

Great Plains United Methodist Disaster Response Handbook for District Superintendents

“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless . . .” Matthew 9:36

The Great Plains United Methodist Disaster Response is a Ministry of Care that has theological, material, mental health, advocacy, and social service components designed to provide for the spiritual, emotional and physical recovery of disaster survivors and for the well-being of their caregivers. The Conference Disaster Response Ministry exists for the purpose of responding to natural or man-made disasters of such magnitude that they overwhelm a community’s ability to recover on its own and additional help is requested by the community.

General Provisions

The role of the District Superintendent is critical for disaster relief. Task include, but are not limited to:

1. Prepare your family for disasters.
2. Prepare the District for disasters.
3. Encourage each local church to develop a disaster plan.
4. Work closely with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, your district and regional coordinator to administer the District’s response to disasters.
5. Encourage the active participation of local pastors in disaster relief.
6. Be available to the Bishop for consultation with regard to any appeal for disaster relief funds for your district.

Develop a Plan Before Disaster Strikes

It is the goal of the Great Plains Disaster Response Ministry that we work along side of each District Superintendent to secure a District Disaster Leader and a Regional Disaster Leader.

- East Region
 - Blue River
 - Missouri River
 - Flint Hills
 - Topeka
- South Central Region
 - Hutchison
 - Wichita East
 - Wichita West

- Northwest Region
 - Great West
- Northeast Region
 - Elkhorn Valley
- Central Region
 - Gateway
 - Prairie Rivers
 - Salina
- West Region
 - Hays
- Southwest Region
 - Dodge City
- Southeast Region
 - Kansas City
 - Fiver Rivers
 - Parsons

We should consider the following criteria in our discernment and selection process:

- Dependability in an emergency.
- Interest in disaster response as a ministry of the Great Plains United Methodist Conference.
- Initiative and willingness to do the job on a purely voluntary basis.
- Time and willingness to attend the SCJ Mission Academy at least every 2 years.

Planning

- Annually review the District Disaster Plan.
- Encourage all local churches to have a Disaster Plan, talk with them at least yearly about disasters and how we, the church, respond.
- Encourage all local churches to hold the following trainings: Basic Disaster 101 and Early Response Team.
- If your district is subject to frequent disasters, or if a major disaster is anticipated, consult with your Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Disaster Leader and the Regional Disaster Leader to coordinate initial efforts and anticipate needs.

When a Disaster is Imminent

1. Monitor the situation.
2. Communications
 - a. Contact the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Disaster Leader and Regional Disaster Leader to make preliminary plans of actions if needed.
 - b. Make certain that you know each's others locations and travel time to the potential disaster site.
3. Evacuation
 - a. If your immediate area is likely to be affected and evacuation is recommended, move out of the area and contact the Bishop and Conference Disaster Response Coordinator as soon as possible with your new location.
 - b. Get this information to the pastor's in your district.
 - c. A temporary District office might be in a church that is away from the danger zone.

Immediately Following a Disaster

1. Assess your own damage first.
 - a. Your family and home become your first priority at this time.
 - b. Unless it is unsafe to remain at your home, stay there with your family and property until law enforcement or emergency personnel get to you.
 - c. Assess whether your neighbors need immediate attention.
 - d. Listen to and follow the instructions of First Responders (official).
 - e. If you are the victim, do not rely upon your own judgment or the judgment of other victims.
 - f. Realize that this phase of the disaster may be slow process.
2. Monitor
 - a. If available, monitor news for damage to your community and surrounding area.
 - b. If service is available, contact the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Disaster Leader and Regional Disaster Leader. Provide update on your situation.
 - c. Relay to Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Disaster Leader and Regional Disaster Leader any reports from pastors in your district.

Acting When it is Safe to Move About

1. If you have not been affected by the disaster, or after you have taken care of your family first:
 - a. Contact the pastors in the damaged areas. Prioritize areas according to report.
 - b. With Local Pastor, Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Disaster Leader, Regional Disaster Leader, assess each church owned property and the community.
 - c. Provide pastoral care to the affected pastors. Assess if they need another colleague to just be with them. Contact another pastor in your district who was not affected.
 - d. Any preliminary assessment of church owned property should be shared with the Conference office for insurance purposes.

Relief Phase

1. Damage Assessment Tour
 - a. Our first impression is to be the visible presence of the Church.
 - b. If the damage is widespread, efforts may have to be divided among the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Disaster Leader, Regional Disaster Leader and yourself. Be sure to have your Disaster badge visibly displayed.
 - c. Be prepared to do a lot of listening. Those individuals affected by the disaster will want to tell their stories over and over again. Listen intentionally to the pastors, assessing whether they are truly functional. Be prepared to ask other pastors from the district to help when a pastor is a victim. Consider a substitute pastor or pulpit supply for a period of time if the situation calls for this.
 - d. Look for damage in terms of areas hit. Do not try to count the number of homes destroyed, or what they will need to make them safe, secure, and sanitary. Gain a general sense of the magnitude and severity.
 - e. Stop and speak to people, if you are walking through the community.
 - f. If shelters are open, tour the shelters. More often than not, the shelter will be at the United Methodist Church if there is no damage. Red Cross will most likely have mental health experts on site, see if they need any assistance.
 - g. At the end of the day, call the Bishop, just to check in. Invite him to come visit your district.
2. Organizing the District
 - a. Affected pastors are to care for their family and needs first.
 - b. If the church is not affected, that is where the Conference Disaster Response Team and volunteers will gather.

- c. Call a meeting of the pastors in the affected area. Have your Conference Disaster Response Coordinator explain how they can respond to the crisis and what will happen over the next few days to months.
 - d. Encourage your pastors to work ecumenically in the relief effort. Encourage them to take charge of this venture! Work so that churches are not duplicating efforts.
 - e. Remind them that their Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Disaster Leader, and Regional Disaster Leader are available to help them during the relief and recovery phases.
 - f. Encourage them to hold worship on the upcoming Sunday. That is one important step in the healing process for the community and the community of faith.
 - g. Encourage those churches not affected to assist those who were with feeding, snacks, childcare, clean-up, etc.
3. Look Out!
- a. Watch your pastor's whom seem to be going, going, going and doing so much for everyone.
 - b. Watch for those who have no energy, can't think straight.
 - c. Monitor the more heavily involved frequently.
 - d. Don't expect the pastor to call you, you call them!
 - e. Continue to debrief with all pastor's involved in the disaster.
4. Take initiative!
- a. Encourage the pastor and her/his family to get away from the affected area for a while. After a week of solid relief emotions and work, a couple of days away are a must.
 - b. Make sure they are caring for their own needs, and not just others.
5. If the pastor(s) are affected.
- a. You will be key in how the local church responds in a time of crisis. If the whole community is affected, church members may expect the pastor to carry on their "normal" pastoral duties, and that is not workable. Church members are hurting and in need, and the pastor is always the one we call!
 - b. Provide pastors from outside the disaster area to be the pastor to the church members.
 - c. If the parsonage is uninhabitable, be certain that the local church is providing the pastor and family with a decent place to stay.
 - d. Check to see how much of the pastor's personal loss is covered by church insurance.
 - e. Make sure that the pastor "registers" with Red Cross, who will be on site as soon as possible. If Salvation Army is present, make sure they talk with them. Both agencies will provide some immediate financial relief.
 - f. For pastor's owing their own home, make sure they apply with Small Business Association and Rural Homeowners Association for a possible loan.

- g. If the disaster receives a Presidential Declaration, make certain the pastor registers with FEMA. Communities may receive Public Assistance, with that money only being used for city/county repairs. Only if the community receives Individual Assistance will people receive funding.
- h. See if the pastor needs any financial help.
- i. Your direct involvement during the crisis will have a tremendous impact on the pastor, her/his family, and the community.
- j. You will have to insist on helping them, most of us in the helping field don't think we need it!

Recovery Phase

- The most likely period for clergy “burnout” is during the recovery phase.
- While pastors may function well in the early stages of a crisis with long hours and heavy responsibilities, after a while it becomes clear that most of their efforts will take place when the obvious urgency has past.
- Congregations may become less understanding of the time required from the pastor six months after the disaster.
- Several things can be done to avoid problems for the local pastor:
 - Let the congregation know how much the pastor’s work in and for the community is being appreciated.
 - Work with Staff Parish Relations to provide some time away for rest and renewal.
 - If the congregation is feeling “things” are not just getting done, is there a part time pastor or other individual who could help for a while?
 - Keep in touch with the pastor. If you don’t hear from her/him, don’t assume everything is going ok and things are fine.
 - Check on the condition of the pastor’s family. Make sure they are not being neglected as a result of the increased workload.
 - If the pastor and family was affected by the disaster, focusing on the needs of others helps with denying their own need.
 - Make sure the pastor is not letting the disaster and all the relief/recovery work be an excuse and a way out of their responsibilities.
- Stay in touch with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Disaster Leader, and Regional Disaster Leader.

The New Normal

- Realize that once a community experiences a disaster, things will never be the same again. Homes will be rebuilt, life will continue, yet it will always be different. Individuals will now be living in their “new normal”.
- There will be doubt and regret. “I wish I would have. . . “.

- Grief work is extremely important for what was and what will never be again.
- Understand and help the pastor(s) to understand that telling the story of the disaster may upset them for years to come. Be aware of the anniversary of the disaster.
- Celebrate milestones, such as finishing the rebuilding of the Sanctuary or other repairs to the church facilities.
- Always keep in mind that the disaster story is unique to each individual and their story is as important as the next persons.