

# **The Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church**

## **Conference Disaster Plan**

**January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023**



**The Florida Conference**  
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Disaster Recovery Ministry  **UMCOR**

## **Conference Disaster Plan Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church Disaster Recovery Ministry**

The Mission of The Disaster Recovery Ministry 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.

### **Goal**

Effectively oversee resources available to our churches before, during, and after a disaster, encompassing:

- Information
- Supplies
- Volunteers
- Financial assistance

### **Who is responsible?**

The Conference Disaster Response Coordinator working collaboratively with:

- District Offices
- District Disaster Response Coordinators
- Church Disaster Response Coordinators
- Disaster Response Front Team
- Early Response Team Coordinator(s)
- Other Volunteers (trained and untrained)
- United Methodist Committee on Relief
- Local And State Emergency Management
- Other Relief Agencies and Organizations

### **Note:**

Disaster Response Front Teams are specialized volunteers trained to deploy into a disaster area to support the local United Methodist response, including assessing damage and identifying needs.

Early Response Teams are specialized volunteers trained to assist survivors impacted by the disaster to be safe, sanitary, and secure until additional resources are available.

Disaster Response Front Teams and Early Response Teams are coordinated by Conference Disaster Recovery Ministry and deploy into a disaster area only when invited by the district, the local church, or emergency management.

## **Do no harm**

In the event that a district office, church, pastor, or congregant is presented with offers of aid from individuals such as volunteers, donors, and the like, who are located beyond the immediate vicinity, express appreciation for their willingness to assist, and then direct them to connect with The Disaster Recovery Ministry hotline at (855) 228-3862.

This proactive approach serves to prevent any inadvertent harm by fostering seamless coordination with other responsive entities, agencies, and organizations. This collaboration is driven by several key objectives:

- Preventing duplication of resources
- Enabling equitable distribution of resources
- Rerouting goods and services that aren't immediately essential
- Verifying that volunteers possess appropriate training and are aligned with reputable organizations
- Safeguarding the wellbeing and security of both volunteers and those impacted by the disaster
- Placing the right resources to the precise location, at the exact time when they are needed

This approach shields our churches from the burden of overseeing unsolicited and potentially unaffiliated, untrained volunteers who, while driven by good intentions, could inadvertently introduce further complications for both the church and the community. By adhering to this strategy, the central emphasis remains steadfastly fixed on the needs of the local church congregation and the impacted community. This, in turn, enables the pastor and congregation to be fully accessible for the vital role of ministering to those in dire need.

## **Plan format**

This plan is structured around the distinct progression of disaster through four comprehensive phases:

Phase 1 – Proactive Planning and Preparation (pre-disaster)

Phase 2 – Warning (disaster is imminent)

Phase 3 – Immediate Aftermath (emergency response, relief, short-term recovery)

Phase 4 – Long-Term Recovery (restoring the community)

The role of the Bishop, Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, District Superintendents, District Disaster Response Coordinators, and local church disaster response coordinators are outlined in their own section, by phases, for quick reference.

## **Plan assumptions**

To ensure user-friendliness, the plan was crafted on the basis of the following assumptions:

1. Communication is of vital importance for an effective response:
  - a. It is essential to proactively establish means for promptly communicating your status and contact details before and after an event to those who require this information.
  - b. If you are in an evacuation area, or evacuation is part of your personal plan, include details like departure time, evacuation destination, and contact method.
  - c. For media inquiries, kindly refer them to the Director of Communications.
2. Prioritize Personal Safety and Well-being:
  - a. Your own safety, the safety of your residence, and the well-being of your family are paramount. Only after ensuring these aspects are secure, should you contemplate executing your duties as outlined in this plan.
3. Embrace the Four C's:
  - a. We embrace the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters principle of the four C's: cooperation, communication, coordination, and collaboration. These pillars are integral to our approach.
4. Communication in absence of a District Disaster Response Coordinator:
  - a. If your district lacks a District Disaster Response Coordinator, please establish direct communication with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator.

By adhering to these guiding principles, the plan remains concise, user-centric, and effective.

# Conference Disaster Response Coordinator

## Primary role:

- Empowering and equipping United Methodist Churches and districts to effectively prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters
- Functioning as the central communication hub for the conference throughout all disaster phases
- Providing unwavering support to the local United Methodist Church and the district within disaster-affected areas
- Coordinating the United Methodist response with other responding organizations and agencies
- Acting as the conference's liaison to Florida Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, The United Methodist Committee on Relief, local and state emergency management, FEMA, and other state and national disaster-focused organizations

## Phase 1: Planning and Preparation – Before Disaster

- Collaborate with the District Superintendent and district personnel to identify at least three District Disaster Response Coordinator's for each district
- Ensure continual training for the District Disaster Response Coordinators, fostering their skill enhancement
- Collaborate with the District Disaster Response Coordinator to aid in formulating a comprehensive disaster strategy for their district, in tandem with the District Superintendent and/or designated district staff
- In conjunction with the District Disaster Response Coordinator:
  - Engage with churches through site visits, training sessions, phone conversations, and emails, sharing the mission and relaying available resources and response plans
  - Highlight and communicate educational opportunities for churches and volunteers
  - Empower churches to collaborate with their District Disaster Response Coordinator in crafting a documented disaster plan and sharing it with their district office and The Disaster Recovery Ministry by uploading it to the Church Dashboard
- Maintain and update the conference's disaster plan, enhancing coordination and communication in disaster
- Coordinate conference plans with District Disaster Response Coordinators
- Train and cultivate Disaster Response Front Team and Early Response Team volunteers
- Establish connections with local and state emergency management personnel and play an active role within Florida Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster as well as relevant local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster as necessary

## Phase 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Imminent

- Establish and ensure open communication channels with the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the Bishop, District Offices, District Disaster Response Coordinators, Disaster Response Front Team volunteers, and Early Response Team Coordinator(s)

- Designate a dedicated operational area and identify alternative workspace options in case of unforeseen circumstances.
- Put in place necessary preparations for activating the call center at the conference premises, should the situation demand such action.

### **Phase 3: Emergency Response, Relief and Short-Term Recovery – After Disaster Strikes**

- In partnership with the District Disaster Response Coordinator and/or district office, assess the restoration of communication within the affected region.
- Collaborate with the District Disaster Response Coordinator in the affected area to ascertain the necessity for deploying a Disaster Response Front Team
- Disseminate timely updates to the Bishop, pertinent conference personnel, volunteers, and The United Methodist Committee on Relief, sharing information as it becomes available.
- Should a Disaster Response Front Team be dispatched to the affected area, include their findings into all communication channels.
- Orchestrate cohesive response and assistance by liaising with the District Disaster Response Coordinator, Disaster Response Front Team, local churches, and the affected community.
- If required, initiate the activation of the call center using conference staff until volunteer resources are available.
- Engage in Florida Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster conference calls and/or monitor incoming situation reports from local and state emergency management, Volunteer Florida, FEMA, and National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.
- Collaborate with the Bishop, Ministry Protection, and conference communications to efficiently communicate information across the conference, including call center activation.
- Serve as the communication hub for disaster response activities, overseeing:
  - Management of the conference call center,
  - Assimilation of intelligence garnered by the District Disaster Response Coordinator and/or Disaster Response Front Team.
- Engage with external agencies beyond the conference to:
  - Coordinate the shipping and receipt of supplies and donations
  - Facilitate the organization of volunteers, in coordination with the district, local church, and/or community
  - Deploy Early Response Teams and other volunteers if invited by the district, local church, and/or community

### **Phase 4: Long-Term Recovery**

- Conference Disaster Response Coordinator works with conference and/or district leadership to determine what role the conference will play in long-term recovery from the event.
- If the conference is considering setting up a recovery project, refer to the Disaster Recovery Ministry Long-term Recovery Guide for next steps.
- Working with the District Disaster Response Coordinator, assist the community in making the transition from relief and short-term recovery to the longer process of community recovery by offering information about what to expect, best practices, available resources, training, and other education and consultation as requested.

- Collaborate and cooperate with responding agencies and organizations in the community to develop a long-term recovery committee or group.
- Encourage, assist and support local United Methodist Churches participation in the Long-Term Recovery.
- Provide guidance, training, and other assistance as requested by the local United Methodist Church(es) and/or the Long-Term Recover, including offering United Methodist Committee on Relief training and workshops, if appropriate.
- Consult with United Methodist Committee on Relief to offer case management training to the Long-Term Recovery.
- Communicate volunteer opportunities to individuals and teams from inside and outside the conference and coordinate their participation, as appropriate.
- Administer the Disaster Recovery grant process, if applicable.
- Work with the Bishop, District Office(s), District Disaster Response Coordinators, Disaster Response Front Team volunteers and appropriate conference staff to evaluate the conference response to the disaster and adjust the plan to reflect lessons learned.

# District Disaster Response Coordinator

## **PRIMARY ROLE:**

- Communication liaison between the District Office, local churches, and the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator.
- Encourage and assist churches to have a written church plan that is shared with the district and Disaster Recovery.
- Facilitate support and resources during the response phase per the district plan.
- Coordinate the use of a Disaster Response Front Team, if needed to support the district and local church response.

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

- Contact each church in your district to introduce yourself and Disaster Recovery Ministry.
- Make sure each church has your contact information in the event of a disaster as well as Disaster Recovery contact information in case they cannot reach you.
- Encourage the churches in your district to have a written disaster plan and to share the plan with the District Office and Disaster Recovery.
- If needed, assist the local church in developing their disaster plan.
- As appropriate, promote the connection between churches, the conference, and Disaster Recovery Ministry.
- Work with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, the District Superintendent and district staff to develop a district disaster plan.
- Communicate this plan with local churches so they know what to expect from the district and Disaster Recovery Ministry when disaster strikes.
- Review the district disaster plan annually with the District Office or as circumstances in the district office change (new staff, new office location, etc.).
- Work with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator to assist in promoting available trainings and encouraging churches to participate.
- Work with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator to assist in raising awareness about The United Methodist Committee on Relief and Disaster Recovery Ministry.
- Attend local Community Organizations Active in Disaster/Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster meetings as the United Methodist representative. Identify an alternate representative if you are unable to attend.

## **Phase 2: Warning – District Strike is Imminent**

- Confirm communication plans with the district office and Disaster Recovery.
- If applicable, secure your physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternate workspace.

## **Phase 3: Emergency Response, Relief and Short-Term Recovery – After Disaster Strikes**

### **If the disaster is in your district:**

- Work with the district and Disaster Recovery to determine if communication capabilities have been restored.



- Communicate status and immediate needs to the District Superintendent and Conference Disaster Response Coordinator.
- In consultation with the District Superintendent and the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, determine if a Disaster Response Front Team is needed.
- Coordinate with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator and the Disaster Response Front Team, if deployed, to coordinate their activities and assist in supporting the local United Methodist response, assess damage and determine what resources are needed.

**If the Disaster is NOT in your district:**

- Monitor the conference web site and social media to see if help is needed and encourage churches to do the same.
- Serve as the communication point for churches in your district wanting to respond and stay in communication with them to help guide their response.
- Discourage churches from self-deploying.
- Discourage churches from collecting items unless there is a specific ask from Disaster Recovery.
- Encourage churches to support the conference response and/or United Methodist Committee on Relief with prayers and financial donations.
- Encourage churches to provide other support only when they are invited to do so.

**Phase 4: Long-Term Recovery**

- As appropriate, work with Disaster Recovery staff to provide information and resources to further long-term recovery in your area.
- Once a community begins long-term recovery, the District Disaster Response Coordinator may continue to support and assist long term recovery efforts or return to planning and preparation; this will depend on capacity and district needs.
- Work with your District Office and Disaster Recovery to evaluate the district response to the disaster and adjust the plan to reflect lessons learned.

## **District Superintendent**

### **Primary Role:**

- Communication point and pastoral support for pastors serving in the district and local church staff/leadership, as appropriate.
- Communication link between the local church, the District Disaster Response Coordinator, the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator and the Bishop.
- Coordinate with the District Disaster Response Coordinator to activate and oversee the district disaster plan as needed.

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

- Work with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator to identify a District Disaster Response Coordinator for the district.
- Work with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, the District Disaster Response Coordinator, district staff and/or district leadership, as needed, to develop a disaster plan for the district.
- Review this plan annually or as circumstances in the district office change (new staff, new or no District Disaster Response Coordinator, change in office location, etc.)
- Support and work with the District Disaster Response Coordinator to:
  - a. encourage churches to have a written disaster plan for their church and to share the plan with the District Office and Disaster Recovery;
  - b. promote the connection between churches, the conference, and Disaster Recovery Ministry;
  - c. Encourage churches to connect with Disaster Recovery for training.
  - d. Assist in raising awareness about United Methodist Committee on Relief, United Methodist Committee on Relief Sunday and Disaster Recovery ministry.
  - e. Encourage churches to know and work within the emergency management process when disaster strikes.
  - f. Discourage responding in silos and self-deploying.

### **Phase 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Imminent**

- Secure the office and parsonage, and identify alternate workspace, if needed, per the plan.
- Determine which clergy are evacuating and confirm contact information.
- Determine which churches are going to be the most vulnerable and advise the Bishop, District Disaster Response Coordinator, if applicable, Ministry Protection and Disaster Recovery.
- Participate on conference-led calls related to preparations for the event, as appropriate.

### **Phase 3: Emergency Response, Relief and Short-Term Recovery – After Disaster Strikes**

#### **If the disaster is in your district:**

- Work with your District Disaster Response Coordinator and/or Disaster Recovery to determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected area.
- Communicate with the Bishop, the District Disaster Response Coordinator and/or the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator to update status of churches, pastors, communities and other information, if known.

- Coordinate with District Disaster Response Coordinator to determine if a Disaster Response Front Team is needed.
- If a Disaster Response Front Team deploys, support the District Disaster Response Coordinator with communication and coordination of their activities, as needed.
- In accordance with the district disaster plan, contact pastors in affected areas to assess physical, spiritual, and emotional needs.
- Coordinate care and resources for affected clergy and pastoral families in collaboration with the District Disaster Response Coordinator and Disaster Recovery as appropriate.
- Report on the condition of church properties to appropriate conference personnel (Bishop, Ministry Protection, etc.).
- If the call center has been activated, encourage churches with damage or other needs to contact the call center.
- If the call center has not been activated, advise churches to:
  - contact Ministry Protection to file a claim for damage to church property,
  - contact Disaster Recovery with other needs or offers of assistance/resources.

**If the Disaster is NOT in your district:**

- Work with the District Disaster Response Coordinator to
  - a. encourage churches to monitor the conference web site and social media to see if help is needed;
  - b. discourage churches from self-deploying;
  - c. discourage churches from collecting items unless there is a specific ask from Disaster Recovery.
  - d. encourage churches to support the conference response and/or UMCOR with prayers and financial donations.
  - e. encourage churches to provide other support only when they are invited to do so.

**Phase 4: Long-Term Recovery**

- Continue to provide emotional and spiritual support to clergy and families as needed, referring them to Shade and Fresh Water retreats or other appropriate resources.
- Encourage and assist pastors to monitor their emotional and spiritual needs.
- Offer the option of pulpit supply as soon as feasible to pastors in the hardest hit area.
- Encourage local church participation in long-term recovery in the affected area, as appropriate.
- Communicate with Disaster Recovery any unmet needs that arise or areas that may need additional resources or other assistance.
- Work with your district staff, District Disaster Response Coordinator and Disaster Recovery to evaluate the district response to the disaster and adjust the plan to reflect lessons learned.

## **Local Church Disaster Response Coordinator**

### **PRIMARY ROLE:**

- Serve as the communication liaison between the church and the district.
- Ensure the church has a disaster plan to:
  - protect church property;
  - respond and provide assistance to their congregation and the community after disaster strikes.
- Share the church disaster plan with the District and Disaster Recovery.
- Coordinate with the District Disaster Response Coordinator and Disaster Response Front Team, if deployed, to support and resource your church response efforts.

### **Phase 1: Planning and preparation – Before Disaster**

- 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.
- Lead the church disaster team in developing a church disaster plan, and communicate the plan with your church leadership, congregation, District Office, and Disaster Recovery.
- Include in your plan a policy for:
  - referring people in need who contact the church for help,
  - managing volunteers (from the church or community) who contact the church to offer help,
  - managing supplies and resources – including financial donations-- offered to the church.
- Review the church plan annually or as circumstances within the church change (building addition, new pastor, or other changes in leadership, etc.).
- To begin the planning process, consider hosting and/or attending a basic disaster ministry training provided by Disaster Recovery Ministry.
- Educate your church about the resources and opportunities available through the conference Disaster Recovery Ministry and United Methodist Committee on Relief.
- Encourage participation in United Methodist Committee on Relief Sunday.
- Contact your District Disaster Response Coordinator and/or Disaster Recovery if you need assistance with any part of your planning process.

### **Phase 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Imminent**

- Activate the church disaster plan with support from the church disaster team and the pastor.
- Check for updates from the District Disaster Response Coordinator, District Office, Disaster Recovery, and/or the conference web site.
- If appropriate, secure physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternate workspace.

### **Phase 3: Emergency Response, Relief and Short-Term Recovery – After Disaster Strikes**

#### **If the Disaster is in your community:**

- Determine if communication capabilities have been restored.

- Implement response activities per the church disaster plan.
- Work with the District Disaster Response Coordinator and the Disaster Response Front Team, if deployed, to coordinate activities that support and assist your response.
- Coordinate response activities with other responding churches, organizations, and agencies.
- Identify someone to take the District Superintendent, the Bishop, and other personnel on a tour of the affected area, if and when appropriate.
- Keep a separate accounting of any disaster funding received, documenting all expenditures, and including receipts where possible.
- Track volunteer hours and activities and report those as directed by the District Disaster Response Coordinator, Disaster Response Front Team or Disaster Recovery.
- Refer media inquiries to the pastor or the conference communicator.
- Contact Disaster Recovery as needed for information and assistance.

**If the Disaster is NOT in your community:**

- Monitor the conference web site and social media to see if help is needed and encourage church members to do the same.
- Discourage your church from self-deploying.
- Discourage your church from collecting items for the impacted area unless there is a specific ask from Disaster Recovery.
- Encourage your church to support the conference response and/or United Methodist Committee on Relief with your prayers and financial donations.
- Provide other support only when invited to do so.

**Phase 4: Long-Term Recovery**

- If your church is in the disaster-affected area, work with Disaster Recovery Ministry to determine the level of involvement appropriate for your church in long-term recovery.
- Disaster Recovery encourages churches to take an active role in the formation and ongoing work of the long-term recovery organization in your community and will work with you to provide guidance and assistance in that process.
- If it is not already part of your plan, develop a policy for:
  - referring people in need who contact the church,
  - managing volunteers who contact the church,
  - managing supplies and resources – including financial donations-- offered to the church.
- If your church is not in the disaster area, determine level of involvement for your church in the long-term recovery in affected areas (providing work teams, supplies, funds, etc.).
- Encourage your church to support United Methodist Committee on Relief and/or the Bishop's appeals for disaster relief.
- Working with your pastor, church disaster team, District Disaster Response Coordinator and/or Disaster Recovery, review the church's response to the disaster and adjust the church plan to reflect lessons learned.

# Bishop

## **PRIMARY ROLE:**

- Communication point for District Superintendents.
- Ambassador to district office(s) and conference churches affected by the disaster.
- Conference spokesperson for the United Methodist response to the disaster.

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

- Work with District Superintendents to develop a communication plan.
- Along with the District Superintendents and Disaster Recovery, encourage churches to have a written disaster plan and to share the plan with their District Office and Disaster Recovery.
- Encourage churches to connect with their District Disaster Response Coordinator and Disaster Recovery for training opportunities and other planning and preparation resources.
- As appropriate, promote the connection between the churches, districts, conference, Disaster Recovery Ministry and United Methodist Committee on Relief.
- Whenever possible, assist in raising awareness about United Methodist Committee on Relief and United Methodist Committee on Relief Sunday.

## **Phase 2: Warning – Disaster Strike is Imminent**

- Confirm communication plans with District Superintendents.
- Coordinate with Conference Trustees to secure parsonage.
- Determine who is evacuating and confirm contact information.
- Secure physical work area and, in case of need, work with conference staff leadership, Ministry Protection and Disaster Recovery to identify alternate workspace.

## **Phase 3: Emergency Response, Relief and Short-Term Recovery – After Disaster Strikes**

- In cooperation with Disaster Recovery and the District Office(s), determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected areas of the district(s).
- In accordance with the communication plan, contact District Superintendent(s) in affected area for status updates: personal, churches, communities
- Work with District Superintendent(s) and, if needed, Disaster Recovery, to coordinate care and resources for affected clergy and their families.
- When it is safe to do so, visit affected area of the conference with the District Superintendent(s), the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator and/or other conference personnel to offer support and encouragement.
- In collaboration with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, determine what support, if any, is needed from United Methodist Committee on Relief:
  - An immediate solidarity grant from United Methodist Committee on Relief (up to \$10,000),
  - United Methodist Committee on Relief personnel to provide immediate support and guidance.

- If the event is large or widespread, work with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator and the Director of Missional Engagement to determine if there is a need for a special appeal for financial donations.



#### **Phase 4: Long-Term Recovery**

- Continue to provide spiritual and emotional support for the District Superintendent(s) referring them to Shade and Fresh Water retreats or other appropriate resources as needed.
- Work with the District Superintendent(s), as needed, to provide pulpit supply as soon as feasible to pastors in the hardest hit areas
- Encourage local church participation in long-term recovery in the affected areas as appropriate.
- Communicate with Disaster Recovery any unmet needs that arise or areas that may need additional resources or other assistance.
- Work with the District Offices, Disaster Recovery Ministry, and appropriate conference staff to evaluate the conference response to the disaster and adjust the plan to reflect lessons learned.

## **Addendum**

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, churches and volunteers are expected to know and follow safety guidelines as outlined by the CDC and the conference. In addition, Disaster Recovery Ministry has adopted safety protocols for volunteers and staff working in disaster that includes wearing masks, sanitizing work areas, and practicing social distancing.

DRFTs, ERTs and other volunteers deployed by Disaster Recovery into a disaster-impacted area will abide by the protocols developed by Disaster Recovery and United Methodist Committee on Relief. These protocols have been shared with the Disaster Response Front Team and Early Response Team volunteers and will be shared with other volunteers as needed.

Please contact Disaster Recovery for more information or a copy of the safety protocols.