on a wide network of support.
- St Laurence Priory had a previously installed a kitchen and single toilet, that were used extensively throughout the flood response.
- As a result of the extensive size of the building, despite the presence of fixed pews, there was a large amount of available space allowing for sectioning of activities.

### **What was done?**

On the day of the flood, when alerted, the vicar immediately opened the church to the Snaith community. During the next few days it became a centre for the relief efforts and was used to house, feed, and provide clothing and shelter to community members and emergency service workers.

Community and congregational members, and emergency service workers were able to:

- use space in the nave to sleep
- use the pews as storage for clothes and food
- cook three meals in the onsite kitchen

Emotional support and hot drinks were on offer, leading to the view of the church as a 'hub' for the community in a time of crisis.

Throughout this time period, the regular functions of the church continued, and services were joined by many more members of the community, as well as providing spiritual support and prayer.

### **How well did it work?**

St Laurence Priory was able to provide shelter and food for over 500 people in total, at maximum 100 people were using the space at one time.

Available kitchen and toilet facilities were insufficient and were supplemented in the kitchen by donated electrical equipment and through the provision of portaloos.

The church was seen by the community as a key centre of relief effort for the area, one that is still talked about to this day. For some it changed their view of the church building to one of an inviting space, notably including recent weddings in the space from previous flood victims.

### **How were these actions funded?**

- The major cost was heating, as it was turned on 24/7 from the time of the flood. The cost was covered in full by outside sources, partially through donations and partially through an emergency relief grant from the local county council.
- Portaloos were also provided as a donation.
- Food and resources that were housed in the church were donated by community members and people from the larger surrounding area (as far as Doncaster).

### **What could others learn from this case study?**

1. Consider the potential flood risk for the local area, to understand the potential for floods.
2. Have a flood action plan detailing initial responses and with an awareness of how to use the space.
3. Have list of key contacts within the community and emergency services.
4. For churches that may need to act as refuges in this way, include additional capacity for emergency usage in the design of kitchens and bathrooms, and think through how the limitations of available resources could be got round (for example through the hire of portaloos).

*“There was an anxiety to do with what's going to happen with the floods...  
But then, in no time at all, there was this community spirit. It was extraordinary”*  
Congregation Member, St Laurence Priory