

SECTION 4

LOCAL CHURCH ACTIONS

GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. The Local Church
 - a. The local church is the point of contact for all church assistance in a disaster. The Conference will not move in and take over this role. If the local church is not involved in disaster relief, neither is the Conference. Volunteers will be available, but only if they are requested by either the local church or the community interfaith in which the local United Methodist Church is involved. Any monetary assistance will be disbursed to the community through the appropriate fiscal officer of the community interfaith. (This may be the treasurer of the Long Term Recovery Organization).
 - b. The Conference will assist the local church to provide disaster relief.
2. Conference Support

Following involvement of the local church, the Conference will make its resources and those of the General church available, as needed, with the help of the Conference Disaster Coordinating Committee.

EARLY PREPARATION

1. Planning

Develop a Disaster Plan for dealing with a disaster. Learn how your county plans to deal with disaster response (contact the county Emergency Management Office), how this plan is supposed to work, and how the local church can fit in or help.
2. Church Facility
 - a. Have your Board of Trustees determine if your physical plant is a potential shelter for either mass care or feeding by contacting the nearest chapter of the American Red Cross. They will inspect your building(s) and determine its suitability and certifiability. The Red Cross needs a broad range of building sizes and shapes. Red Cross may choose to supply your shelter with a shelter kit containing signs, registration sheets etc. for operating your shelter. Red Cross also provides training in Shelter Operations for your volunteer staff. Remember also, opening non-certified shelter involves liabilities that could easily be beyond the ability of the local church to withstand.
 - b. Your church may choose, rather than to be an emergency shelter, to be helpful in other ways (office space for the relief effort, rooms for meetings, etc.). Be certain that your building is ready for an emergency. Emergency exit signs and fire extinguishers should be in working order. Keep all exits clear. Have flashlights available.
 - c. In preparing church property for disaster use, draw floor plans of building(s), showing dimensions, restrooms, handicapped access, kitchen 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.

Master Plan for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

- d. Do an annual review of insurance needs. Providing services in disaster response can incur additional liability unless and until that coverage is provided by the Federal Government (FEMA) or the Red Cross (this is only possible if there is official certification of buildings for disaster usage).
- e. Timely maintenance is essential. Church property that is regularly and properly maintained comes through disasters better than those where maintenance has been deferred. The Board of Trustees is responsible for an up-to-date inventory of church property and contents. This should include a safe repository for valuable records plus duplicates in safe places away from local church buildings. Property and content inventories are backed up best by narrated videotape records of each room with an accompanying printed list. All computer files should be duplicated on back-up discs and stored in a safe place.

3. Congregation Tasks

- a. Congregation Check
Prepare a method of checking on the congregation of the church when a disaster strikes. i.e. developing a “telephone tree.” Check on shut-ins first. Notify the local rescue squad if there is a call for evacuation, giving all pertinent details.
- b. Companions
Arrange for people (volunteers) to serve as companions for victims. Companions should be prepared to listen, run errands, make phone calls; anything to help victims feel more comfortable and ease the anxiety. If possible, arrange for persons with skills in signing for the hearing impaired, and translators for non-English speaking people.
- c. Make contingencies for providing services as soon as possible after the disaster. Consider identifying an alternate location in case the church is damaged, perhaps including a reciprocal agreement with another church. Be prepared in the event that the pastor is affected by the disaster.
- d. Determine ways existing ministries can continue in the event the church is damaged, including child care, bible study, AA meetings, etc..
- e. Identify and plan for ministries your church will engage in during a disaster, such as feeding, donations distribution, information center, etc..
- f. Volunteers

1.UMVIM Teams

Form a committee to receive volunteer teams (UMVIM) from outside the area who come in to help. Most outside volunteers will be most helpful toward the end of the Relief Phase and the onset of the Recovery Phase. Such volunteer teams will need a place to stay, but should be self-sufficient otherwise. It should be the responsibility of the Conference Volunteers in Mission Coordinator in cooperation with the Conference Disaster Preparedness and Response Coordinator to make arrangements with the volunteer teams, and not that of the local church. Arrangements should be made through the Jurisdictional Volunteers in Mission Coordinator.

2. Spontaneous Volunteers

Spontaneous Volunteers can be a blessing or a curse depending on advanced preparation. It is important to create a spontaneous volunteer reception center which includes a reception table, a registration table, and an assignment table.

- g. Local Church Organizations

Master Plan for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

Develop a plan for United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, United Methodist Youth (and other ad hoc groups) to perform some of the following services if they train for them and have made arrangements with the proper Emergency Management people:

- Assist in the feeding of volunteers; light lunches and snacks, etc.
- Form teams of volunteers to clear debris and clean up. **DO NOT DISTURB** a disaster site until it has been inspected for damage. Those impacted should not be kept from receiving assistance from Federal, State, or Insurance companies by volunteers who act too quickly. It is not legal for government to duplicate benefits. Remember: appearances may be deceiving; some places may not seem to have sustained damage; make no assumptions—wait until after inspection to do any clean up.

h. Child Care

Have available a person or persons who have received the UMCOR training in working with children and/or youth in disasters. Children will need safe, secure and compassionate places to be after a disaster and people who are trained to listen to them and meet their needs and help to allay their fears.

i. Pastor (Staff) Parish Relations Committee (PPR or SPR)

In the event of a disaster there will be additional demands made upon the pastor's time and energy. A pastor could "burn out" if the church is not prepared to provide some relief. Provide rest and relief time for the pastor.

g. Food and Clothing

Do not make an appeal for either food or clothing—you will get it, and with it the problem of adequate storage space and refrigeration. The Red Cross, Salvation Army and Seventh Day Adventist Church specialize in helping those affected by disasters with donations management. Caution—**Donations Management can become a second disaster.**

h. Communication Center

i. Local Church Communications

Prepare a plan for a communication center, working with community resources. Plan where the center will be (preferably the local church), when it will be staffed, what information will be helpful, and what information will be available. Prepare alternate plans if telephone and power outages occur, e.g. ham amateur radio operator equipment. Your state Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster can be a resource and can be contacted through your Conference Disaster Preparedness and Response Coordinator.

ii. Compose a Disaster Information Team responsible for establishing and operating the Communication Center. The Communications Manager will oversee operations, verify information, sort information into appropriate categories, compile reports, and coordinate information and distribution. The Pastor will be a conduit of pertinent information, some shared with the Center. The Center will relay information needed by the pastor for pastoral care calls.

iii. Public Information Officer (PIO)

Select a volunteer from the church to coordinate media relations—preferably someone with a communications background. All news releases to the media should go through the PIO.

iv. The Board of Trustees' Representative will gather data on damage to church-owned property and arrange for an inspection if necessary. Program Directors will implement the disaster programs they have developed and will transmit information regarding their work. The Church secretary compiles information from local

Master Plan for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

church members and friends as they call and will assist the communication center with data processing and distribution.

C. DISASTER IS IMMINENT

1. Monitoring
Listen to the radio/television and monitor your county and State Emergency Management web sites for disaster updates; follow any instructions issued by your County Emergency Management Agency or the National Weather Service. If you are advised to evacuate, GO!
2. Precautions
Look to the needs of your households first. If there is time, see what can be done to secure the church building(s). Remove swinging signs, board or shutter windows and secure church records.
3. Opening Shelter
If your church is a certified shelter, follow the instructions of the American Red Cross and prepare to open. If you evacuate to other locations, try to identify other members of your church. Volunteer to help with shelter operation. Form a prayer group. Be ready to calm the anxiety of others.
4. Shut-ins
Remind the rescue squad of shut-ins. If they are not at home, advise the rescue squad where they may be found.

D. RESCUE (OR EMERGENCY) PHASE OF THE DISASTER

1. Minimize activities
The church does not usually function as such during this phase. Individuals should seek shelter or have already been evacuated. The only organized church activity would involve operating the church as a shelter, or to sponsor church activities in shelters.
2. Rescue efforts
After the danger has passed, concentrate on rescue efforts and moving to safer areas, if necessary.
 - a. Do not interfere with rescue or emergency personnel. Volunteer your services, but avoid situations for which you are untrained.
 - b. Stay with any victims you find and give them whatever assurances you can until emergency personnel arrive. If you are trained, provide first aid as needed.
 - c. Provide comfort to those who have been hurt. Make certain rescue workers are able to get to those who have been severely impacted by the disaster.
3. Security
 - a. If a home is damaged and there are no police around, help your neighbors by keeping an eye on their property.
 - b. Discourage outsiders from entering the area. Report suspicious individuals to the police; note license plate numbers of suspicious vehicles.
 - c. Don't give information to strangers unless they are representatives of a known relief agency. If they are, they will have identification and will be wearing it.
4. Communications
Follow the instructions of emergency personnel. Instigate plan for Communication Center to help people know what is happening, how their neighbors and friends are, how the wider community has been impacted, what services are available and where they may be found.

Master Plan for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

E. RELIEF PHASE OF A DISASTER

1. Get organized
 - a. Activate your disaster groups and coordinate all activities with the Chair of your Administrative Council and your pastor.
 - b. Notify the Conference United Methodist Rapid Response Teams through the UMVIM Coordinator.
 - i. The Rapid Response Teams will need a point of contact within the Disaster area.
2. 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 on.
3. Financial Assistance

Emergency living expenses (temporary housing, food and clothing) for those directly affected by the disaster are normally handled by the American Red Cross. Victims 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 Interfaith agencies. There will be ample 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 Relief Funds will be available for the Rapid Response Teams and the disaster UMVIM teams as well as general disaster response.
4. Clean-up

In any clean-up effort, the following guidelines may prove helpful:

 - a. Do not perform any repairs until government and insurance companies have assessed the damage. Early repair may interfere with reimbursements.
 - b. Concentrate on collecting important papers, photographs, valuables, securing property and opening access ways.
 - c. Compile a list of property damage in your area. Relief agencies will not usually give out this information unless your church has a prior arrangement and role in relief work. Your pastor, the District Superintendent and District Coordinator for Disaster Preparedness and Response may tour the area and any information you can give them will be helpful. At this point, it need not be detailed or complete.
 - d. Remember 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 time to listen.
5. Keep Journals

Journals of the activities of the church in the relief phase are helpful to the committees of the church and to the Conference Disaster Preparedness and Response Committee. Encourage workers to keep a record of their activities and select someone to make a composite report.
6. The Disaster Tele-registration System

If the disaster receives a Presidential Declaration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will publish the telephone number of the Tele-registration Center. FEMA and the agencies coordinate the Center by gathering data through 1 (800) 621-3362. Each family should call the toll-free number and apply for assistance. They will be sent a packet of forms. The local church should consider doing any or all of the following:

Master Plan for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

- a. Many victims understate their damage in the period just after a disaster. They may need encouragement or to be reminded to declare all damage they received.
- b. People may need help in filling in the disaster relief forms. Help them declare all their losses, not just those that they think are excluded from insurance coverage. Small grants are available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. For those who need additional assistance, low interest individual loans are available through the Small Business Administration. For 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.
- c. Help victims fill out the forms on time. There is a deadline that must be met in order to be considered. They should take time to truly assess all of their losses, but the forms should be completed on time.

F. THE RECOVERY PHASE

1. Local Church Initiative
If your church is not involved, the Conference will not be involved and UMCOR's response will be seriously limited. The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) works through the connectional system. People in the church and in the community generally will receive more assistance if recovery is coordinated through the local church.
2. 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 response phase). You will be heavily involved as a church for two to four months, and somewhat involved for the balance of the recovery time after that.
3. Inter-faiths and Networking
When major disasters occur, an Inter-faith organization (often called a Long Term Recovery Organization) is recommended as a preferred way to work at recovery by pooling the resources of all the churches. Very often, such an Inter-faith, upon organization, can hire a local person to coordinate the recovery effort on behalf of the churches. The key to long term recovery is Case Management which can be financed by UMCOR dollars. An Inter-faith is the most common agent for distribution of various denominational aid, and some aid will only be given through an inter-faith.
4. Capitalize on Strengths
Focus on those things in which your church is proficient. Whatever your strengths may be, bring them to the fore during the recovery phase. Not every church can handle every type of relief.
5. Monetary Considerations
Your church should be prepared to ask for contributions for disaster relief after a disaster. Encourage other churches of the community to do likewise, especially if there is an Inter-faith. Channel disaster relief funds raised by your church through the office of the Conference Treasurer.
6. Building Repair and Reconstruction
Teams of volunteers can be organized to do building repair and reconstruction through the United Methodist Volunteer in Missions Coordinator (or can be requested through UMCOR, Mennonite Disaster Services, Church of the Brethren, or Christian reformed World Relief Committee). The teams must be supervised by a licensed contractor familiar with the building codes of your area. In addition, the teams will need a site coordinator to

Master Plan for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

prioritize and assign needed jobs. Coordinate with other relief agencies especially through an interfaith. DO NOT begin repairs anywhere until all inspections have been made and repair plans have been approved. People can be denied recovery financial assistance if repairs are begun too soon (either that, or what has been begun can be ordered torn down and restarted after plan approval). To maximize the assistance available to those who have suffered damage, wait for recovery funding decisions to be made before providing repair assistance. Remember, government is not allowed to duplicate services. At the same time, recognize that when time is an important consideration and the person or family has a special need, sensitivity requires a special approach and perhaps a special advocate to expedite the process.

7. Advocacy

A sympathetic listener/companion who can make telephone calls, personal contacts, run errands, search for records, would be helpful to have for disaster victims.

a. Support Groups

Sponsor a support group, especially through the community interfaith, to allow those who have been impacted by disaster to tell their stories to someone who both understands their plight and can listen.

G. THE AFTERMATH

Take some time to assess yourself and others' performance during and after the disaster using the "Assessment Form" found in the Appendix.