



Local Church Disaster Response Handbook

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

Matthew 9:36

General Provisions, The Conference Disaster Response Plan

The Great Plains 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 Ministry exists for the purpose of responding to natural or civil disasters of such magnitude that they overwhelm a community's ability to recover on its own and additional help is requested by the community.

The local church is the point of contact for all church assistance in a disaster. The Conference will support the local church by making its resources and those of the General Church available, when invited and if needed, through the leadership of the Conference Disaster Response Ministry.

Operating consistently within UMCOR's philosophy, this is not a first-response organization, but stands ready to assist communities within the Great Plains Conference geographical area over the long haul of their recovery, until they are well on their way to establishing a "new normal" after a crisis. While the local community owns their disaster recovery, this organization and plan will enable others outside the local community to also participate in their recovery and meeting their recovery goals.

Volunteers will be available, but only when they are requested by either the local church or the community officials in which the local United Methodist Church is involved. Any monetary assistance will be disbursed to the community through appropriations made by the Long-Term Recovery Committee or through other appropriate case management processes.

Local Church Actions to Plan for a Disaster

- ❖ Appoint a member from the local church to serve as the Local Church Disaster Leader.
- ❖ Develop a plan for dealing with a disaster. Learn how your county plans to deal with disaster response (contact your County Emergency Manager), how this plan is supposed to work, and how the local church can fit in or help. The Conference Disaster Response Coordinator will assist you with your Church Disaster Plan.
- ❖ Determine if and how the church facility could be used:
 - Offer and plan for the use of your facility as a Reception Center or a Shelter through the American Red Cross.
 - Have your Board of Trustees contact the American Red Cross office to begin this process.
 - Red Cross will inspect your building(s) and determine its suitability and verifiability.
 - Your church will need to develop **a written agreement with the American Red Cross that specifies the Red Cross and its insurance will cover provider liability and the cost of repair for any damages incurred.**
 - Red Cross will oversee all the activities of the shelter, not you as a church.
 - Red Cross will provide training for any volunteers desiring to know about Shelter Operations.
 - Your church may choose, rather than to be an emergency shelter, to be helpful in other ways (office space for the Great Plains Disaster Response Ministry, meeting rooms, respite site for volunteers, etc.)
 - Be certain that your building(s) is ready for an emergency.
- ❖ Prepare church property for disaster use:
 - Draw floor plans of building(s), showing dimensions, restrooms, handicapped access, kitchen facilities, childcare facilities, etc.
 - Specify areas not to be used by others.
 - Make certain any limitations or restrictions are understood by all concerned in advance of a disaster.
- ❖ Do an annual review of insurance needs:
 - Ask your insurance agent if your insurance covers volunteers being and staying in your building?
 - What is the liability for volunteer teams to cook their own meals in your facility?

- If you become a Red Cross Shelter, they will provide the insurance coverage.
- ❖ Ensure Church Property receives timely ongoing maintenance:
 - Church property that is regularly and properly maintained comes through disasters better than those where maintenance has been deferred or done poorly.
 - The Board of Trustees is responsible for an up-to-date inventory of church property and contents. This should include a safe depository for valuable records plus duplicates in safe places away from the local church buildings.
 - Be sure to back up all financial records and important documents to a Cloud Server daily.
 - Property and content inventories are backed up best by narrated recording of each room with an accompanying printed list.
 - All computer files should be duplicated on back-up flash drives and stored in a safe place. Computer files should also be backed up daily on a Cloud Service.
- ❖ Develop a plan to support volunteers in mission who come to help following a disaster:
 - Form a committee to receive and work with volunteer teams, Early Response Teams in the early Relief Phase and (UMVIM) volunteers who will most often come in during the early and all through the Recovery Phase.
 - It should be the responsibility of the Conference Volunteers in Mission Coordinator in cooperation with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator to make arrangements with the volunteer team's leader.
 - In the event of a large disaster, the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator may have to request teams from other Annual Conferences in our Southcentral Jurisdiction. Those teams will most likely request to stay in a local church.
 - Spontaneous volunteers who come to help without invitation can be a blessing or a curse depending on advanced preparation. It is extremely important to anticipate that will happen and therefore create a spontaneous volunteer reception center that includes a reception table, a registration table, an assignment table, and a sign saying "Individual and Non-Agency Volunteers".
 - There will also need to be the same reception center that includes a reception table, a registration table, an assignment table, and a sign saying "Badged Agency Volunteers". This reception center is for

volunteers from agencies like Great Plains Disaster Response, Lutheran Disaster Services, Red Cross, etc.

- ❖ Develop a plan to involve groups within the church:
 - Tap into the talents and resources of the United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, Youth, Young Adults, and others within the congregation to perform the following:
 - Assist in feeding volunteers; light lunches and snacks, lots of water and Gatorade.
 - After the disaster, has happened, and the all clear given, form teams of volunteers to clear debris and clean-up mainly in road ways and public areas. Do not go near any electrical wires that are laying on the ground or hanging in the air. Do not throw any type of official documents, mail, pictures, or other items away that you come into contact with. Bring these back to the church for the community to come in and look through.
 - All volunteers immediately following the disasters must be informed to NOT DISTURB a disaster site period. There are lots of inspections that must take place at every facility affected by the disaster.
- ❖ Plan for how children and youth will be cared for in disasters:
 - The Conference will provide members of the Spiritual and Emotional Care Team to work with children and youth after a disaster. These individuals are trained and have completed Safe Gatherings.
 - Children and youth will need safe, secure, and compassionate places to be after a disaster. Provide a place in the church with is warm and inviting for this to take place.
- ❖ Develop a plan with the Pastor (Staff) Parish Relations Committee (PPR or SPR):
 - This committee should plan how to handle the extra demands on the pastor's time and energy following a disaster. Because the pastor is a strong leader in the community, she/he will be called upon to be on committees to help plan and carry out the community's long term recovery.

- If the pastor is required to continue a full load at the church during the early stages of the recovery, she/he can easily “burn out”. Provide rest and relief time for the pastor as much as possible. Appoint someone on the committee to work alongside the pastor in her/his new-found duties in the community with the recovery.

- ❖ DO NOT MAKE APPEALS FOR FOOD, WATER, OR CLOTHING:
 - Those items will appear, and with them the presented problem of adequate storage space, refrigeration, and the distribution challenges.
 - Plan on how to direct those donations to organizations that specialize in helping with that type of donations management: Salvation Army and Seventh Day Adventist Church.
- ❖ Communications Center:
 - Work with your Conference Disaster Response Coordinator to set up a United Methodist Call Center in the church. Staff with volunteers who can take messages and direct individuals on where to receive help.
 - Prepare alternate plans if the telephone and power are out, e.g. ham amateur radio operator and equipment.
 - The Conference Communications Department will handle Media relations. The only spokesperson will be the District Superintendent if available. The Communications Department will supply a statement for the Pastor of the church if needed.
 - All news releases to the media will go through the Conference Communications Coordinator.
- ❖ Plan for How the Church Staff and Trustees will respond:
 - Board of Trustees’ Representative will gather data on damage to church-owned property and arrange for an inspection if necessary. Any damage repair to church facilities will be initiated by the Chair of the Trustees.
 - If a disaster is during regular church times and events, the staff are to initiate the church disaster plans as soon as notification is given of potential danger.
 - The Church secretary compiles information from local church members and friends as they call and will assist the communication center with data processing and distribution. In the hours following a

disaster, the Church Secretary should inquire with city officials on where the official reception center will be to register with American Red Cross and to ask for volunteer help with Great Plains Disaster Response Ministry.

❖ Shut-ins:

- Know the plans of your shut-ins for disasters. If an evacuation takes place, will they need help? Where will they go? Have contact phone numbers for their extended family.

Actions When Disaster is Imminent:

❖ Monitor the News:

- Listen to the news and monitor your location for weather updates.
- There are several great weather apps to download on your cell phone that will alert you to potential weather: FEMA, American Red Cross, AccuWeather, The Weather Channel, National Weather Service Mobile App. All these can be programmed for your immediate area and other areas of concern.
- Follow all instructions issued by your city/county warning system and/or the National Weather Service.
- If you are advised to evacuate, GO! As a leader in the community, you are looked to for guidance. People who stay, when ordered to evacuate, risk their own lives, and the lives of emergency personnel who must go in to save them.

❖ Move to a Safe Place:

- Protect yourself and your family first. Do not abandon your family for the sake of the parish.
- Contact your District Superintendent to share your location.
- If your church is a certified Red Cross shelter, arrange with them on how they will be able to get into the building.
- No matter what your level of involvement in disaster response, you will not be effective if you are not certain of the safety of your family. What you do for them will be an example for others to follow with regard to themselves, and their families.
- If there is time before you evacuate, see what you can do to secure the church building(s). Remove swinging signs, lite playground

equipment, turn off the gas, secure doors and windows as best as can be.

❖ Opening as a Shelter:

- If your church is a certified Red Cross shelter, and you did not have to evacuate, follow the instructions of the Red Cross, and prepare to open.
- Follow the instructions of the Red Cross personnel in charge of running the shelter. Offer to assist if they need your help.

Actions During the Rescue/Recovery Phase:

❖ Chancel church activities:

- The church does not usually function as such during the rescue/recovery phase.
- Individuals will most likely be sheltered in the church.
- As long as the shelter is open or there are other disaster relief events taking place in the church, cancel all activities except Worship.
- Following a disaster, the church needs to come together to worship and to just be together. It matters not where you meet, as the church is the people and not the building.

❖ Rescue/Recovery Efforts:

- After the danger has passed, and the surrounding area has been deemed safe by Law Enforcement, if not already so, move to a safe area with your family.
- Do not interfere with rescue or emergency personnel. If the chance is presented, let the first responders know you are clergy.
- If you find anyone affected by the disaster who is hurt, stay with them, and watch for first responders so you can wave them over to your location.
- If you are trained in First Aid, provide assistance as you can.

❖ Security:

- If your neighbor's home has been damaged, help them out by keeping an eye on their property. Maintain safety first and at all times!! Do not put yourself in harm's way.

- Discourage outsiders from entering your area. Maintain safety first! Do not put yourself in harm's way!
- Report suspicious individuals to the police; note license plate numbers, the color of the vehicle, and/or logos on the vehicles.
- Do not give any information to strangers unless they are badged representatives of a known relief agency. Even then, if you are uncomfortable, do not provide information.
- Be alert and aware of scammers!! Always ask for their business license.
- ❖ Communications:
 - Follow the instructions of the first responders.
 - As church members and community individuals begin to gather at the church, inquire about everyone. Is there someone missing?
 - Begin to prepare for the Great Plains Disaster Response Ministry to arrive at the church.
 - Activate your Church Disaster Plan. If possible, notify your members and volunteers of the actions the church is about to take.

Actions During the Relief Phase:

- ❖ Get organized!
 - If neither the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, Regional Disaster Leader, or District Disaster Leader are present, notify them with information about the extent of damage and what assistance you think you will need.
 - Get prepared to host the District Superintendent, Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Disaster Leader, and/or the Regional Disaster Leader.
 - Set up a point of contact for conference, district, and regional leadership to meet you.
- ❖ Ecumenical Cooperation:
 - Enlist the aid of other area churches in disaster relief. Ecumenical efforts arising in a disaster can evolve into something more permanent in dealing with community needs later. Plan with other churches in advance of a disaster, so services will not be duplicated.
- ❖ Financial Assistance:
 - Emergency living expenses (food, and clothing), for those directly affected by the disaster are normally handled by the American Red Cross and Salvation Army, in the form of gift cards.

- Those affected by the disaster might not be reimbursed and the people helped could be in jeopardy of receiving further aid in the amount for which they would normally qualify if expenses were picked up early by the church.
 - Generally, it is a good idea to let those who have suffered loss use the assistance that is available through the government and the American Red Cross before going to the church or other interfaith agency. There will be a greater need for church and interfaith funds during the recovery phase.
 - Churches wishing to donate to the disaster should be encouraged to donate to the Conference Disaster Relief Fund or the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). The Conference Disaster Funds will be available for the Early Response Teams and the UMVIM teams in the relief and recovery phases.
- ❖ Clean-up Guidelines:
- Our Early Response Volunteers, nor any other volunteer should perform any repairs until city, county government and their insurance company have assessed the damage. Early repair may interfere with survivors receiving benefits from the government or insurance.
 - Concentrate on collecting important papers, photographs, valuables, securing property, and opening access ways.
 - Compile a list of property damage in your area as you walk through the community. No details are needed, just a visual of what you see. This will be very helpful to the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator.
 - Keep in mind that a soiled photo or a broken plate may look like trash to you, but may be a valued connection to family history for the homeowner. Be sensitive to emotional needs. Always take the time to listen.
- ❖ Keep Journals:
- Journals of the activities of the church in the relief and recovery phases are helpful to the committees of the church and to the Conference Disaster Response Ministry.
 - It is extremely important to record all volunteer hours and the locations where they volunteered. These hours can be used as an in-kind match if a Federal Declaration is received and will save the community a lot of money. Make sure these hours get turned into the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator on a regular basis.
- ❖ The Disaster Tele-Registration System and Phone App:

- If the disaster receives a Presidential Declaration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will publish the telephone number of the Tele-Registration Center.
- Individuals may also register for assistance through the FEMA Mobile App.
- Every family should call the toll-free number and apply for assistance. Each family will receive a packet of information. The local church could gather volunteers to assist community members with filling out these forms.
- Many homeowners affected by the disaster will understate their damages, especially if it is in the days recently soon after the disaster. Mental fatigue and lack of clarity are present. They may need to be reminded to declare all damages that they received. Make sure they declare everything, not just what they think insurance or FEMA might want to know.
- Small grants are available from FEMA, even if a Presidential Declaration is not established. For those who need additional assistance, low interest individual loans are available through the Small Business Administration. Those who do not qualify for low interest loans can apply for Other Needs Assistance – additional small grants. For those who were going to take out a loan or withdraw savings to repair the damage, they should be encouraged to seriously consider government assistance since the interest rates are lower than they could receive at a bank.
- Enlist some volunteers from the church to help those affected by the disaster to fill out the forms on time. There is a deadline that must be met in order to be considered.

Actions During the Recovery Phase

- ❖ Local Church Initiative:
 - The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) works through the connectional system that strengthens us as the Body of Christ. People usually receive more assistance if recovery is coordinated through the efforts of the local church, working with the Conference Disaster Response Ministry.
- ❖ Duration:
 - The recovery phase will last 200 to 400 days or more.
 - The general rule is that the recovery phase is 100 times longer than the rescue phase.

- You will be heavily involved as a church for 4 to 6 months, and somewhat involved for the balance of the recovery time after that.
- ❖ Community Networking for Recovery:
 - When major disasters occur, and those in which the community cannot rebound on its own, a Long-Term Recovery Committee is recommended as a confidential and preferred way to work at recovery by pooling the resources from individuals, churches, and agencies that can provide finances and in-kind gifts.
 - The key to long term recovery is Case Management which can be financed by UMCOR funds.
 - Disaster Case Managers go through extensive training for this very detailed and confidential work.
- ❖ Capitalize on Strengths:
 - Focus on those things in which your church volunteers are proficient.
 - Whatever your strengths may be, bring them to the front during the recovery phase. Let's capitalize on the strengths that each church can bring.
 - Not every church can handle every type of relief, and that is ok!
 - Plan with the other churches in the community to not duplicate services, if the Baptist want to feed, then the United Methodist handle volunteers for example.
- ❖ Monetary Considerations:
 - In times of disaster, one of the best "helping" tools are to take up an offering for the Conference Disaster Response volunteers who are present in the community making homes "safe, secure, and sanitary" in the relief phase, and making repairs and doing rebuilds in the recovery phase. Your offering can help to purchase needed supplies.
 - Channel disaster relief funds raised by your church through the office of the Conference Treasurer.
- ❖ Home Repair and Reconstruction:
 - Teams of volunteers can be organized to do building repair and reconstruction through the Conference United Methodist Volunteer in Mission Coordinator.
 - All repairs/rebuilding must comply with local building codes. This may require a local licensed contractor familiar with the building codes to supervise the work teams.
 - The Long-Term Recovery Committee will obtain a site coordinator to prioritize work needed, and then Volunteer Manager (also obtained by LTRC), will assign the volunteers to a job.

- DO NOT begin repairs anywhere until all inspections have been made, repair plans approved, and a building permit issued (if required). People can be denied recovery financial assistance if repairs are begun too soon. Repairs and rebuilding can also be ordered to be torn down. Patience as we wait for all the agencies and insurance companies to do their inspections.
- To maximize the assistance available to those who have suffered damage, wait until the Long-Term Recovery Committee's Unmet Needs Committee has been given the information on the needs by the Disaster Case Managers.
- The government is now allowed to duplicate services, neither should all the agencies responding to the disaster. Each agency must work together to build each other's strengths and not to duplicate services.
- During all this that is going on to assist homeowners, we must recognize that when time is an important consideration, and the person or family has a special need, sensitivity is required. They may need an advocate to work on their behalf to help meet the most pressing needs.
- ❖ Support Group:
 - Sponsor a support group for disaster survivors. Part of healing is to be able to tell your story, and for someone to present with them in that moment, just to listen.
 - Hold a monthly gathering for all in the community who were touched by the disaster. Have a covered dish meal, and then have some time of sharing and fellowshiping.

After it is All Over With

- Take some time to reflect and to read over the journal kept by church volunteers.
- At some point, schedule to meet with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator to talk about the experience and to offer suggestions.

