

# **The Conference Plan for Disaster Preparedness and Response The Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church Revised Feb 15, 2007**

## **Introduction**

A disaster is any specific event, natural or unnatural, which results in overwhelming physical, economic and/or emotional damage to a community. It is in these settings that the Church has both the opportunity and the responsibility to reach out in meaningful ways with the love and hope of Jesus Christ.

To ensure timeliness, avoid redundancy and provide an effective and appropriate response, the church must be ready, at all levels, when disaster strikes. This means planning and preparation *before* disaster strikes.

With this in mind the Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has organized a structure and guidelines to facilitate the ability of the local church to be in ministry to persons in need as a result of a disaster.

## **Purpose**

1. To resource and equip local United Methodist churches and districts as they assist their communities and individuals to prepare, respond and recover from disaster.
2. To provide immediate relief for acute human need and to respond to the suffering of persons in our communities caused by natural or unnatural disaster.
3. To work cooperatively with the appropriate conference units, ecumenical bodies, and interdenominational agencies in the identification of, advocacy for, and assistance with ministries for disaster response.
4. To work cooperatively with United Methodist Communications in promotion of the One Great Hour of Sharing offering and the Florida Annual Conference Disaster Response appeals.
5. To work with conference communications to initiate printed, audiovisual, electronic, and other resources to interpret, support, and communicate with our churches and other conferences concerning appeals for help and information related to ministry for disaster response.

*"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one  
of the least of these friends of mine, you did for me."*

Matthew 25:40 (modified)

## **Florida Conference Disaster Response**

In the event of a disaster, resources available to the local church (i.e. volunteers, money, expertise, etc.) are sometimes limited or may not match the need. This is where the connectional system of the United Methodist Church can provide support and resources to the local church to respond effectively and appropriately. The following individuals and teams are typically active in disaster response in the Florida Conference, depending on the nature, size and location of the disaster:

- The Conference Disaster Administrative Team (CDAT)
- Bishop, District Superintendents and extended Cabinet members
- Conference Disaster Coordinator and District Disaster Coordinators
- Local Church Disaster Coordinators and local volunteers
- Storm Recovery staff and volunteers.

This plan outlines the roles and responsibilities of those involved in disaster response in the Florida Conference, as well as processes to ensure the seamless flow of information and assistance to those affected by disaster.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of the Conference Disaster Administrative Team**

The Conference Disaster Administrative Team (CDAT) manages and oversees administrative issues of disaster response for the Florida Conference. This includes:

- Overseeing the development and implementation of policies and procedures for disaster response in the Florida Conference;
- Establishing short term and long term strategies for disaster response, including guidelines for the role of the conference and local churches in long term recovery and determining if advocacy is needed at the state level;
- Setting financial policies including the grant process, grant criteria, approvals, accountability structure and audits;
- Identifying staff needs and requesting staff in conjunction with the Director of Connectional Ministries.

CDAT's primary role is to provide the administrative framework that enables the rest of the team to respond effectively and in a timely fashion.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of the Storm Recovery Ministry**

The goal of the Storm Recovery Ministry of the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church is to effectively manage the resources available to our churches when disaster strikes: information, supplies, volunteers and financial assistance. This is coordinated through the Storm Recovery Center where Storm Center staff and volunteers work closely with the Conference Disaster Administrative Team (CDAT), district and church disaster coordinators, and outside relief agencies to ensure clear lines of communication and effective coordination of resources. The center is located in the conference offices in Lakeland. However, Storm Recovery Ministry also has Storm Recovery Representatives who work in the field and are deployed according to the need.

*Note: These processes refer specifically to natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes and severe storms, floods, etc. Unnatural disasters may require a different type of response, but we believe the division of responsibilities among those involved in disaster response and recovery remains basically the same.*

*Further it is understood that all staff and volunteers involved in disaster response have the immediate and primary responsibility to first secure the safety of their families and property in the event of a disaster. They should then notify their team leader or immediate supervisor as to their status and ability to help. The team leader or supervisor should then notify the Storm Recovery Center, as appropriate.*

### **Stage 1: Planning and Preparation – Before Disaster Strikes**

1. In cooperation with District Disaster Teams, assist districts and local churches in the preparation of disaster response plans.
2. Provide training opportunities and resources in all phases of disasters. Trainings include:
  - a. Early Response Teams (ERT)
  - b. Local Church Disaster Planning
  - c. Spiritual and Emotional Care (Care Team)
  - d. Case Management
3. Work collaboratively with other Conferences of The United Methodist Church, The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and other organizations active in disaster as appropriate.
4. Develop a plan for the coordination of volunteers.
5. Develop specialized volunteer teams including ERTs and Care Teams.
6. Collaborate with District Disaster Teams for location of supply depots and distribution and collection sites.

### **Stage 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Eminent**

1. Confirm communication channels with UMCOR, District Disaster Teams and depots.

2. Provide timely information updates to UMCOR, District Disaster Teams and depots as appropriate.
3. Secure physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternative workspace.

### **Stage 3: Emergency Response – After Disaster Strikes**

1. Serve as the communication hub for disaster response, including:
  - a. managing incoming calls (requests for assistance, offers of assistance, etc.)
  - b. coordinating the shipment and receipt of supplies
  - c. coordinating deployment of volunteers in cooperation with affected district(s).
2. Assign and deploy Early Response Teams as needed.

### **Stage 4: Relief**

1. Determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected areas.
2. Monitor Situations Reports as received from NVOAD, FEMA, ARC, CWS, etc., and disseminate information throughout the conference, as appropriate.
3. Continue as communication hub.
4. Assist in coordinating volunteer work teams assigned to work areas.

### **Stage 5: Long Term Recovery**

1. Identify staff to work in recovery.
2. Collaborate and cooperate with agencies and organizations involved in long term recovery to provide assistance, training and spiritual care as appropriate.
3. Administer the grant process developed by the Conference Disaster Administrative Team.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of the District Disaster Coordinator**

The District Disaster Coordinator (DDC) is the point of contact for coordinating disaster response and disaster-related efforts at the District level. The DDC is a partner and advocate for the local churches in their district as it relates to disaster issues as well as liaison to the District Office and the Storm Recovery Center.

### **Stage 1: Planning and preparation – Before Disaster Strikes**

1. Develop a District Disaster Team that includes your District Superintendent.
2. In concert with the Conference and your District Disaster Team, develop a District Disaster Response Plan.
3. Work with local churches and extension ministries to assist them in the preparation of their disaster response plans.
4. Provide the local church pastors and extension ministers with information on who to contact in the event of a disaster and in what order they should be contacted.
5. Participate in and build relationships with agencies active in disaster response in your district (\*VOAD, COAD, LTRO, EOC, interfaith organizations, etc.) If you are unable to participate yourself, select a representative from the district team so that The United Methodist Church continues to be recognized, at all levels, as a valuable partner in the disaster response community.
6. Serve as communicator and liaison with Storm Recovery.
7. Identify locations for supply depots, identify and inventory available equipment, update forms and procedures as necessary. Collaborate with other District Disaster Teams for location of supply depots, distribution sites, etc.
8. Work with Storm Recovery to coordinate training in the district. This may include identifying training opportunities, serving as the trainer or designating a member of your team to be a trainer, assisting Storm Recovery with follow up after training events, etc.

### **Stage 2: Warning – District Strike is Eminent**

1. Contact District Superintendent and confirm communications plans within the district and confirm response plans with conference and district coordinators.
2. Check for updates from Storm Recovery and verify communications plans.
3. Check with local EOC, Emergency Management or other local disaster agencies.
4. Check in with your District Disaster Team and confirm communications plans.
5. Secure your physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternative workspace.

### **Stage 3: Emergency Response – After Disaster Strikes**

1. Contact District Superintendent and implement the District Disaster Plan.
2. Communicate status and immediate needs to the Storm Recovery Center.
3. Activate distribution sites as needed.

4. Assist in the deployment of work teams as allowed by county emergency management, *(Note: do not deploy volunteers into areas that are unsafe or restricted by law enforcement.)*
5. If appropriate, coordinate and participate in early assessment of the affected area with other conference personnel (District Superintendent, the Bishop, Storm Recovery staff, etc.)

#### **Stage 4: Relief**

1. Determine if communication capabilities have been restored.
2. Identify special needs and coordinate communication and activities with the Storm Recovery Center and local agencies.
3. As appropriate, continue to coordinate and participate in assessment of the affected area with other conference personnel (District Superintendent, the Bishop, Storm Recovery staff, etc.).
4. Identify affected areas for placement of volunteer work teams.
5. Identify a local volunteer manager for each worksite to receive and coordinate volunteers.

#### **Stage 5: Long Term Recovery**

1. As appropriate, work with Storm Recovery staff to provide information and resources to assist in establishing a long term recovery presence in your area.
2. Continue presence and relationship building with local agencies in your district.
3. Once a community begins long term recovery, the focus of the DDC and the District Team transitions to mitigation and preparedness.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of the District Superintendent**

The District Superintendent (DS) is responsible for oversight and supervision of churches and local pastors in the district where they serve. Therefore, in the event of a disaster affecting their district, it is imperative that the District Superintendents are kept informed so that they, in turn, can inform the Bishop as well as minister to those in their care. Including the DS on the District Disaster Team facilitates communication and ensures that the DS has input into the response effort.

### **Stage 1: Planning and preparation – Before Disaster Strikes**

1. Appoint a District Disaster Coordinator and work closely with the DDC to recruit a District Disaster Team.
2. As part of the District Disaster Team, and in concert with the conference, develop a District Disaster Response Plan including a communication plan.
3. Be familiar with the conference disaster plan and its application for your area.
4. Encourage churches in your care to have a written disaster plan for their church.
5. As appropriate, promote the connection among churches, extension ministries and the conference, reminding them that the Storm Recovery staff is available to provide the resources they need to serve their congregation and their community.

### **Stage 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Eminent**

1. Confirm communication plans with the District Disaster Team, the Bishop, clergy in their district and the Storm Recovery Center.
2. Coordinate with District Trustees and/or designated district leadership to secure office and parsonage.
3. Determine which clergy are evacuating and get contact information.
4. Determine which churches and ministries are most vulnerable and contact District Disaster Coordinator.
5. Secure physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternative workspace.

### **Stage 3: Emergency Response – After Disaster Strikes**

1. Communicate with the Bishop and District Disaster Coordinator.
2. Contact pastors and extension ministers in affected areas to assess spiritual, physical and emotional needs and address with appropriate resources.
3. If it is safe to do so, perform an early assessment of the affected area with the DDC, the Bishop, Storm Recovery staff or other conference personnel as appropriate.
4. Report on the condition of the community and church properties to appropriate conference personnel (the Bishop, Storm Recovery Center, Ministry Protection, Communications, etc.)

#### **Stage 4: Relief**

1. Determine if communication capabilities have been restored.
2. Continue contact with affected areas and site visits as appropriate.
3. Coordinate care and resources for affected clergy and pastoral families.

#### **Stage 5: Long Term Recovery – District Superintendent**

1. Continue to support and refer clergy and families to Shade and Fresh Water retreats and provide spiritual and emotional care for lay persons as appropriate..
2. Publicly acknowledge those who have been working in the disaster and the work they have done.
3. Encourage local church participation in long term recovery in the affected areas as appropriate.
4. As appropriate, communicate with the DDC, Storm Recovery Center and/or Storm Recovery staff regarding unmet needs that arise or areas that may need additional resources or other assistance.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of the Local Church**

The point of contact at the community level for all United Methodist assistance in a disaster is the local United Methodist Church. However, the local church is not expected to respond alone or in a vacuum. There are many resources available to assist the church. By working with the church disaster team, the District Disaster Coordinator and the Storm Recovery staff, many of the connections are easily accomplished.

A disaster may take considerable time to resolve. The local church should recognize and acknowledge its limitations in response. The DDC and the Storm Recovery staff will also work with the local church to identify the church's role, if any, in long term recovery, should that be necessary in the community.

*Note: Churches in the conference do not work directly with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), a resource agency of the general church. When invited by the Bishop, UMCOR provides resources and assistance to the Florida Conference through the Storm Recovery Center.*

*The Local Church Disaster Coordinator is the point person for ensuring fulfillment of the roles and responsibilities of the local church.*

### **Stage 1: Planning and preparation – Before Disaster Strikes**

1. Working with the pastor or designated church leadership, identify a Church Disaster Coordinator and recruit a disaster team. If the pastor is not part of the team, ensure that the team includes a process for keeping the pastor informed and updated regarding activities before, during and after a disaster.
2. Develop a local church plan that includes:
  - a. Caring for people
  - b. Caring for church facilities
  - c. Caring for community
  - d. Caring for others in the conference and beyond
3. The pastor and the Board of Trustees should annually review insurance coverage. Changes in property should be reported to the office of Ministry Protection at the conference, *as they occur*.
4. The Board of Trustees should make an annual inventory of church property and contents and provide a safe repository of valuable records.
5. Communicate with your DDC regularly to ensure knowledge of the church plans in the event of a disaster. Be sure to include any plans the church has to partner with other organizations, such as the American Red Cross as a shelter, the county as a point of distribution, etc.
6. Send a copy of your plan to the District Disaster Coordinator and the District office. Complete a disaster assessment form with your local Emergency Management Office.
7. Encourage those with special needs to register with the county (most counties have plans to evacuate special needs persons).

8. Know where your district depot(s) is located. Does your church have a plan to contribute to the depot regularly?
9. Encourage your church to support the Bishop's appeals regarding disaster relief (supplies, collections, food drives, aid to other conferences, etc.)

### **Stage 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Eminent**

1. Working with the church disaster team, confirm communication and response plans within the church, the district and the conference.
2. Check for updates from the DDC and the conference Web site.
3. Secure physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternative workspace.

### **Stage 3: Emergency Response – After Disaster Strikes**

1. Implement Church Disaster plan including:
  - Checking on the safety of the pastor, staff and families;
  - Assessment of damage to church property;
  - Assessment of safety of members of the congregation and property damage within the congregation;
  - Assessment of damage within the community the church serves.
2. Report the results of your assessment to the DDC and/or the DS per your communication plan.
3. Identify someone to take the DDC, DS, Bishop and/or other conference personnel on a tour of affected area, if appropriate.

### **Stage 4: Relief**

1. Determine if communication capabilities have been restored and communicate with your District Office and DDC when communication is restored.
2. Continue to implement the Local Church Disaster Plan.
3. Establish the immediate needs for food and shelter to the community.
4. If buildings are damaged file a claim.
5. Keep strict and separate accounting of disaster funding and document all expenditures and receipts of money.
6. Concentrate on meeting basic needs: food, water, temporary shelter and drying-in of homes.
7. Organize clean up teams to go into neighborhoods as allowed by county emergency management. (*Note: do not deploy volunteers into areas that are unsafe or restricted by law enforcement.*)
8. Prepare to receive work teams that may show up to help.
9. Contact other faith based and community operations to coordinate your efforts

### **Stage 5: Long Term Recovery**

1. Working with your DDC and the Storm Recovery Center, determine the level of involvement appropriate for your church in Long Term Recovery.

2. Develop a policy for referrals for people in need who contact the church.
3. Develop a policy for managing volunteers who contact the church.
4. Develop a policy for handling supplies offered to the church.
5. If your church is not in the disaster area, determine level of involvement for your church in long term recovery in affected areas (providing work teams, supplies, funds, etc.).

## **Roles and Responsibilities of Extension Ministries**

Extension ministries are unique to each area where they serve. All extension ministries are encouraged to work with their DDC and their district office to develop a plan for both protecting the staff and property of the ministry, if applicable, as well as a plan for responding in an appropriate way to the needs of the community they serve if the community is affected by disaster.

In some cases, extension ministries may be included in the district's plan while in other cases they may be covered under the church plan. A quick review of the Roles and Responsibilities of the Local Church may offer a loose guideline for the roles and responsibilities of extension ministries. In any event, all extension ministries should have, at minimum, a plan for communicating with the DDC, the district and/or the conference in the event they are affected by a disaster.

### **Guide to Acronyms**

ARC	American Red Cross
COAD	Community Organizations Active in Disaster
CWS	Church World Services
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
LTRO/C	Long Term Recovery Organization/Coalitions/Committees
NVOAD	National Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster
UMCOR	United Methodist Committee on Relief
VOAD	Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster