

Conference Disaster Plan

Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

The goal of the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church in disaster is to effectively manage resources available to our churches:

- Information
- Supplies
- Volunteers
- Financial assistance

This is coordinated through the Disaster Recovery Ministry located in the conference offices in Lakeland. Disaster Recovery staff and volunteers work closely with District Offices, District and Church Disaster Coordinators, volunteers and outside relief agencies to ensure clear lines of communication and effective coordination of resources.

The mission of Disaster Recovery is to resource and equip local United Methodist Churches and districts as they assist their communities and individuals to prepare, respond and recover from disaster.

Defer and Refer

If you or any of your churches receive offers of help (volunteers, donations, etc.) from outside your area – even if it's from someone you know – thank them for their offer of assistance and refer them to Disaster Recovery to respond and manage: defer and refer.

Why Defer and Refer?

1. This helps us coordinate with other responding agencies and organizations what resources are available so that we can work together to
 - a. Avoid duplication of resources
 - b. Facilitate equitable sharing of resources
 - c. Refuse goods and services that are not needed
 - d. Ensure volunteers are properly trained and affiliated with a reputable organization
 - e. Protect the safety and security of both volunteers and those affected by the disaster
 - f. Get the right resources to the right place at the right time
2. This protects our churches from having to manage uninvited and potentially unaffiliated and untrained volunteers who—though well meaning – may cause additional problems for the church and/or the community.
3. This frees up the pastor and members of the church for ministry. The focus remains on the needs of the local church congregation and the affected community – not figuring out how to manage offers of assistance from outside the area.

Role of Conference Disaster Recovery Staff

Stage 1: Planning and Preparation – Before Disaster Strikes

1. Connect with churches through site visits, trainings, phone calls and emails to share the ministry.
2. Provide training opportunities
 - a. Community Arise: Basic Disaster Ministry Training
 - b. Early Response Teams (ERT)
 - c. Local Church Disaster Planning Workshops
 - d. Spiritual Response Team (SRT – formerly Spiritual and Emotional Response Care Team or Care Team)
 - e. Ground Responders in Disaster (GRID – Designed for Wesley Foundation Students)
 - f. Case Management
3. Develop a plan for the coordination of resources in disaster including
 - a. Receipt of donations
 - b. Offers of assistances
 - c. Requests for assistance
 - d. Deployment of resources to meet needs
4. Assist the district in identifying a District Disaster Coordinator. In the absence of a DDC and/or in addition to the DDC, identify several point people in the district who could assist in the aftermath of disaster.
5. Train and develop specialized volunteer teams including ERT, SRT and GRID.
6. Collaborate with Districts to identify possible locations for supply depots, distribution sites, etc.

Stage 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Imminent

1. Confirm communication channels with UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), the Bishop, Districts, District Disaster Coordinators and/or previously identified point people in the district, depots/supply sites (if applicable) and appropriate volunteer team leaders.
2. Secure physical work area and in case of need, identify alternate workspace.

Stage 3: Emergency Response, Relief and Short-Term Recovery – After Disaster Strikes

1. Determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected areas.
2. Participate on conference calls and/or monitor situation reports (sit reps) as received from UMCOR, NVOAD (National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), Emergency Management (local and state) and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and disseminate information throughout the conference, as appropriate.
3. Serve as the communication hub for disaster response, including:
 - a. Assisting districts and local churches as requested
 - b. Communicating with appropriate agencies outside the conference: UMCOR, UMVIM, NVOAD, Emergency Management, FEMA, etc.
 - c. Managing incoming calls (requests for assistance, offers of assistance, etc.)
 - c. Coordinating shipment and receipt of supplies and donations
 - d. Coordinating volunteers and deploying specialized teams (ERT, SRT and GRID) as requested

Stage 4: Long Term Recovery

1. Collaborate and cooperate with agencies and organizations involved in long term recovery to provide assistance and training as requested, including assistance in developing a long-term recovery committee/organization as needed.
2. Encourage local church involvement in long-term recovery.
3. Coordinate volunteer work teams from inside and outside the conference, as needed.
4. Administer the Disaster Recovery grant process, if applicable.

Role of the District Disaster Coordinator

The District Disaster Coordinator is the communication liaison between:

- The District Office
- The Church Disaster Coordinators (or other point persons)
- The Disaster Recovery Ministry

Stage 1: Planning and preparation – Before Disaster Strikes

1. Contact each church in your district (or area of responsibility) to introduce yourself and Disaster Recovery Ministry. Make sure the church has your contact information in the event of a disaster and Disaster Recovery contact information in case they cannot reach you.
2. Develop a communication plan with the District Superintendent so that everyone is clear on how communication will flow in the district in a disaster.
3. Assist churches with planning, if requested. (optional)

Stage 2: Warning – District Strike is Imminent

1. Confirm communications plans with the district office and Disaster Recovery.
2. Secure your physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternate workspace.

Stage 3: Emergency Response, Relief and Short-Term Recovery – After Disaster Strikes

1. Determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected areas of your district.
2. Communicate status and immediate needs to the District Superintendent and Disaster Recovery.
3. If appropriate, coordinate and participate in assessments of the affected area with the District Superintendent and others.
4. If needed, work with the District Office, district churches and Disaster Recovery to coordinate resources and volunteers for the response.

Stage 4: Long-Term Recovery

1. As appropriate, work with Disaster Recovery staff to provide information and resources to further long term recovery in your area.
2. Once a community begins long term recovery, the focus of the District Disaster Coordinator transitions to planning and preparation. (optional)

Role of the District Superintendent

The District Superintendent is the communication point for:

- The pastors serving in the district and local church leadership, as appropriate
- The District Disaster Coordinator
- The Bishop

Stage 1: Planning and preparation – Before Disaster Strikes

1. In consultation with Disaster Recovery Ministry, identify a District Disaster Coordinator.
2. In the absence of a DDC and/or in addition to the DDC, Disaster Recovery may identify point people in the district to assist in the aftermath of disaster.
3. Work with the District Disaster Coordinator and/or point people, if appropriate, to develop a communication plan for the district.
4. Encourage churches to have a written disaster plan for their church and provide a copy to Disaster Recovery.
5. As appropriate, promote the connection between churches, the conference and Disaster Recovery Ministry and encourage churches to work within the process.

Stage 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Imminent

1. Confirm communication plans with the District Disaster Coordinator, the Bishop, clergy in their district and Disaster Recovery.
2. Coordinate with District Leadership Council to secure office and parsonage.
3. Determine which clergy are evacuating and confirm contact information.
4. Determine which churches are going to be the most vulnerable and advise District Disaster Coordinator and/or Disaster Recovery.
5. Secure physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternate workspace.

Stage 3: Emergency Response, Relief and Short-Term Recovery – After Disaster Strikes

1. Determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected areas of the district.
2. Communicate with the Bishop and the District Disaster Coordinator. (If there is no DDC, communicate with Disaster Recovery.)
3. Contact pastors in affected areas to assess physical, spiritual and emotional needs.
4. Coordinate care and resources for affected clergy and pastoral families.

5. When it is safe to do so, begin damage assessments with the District Disaster Coordinator and/or other personnel, including site visits to affected areas and churches as appropriate.
6. Report on the condition of the community and church properties to appropriate conference personnel (the Bishop, Disaster Recovery, Ministry Protection, etc.)

Stage 4: Long Term Recovery – District Superintendent

1. Continue to support and refer clergy and families to Shade and Fresh Water retreats.
2. Encourage local church participation in long term recovery in the affected areas as appropriate.
3. Communicate with Disaster Recovery any unmet needs that arise or areas that may need additional resources or other assistance.

Role of the Local Church Disaster Coordinator

The Church Disaster Coordinator ensures that the church has a plan to respond to disaster and serves as the point person for communicating with the District Disaster Coordinator and/or Disaster Recover Ministry.

Stage 1: Planning and preparation – Before Disaster Strikes

1. Working with the pastor, identify a church disaster team. If the pastor is not part of the team, ensure there is a process for keeping the pastor informed and updated regarding activities before, during and after a disaster.
2. Lead the team in developing 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. Send a copy of your plan to the District Office, the District Disaster Coordinator and Disaster Recovery Ministry. Update this plan annually or as circumstances in your church change (new building, change in personnel, etc.) and review with your leadership at least annually.
4. Make sure church leadership knows to call the District Office, the District Disaster Coordinator, and/or Disaster Recovery in the event of a disaster.
5. Contact your local emergency management to offer assistance from the church and share your plan.
 - a. Find out where your church fits in the emergency management process for your area.
 - b. In most cases, Emergency Management personnel are very willing to work with the faith-based community; however, it's important for them to know what your church brings to the table *before* disaster strikes, not in the midst of it.
6. Encourage those in your congregation with special needs to register with the county (most counties have plans to evacuate people with special needs).
7. Encourage your church to support UMCOR through One Great Hour of Sharing.
8. Take advantage of opportunities to raise awareness in your church of Disaster Recovery Ministry and the resources available to the local church.
9. Contact Disaster Recovery at any time that you have questions or need assistance.

Stage 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Imminent

1. Working with the church disaster team, confirm communication and response plans within the church, the district and the conference Disaster Recovery Ministry.
2. Check for updates from the District Disaster Coordinator and the conference Web site.
6. If appropriate, secure physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternate workspace.

Stage 3: Emergency Response, Relief and Short-Term Recovery – After Disaster Strikes

1. Determine if communication capabilities have been restored and activate the church plan.
2. Per church plan:
 - a. Check on the safety of the pastor and family.
 - b. Assess damage to church property; if church buildings are damaged, file a claim.
 - c. Assess safety of members of the congregation and property damage within the congregation.
 - d. Assess damage within the community your church serves.
 - e. Report the results of your assessment to the District Disaster Coordinator, the District Superintendent and/or Disaster Recovery, and Ministry Protection.
3. Identify someone to take the District Superintendent, the District Disaster Coordinator and conference personnel on a tour of the affected area, if appropriate.
4. Working with other responding organizations, identify and meet basic needs for food, water, temporary shelter, etc., per your church plan.
5. Keep a separate accounting of disaster funding received, documenting all expenditures and including receipts where possible.
6. Per your church plan, organize clean up teams to go into neighborhoods; prepare to receive work teams that may show up to help; work with other responding organizations to coordinate your efforts.
7. Communicate regularly with Disaster Recovery about needs and activities in the affected area to assist in coordinating appropriate response.
8. Refer media inquiries to the pastor or the conference Office of Connectional Relations.

Stage 4: Long-Term Recovery

1. Working with Disaster Recovery, determine the level of involvement appropriate for your church in long-term recovery.
2. Develop a policy for:
 - a. Referring people in need who contact the church.
 - b. Managing volunteers who contact the church.
 - c. Handling supplies offered to the church.
3. 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.).
4. Encourage your church to support the Bishop's appeals for disaster relief.