

LOCAL CHURCH DISASTER PLANNING GUIDE



***Fire Flood Earthquake Volcano Tsunami Drought Pandemic
Winter Storm Utility Disruption Hazardous Materials Dam Failure***



Disaster Response Ministry

California-Nevada Conference

2009

Prepared by the
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California-Nevada Conference
United Methodist Church

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Caring:

... for people

... for church facilities

... for community

... for others in the conference and beyond

This guide is designed to assist in preparing a disaster plan for your local church. When a congregation knows in advance how they will protect church property and care for their people in the event of a disaster, they are better prepared to minister to their community and beyond.

Depending on the size and needs of both your church and your community, you may want to expand the scope of your plan to include details not covered by this guide. To assist you in that process, a more detailed explanation of disaster planning and preparation is available on the California-Nevada Conference Web site, www.cnumc.org. Under *Disaster Recovery Ministry*, look for the Local Church Disaster Workbook and the Conference Disaster Plan or ask for a presentation to be made to the people of your church on the subject of creating a local church disaster plan.

We encourage you to check the conference Web site for updates to these documents and for suggestions for responding to current and future disasters. The conference Web site also has a listing of UMVIM teams scheduled to travel to disaster sites or other locations where help is needed.

Please share your completed disaster plan with your district disaster coordinator so that all the churches in your district and the conference may be connected if a disaster occurs.

In the event of a disaster, the Disaster Recovery Center located in the Conference Center in Sacramento will assist you and your community in coordinating recovery efforts. The Disaster Recovery Center may be reached at 916.374.1582 or disasterrecovery@cnumc.org.

Remember, this is a merely a guide for your church to help plan and prepare an appropriate response to disaster in your church, in your community and beyond. Be selective, be creative, be inclusive of other local organizations and above all, be open to the Holy Spirit so that your plan is uniquely yours.

We hope you find this guide helpful. Your questions and suggestions are always welcome.

Purpose

Establishing a Disaster Planning and Preparation Team

Every church is strongly encouraged to develop a disaster response plan in order to be better prepared, lessen the impact and improve the church's response to a disaster. The place to start is to identify a disaster planning and preparation team.

The team will design a plan specific to the needs and desires of the local church, including suggestions for:

- who should be involved in the preparation of the church facilities for disaster;
- how the church will care for the congregation during disaster;
- how existing resources in the church can be best used during disaster;
- how the church will serve the community before, during and after a disaster.

Church Support

The disaster response ministry needs to support the mission and vision of the church.

Disaster response is a ministry opportunity for the church. As with all ministries, it is very important to have the agreement and support of the local church leadership in developing this ministry. By expanding your church ministry to include disaster response, you will be providing for people during their time of greatest needs: spiritual, emotional and physical.



General Information and Suggestions

- There are many places in both preparation and in response that congregation members may find a task to perform. Positions on the disaster planning and response teams would most appropriately be filled by recruitment of specific individuals. However, during the preparation phase, advertise in your church communications asking your laity if anyone has interest, expertise or fills a current position of church service and would like to help. Some of the functions that could be filled by volunteers include:
 - Staffing church phones to answer inquiries.
 - Working on the church web site to disseminate information regarding emergency situations, evacuations, et cetera.
 - Assisting in the protection of church archival records and data.
 - Assisting in the protection of church facilities and equipment.
 - Providing food and beverages to the workers at the disaster response center.
 - Cooking food for disaster survivors.
 - Distributing non-perishable food and baby items.
 - Providing for emergency expenses when banks are closed and ATMs don't function.
 - Helping to send Emergency Response, Spiritual/Emotional Care or reconstruction teams to disaster areas.

There are many ways in which the people of a church can respond and be in ministry following a disaster. The church planning team needs to recognize what activities are already taking place in your church, assess their utility and include them in the formal church disaster plan.

- Disaster preparation activities include determining:
 - How will we help prepare the church body and facilities for disasters?
 - How will we help the families in our church to be better prepared for a disaster?
 - How can we best reach out to our community during its time of need?
- Many agencies such as The American Red Cross, Salvation Army and your county Emergency Management Department offer printed material and training for informing and preparing the community. Merely making this information available to the church and others in the community can be of assistance.
- It is especially critical to keep a concise record of activities during and after a disaster so that future disaster relief, response and recovery efforts benefit from this experience.
- It is equally important to track all volunteer hours served during disaster response and report these to the county as well as the Disaster Recovery Center at the conference. Currently, each volunteer hour is worth approximately \$18.00 in reciprocal recovery money from the federal government.

- **IMPORTANT:** Specific assistance information about individuals, such as addresses, names, financial information, services rendered, or money given, should never be publicly disclosed. This includes public exhibition of photographs of the people you help, such as on a church web site.
- Following a disaster, it is important to decide the length of time disaster response team members will serve. This can be a high stress job following disasters and although their experience is valued, members may need to rotate out more often due to the nature of the work. All members should have trained back-up in case they are unable to respond after a disaster or if they need to be given relief for their own spiritual/emotional needs.
- It is important to be realistic in planning for and protecting the community, church body and facilities. It is impossible for one church to “do it all” during a disaster.
- It is useful to recognize that many churches have historically participated in disaster relief activities in informal ways, such as:
 - cleaning out homes after floods
 - cooking food for disaster survivors
 - distributing donated non-perishable foods and baby items
 - distributing water and ice
 - providing for emergency expenses, etc.

Recognize what activities are already taking place at your church, assess their utility and ability to continue functioning under adverse conditions, and include them in the formal plan if appropriate.



Organization

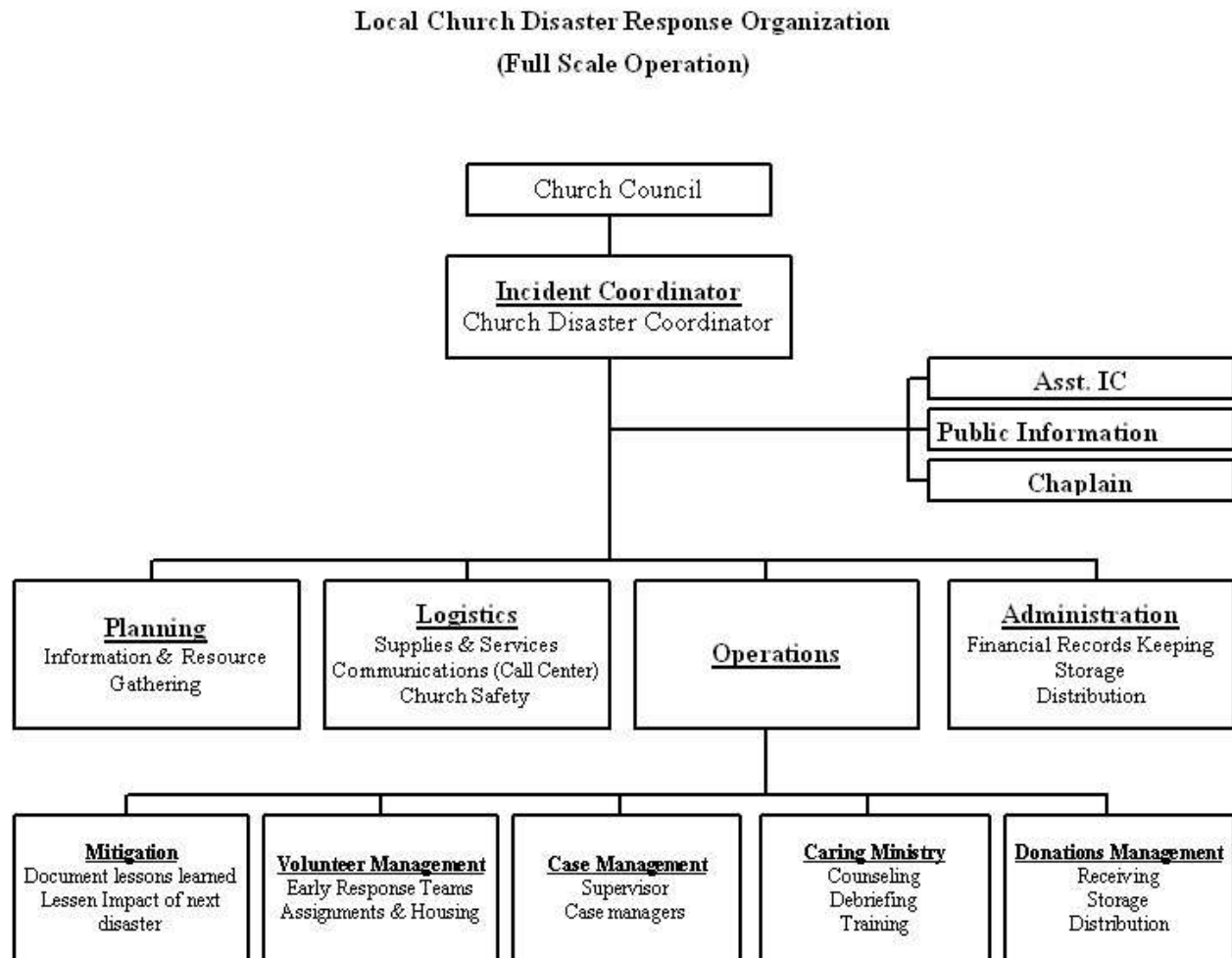
The Church Disaster Planning Team

- Initially, the church may want to establish a Disaster Planning Team (Planners) who are separate from the Disaster Response Team (Doers).
- The pastor may identify a team leader who then recruits a team, or a team may be appointed by church leadership and then select their leader.
- Keeping the planning team to 6 to 10 members may facilitate functionality
- Suggested planning team positions:
 - Team Leader
 - Volunteer Coordinator
 - Trustee representative
 - Finance Representative
 - Administrative Staff member
 - Maintenance Staff member
 - Pastor(s)
 - Representatives from other vital areas of local church
 - Donations manager
 - Secretary/records keeper



The Church Disaster Response Team

The Disaster Response Team will be organized in accordance with the *Incident Coordination System (ICS)*. ICS is a standard organizational format widely used by emergency services agencies in the U.S. To everyone else, ICS means Incident *Command* System, but the national church thought that sounded too dictatorial and changed the title when used in United Methodist Churches to Incident *Coordination* System.



The ICS structure is based solely on function. The actual number of people making up the organization depends upon the tasks needing to be done at any given time, and how many people it will take to do them. For example during the warning phase of a slowly developing disaster such as a slow-rise flood, preparing the church facility, alerting the disaster response team and standing by the phone might be done by one or two people, each performing several functions. In contrast, a week after a catastrophic earthquake producing wide-spread death, injury and destruction, manning this organization may take 12 to 15 people if you are a large church in a major metropolitan area, with each person pursuing a far more specialized task.

While the basic structure always remains the same, the number of people performing these functions can vary widely, depending upon how many functions each person fulfills.

The disaster response ministry should be an on-going role throughout the year, and the church Disaster Response Team should function during normal times in order to plan, train, rehearse, recruit volunteers, obtain needed supplies and equipment, and prepare the facility.

Some of the organizational titles may change between normal times and disasters. The leader of the Disaster Response Ministry is usually called the church Disaster Coordinator, and that person could change titles to become the Incident Coordinator when a disaster strikes and the disaster response ministry changes into its emergency ICS structure.

Disaster Coordinator /Incident Coordinator

- The church Disaster Coordinator should NOT be the pastor. The pastor will have enough to do during a disaster without running the team!
- The Disaster Coordinator should have access to keys for the facility and an intimate knowledge of the facility layout as well as of the church's resources, capabilities and potential weaknesses.
- The Disaster Coordinator should be
 - FLEXIBLE,
 - detail oriented and self motivated,
 - able to work well with many persons in difficult situations,
 - able to work full time - or nearly full time - following a disaster.
- The Disaster Coordinator is crucial for:
 - ensuring that the church maintains an up to date plan for disaster,
 - participating in local disaster organizations (VOAD, COAD, LTRO),
 - helping the church decide their role in the local community during disaster,
 - coordinating community activities planned to be done by the church following a disaster with other community disaster agencies also providing services, and
 - coordinating disaster training for the church
- The Disaster Coordinator will meet with the District Disaster Coordinator and other local church Disaster Team Leaders to establish roles and responsibilities during a disaster.
- The Disaster Coordinator is the point person during a disaster and will function as the Incident Coordinator of the Disaster Response Team.

The Assistant Incident Coordinator

The Assistant Incident Coordinator is responsible for knowing all that the Incident Coordinator does in order to act as:

- a substitute if the Disaster Coordinator is a victim of the disaster and cannot function in that role,
- the IC if there is more than one shift at the onset of a disaster,
- relief for the IC when needed.

The Public Information Officer (PIO)

The Public Information Officer is the media relations person representing the church. All media information releases need to come from the PIO and all interviews with church staff or Disaster Response Team members need to be coordinated through the PIO. It is very important for the church to have a single source of information to the media to prevent disinformation and improper statements.

The PIO also ensures that the disaster response efforts are documented through photographs and written about for church communications such as church newsletters, web sites, etc. This documentation could be invaluable in future recruiting and training, not to mention its impact in fund raising.

The Chaplain

The Chaplain's main function is to monitor the church staff and Disaster Response Team during a disaster and be vigilant for signs of emotional/spiritual distress, burn-out, physical weakening and all other problems associated with people exposed to making highly emotional, sensitive decisions. The chaplain position is an excellent role for a retired pastor or a Stephens Minister. This is a position for a trained person, not merely someone who was in the hall when you needed to fill the spot.

Planning

The primary function of the Planning Section is information and resource gathering. This person may also be involved in meeting with other community emergency service and VOAD organizations to gather as much information as possible before a disaster hits. The part of the function relating to "resource gathering" does not imply that this position is responsible for physically obtaining equipment and supplies during a disaster, that task being the function of the Logistics Section. For example in a disaster, the logistics person may determine that an emergency generator is needed at the area housing Emergency Response Teams who have come in to help. Logistics would ask Planning where the equipment could be obtained and who could transport it and set it up. Planning would have information pertaining to resources and would refer Logistics to appropriate contacts.

Logistics

The Logistics Section has a three-fold purpose:

- to obtain and provide all supplies and services needed by the Disaster Response Team for the conduct of its functions,
- provide adequate communications to and from the Disaster Response Center where the team operates, as well as providing a call center where congregation members can call in with information, requests and questions, and
- provide for church safety, acting as the safety monitor in the response center to insure that the team members have a safe environment in which to work.

Operations

The Operations Section is the largest work area of the disaster response organization, being made up of several sub-sections which together comprise the field operations of disaster response. The Operations section chief is primarily the manager of the sub-sections and the decision maker when strategic decisions must be made pertaining to field operations. When the level of the disaster does not require each sub-section to be individually manned, the Operations chief may also perform the duties of the sub-section, or may delegate that responsibility to another sub-section chief. The sub-sections of Operations are:

- **Mitigation**

The Mitigation section is responsible for documenting the activities of the disaster response organization, recording lessons learned and determining how to lessen the impact in future days or for the next disaster.

- **Volunteer Management**

The Volunteer Management section is a key function in disaster planning and response. The role of the section is to coordinate all the various aspects of managing volunteers, both from within the church congregation and for those responding from outside churches. Those tasks include:

- recruiting
- training
- supervising
- organizing
- logging volunteer hours
- recognizing volunteers
- coordinating outside church teams and making work and housing assignments

- **Case Management**

The case management section consists of a supervisor and the number of case managers that the level of the disaster requires. After the “emergency and relief phase” of the disaster passes and the ICS structure folds, the Case Management section will remain into the long-term recovery phase, probably together with some of the Volunteer Management section working under a conference Field Coordinator.

- **Caring Ministry**

The primary functions of the Caring Ministry section is to coordinate Emotional/Spiritual Care teams sent into the field, coordinate professional counseling provided by the church and train retired pastors, Stephens ministers, and laity to perform emotional/spiritual care tasks appropriate to the disaster.

- **Donations Management**

The Donations Management section will coordinate the receiving, storage and distribution of donations provided for disaster relief. They may also assist in setting up and managing an UMCOR warehouse should one be established in the area.

Administration

The Administration section are responsible for financial records keeping, maintaining activity logs of actions taken by the disaster response team, storage of all paperwork created by the various sections of the team and distribution of administrative information to appropriate agencies. In large disasters it is often advisable to have a “scribe” attached to the IC to record all actions taken, as the IC will be too busy to stop and write a log entry after every decision is made or action is carried out.



Planning Process

- **Establish the disaster planning team:**

At the beginning of the Organization section the planning team positions were mentioned.

- **Organize your resources:**

- In addition to the planning team members, identify others who have a stake in the outcome of your plan. This could be based on their motivation, expertise, experience, or church position. Even though the plan is not yet formulated, think ahead to what actions you think the church will take during a disaster and ask yourself if there is someone responsible for those actions on a normal day. If you come up with some names, add them to your list of resources.
- Identify community agencies and organizations already active in the community response to disasters.
- Their expertise and experience should be helpful and you may want to partner with them in the mutual cause of caring for your community. How can they help you in developing the plan and help in the church's response, and how can the church help them in their response?
- Gather written materials wherever you can find them. Don't overlook your city Fire Department, county Office of Emergency Services, local chapter of the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Google "church disaster plans." If you have an interfaith or ministerial association, ask if any other churches have disaster plans or participate in disaster response.
- Look at the conference Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan (under *Disaster Ministry* at www.cnumc.org). There is a section on the roles and responsibilities of the local church.
- Ask your district superintendent or the conference disaster coordinator for a Disaster Planning Workshop where members of your team and those of surrounding churches can work through your planning process with the help of a comprehensive workbook and experienced leaders.

- **Chart your path:**

- Just as you need to have an agenda to help keep a meeting in focus, so too do you need to have a "road map" of the process your planning will go through. Being aware of the process and having a proposed time line will speed the planning along. Just don't sacrifice quality for quickness.
- Some of the milestones along the way may include:
 - Obtaining support and approval to create the disaster ministry,
 - Forming the disaster planning team,
 - Prayerfully thinking through the process with the team,
 - Collecting resources,

- Starting the written plan,
 - Working through the major sections, each of which may present discoveries, problems, opportunities, frustrations and re-thinking original intentions,
 - Concluding the written plan,
 - Gaining approval, increasing support and obtaining commitment from the church, and
 - Exercising, testing, reviewing results, and modifying the plan.
- **Hazard Analysis:**
 - Most disasters create the same types of need for assistance that the churches will be trying to provide. When a family is displaced from their home it doesn't make much of a difference if it was caused by fire, flood, earthquake or whatever. They will need shelter, food, sanitation, and the necessities of living. For this reason church disaster response plans are written in a general way, as opposed to being hazard specific. However, for adequate planning, you should be aware of what specific hazards you are preparing for.
 - Create a hazard analysis matrix for your church. For each hazard, list
 - history
 - frequency
 - probability
 - impact on church and congregation
 - Based on the risk shown by the hazard analysis, determine what conditions the key hazards will cause that your disaster plan will address.
- **Mitigation:**
 - Mitigation, or lessening the impact on your facilities, is an integral and important facet of disaster planning. As you do your research and resource gathering, the team will go through an intellectual process of defining and quantifying various forms of disaster. In so doing, you will learn of ways that your facility may be vulnerable or fall short of what you would like. If you discover things that should be done to make your facility more safe, secure or effective during a disaster, plan to do them now. Why plan for repairs and replacement following a disaster if you can correct the situation now?
 - Based on hazard identification and analysis, determine what in your church facility should be improved to better withstand the impact of a disaster, and to better serve the congregation following the disaster. Fixing it now is much better than working to repair and replace when the church's hands are full trying to protect, feed and care for the survivors.

The Plan

What should be in the plan and in what sequence should it be? As no two churches are the same, no two plans will be the same, but following this outline would be a good place to start.

- **Introduction:**
 - What is a disaster?
 - Why is the church involved?
 - When is the church involved?

- **Scope (How much is the church involved?):**
 - What is the church's involvement in the response and recovery phases in each of the four levels of disaster? (small, medium, large and catastrophic)
 - What is the church's intention in each of the three types of response? (spiritual, emotional and physical)

- **Purpose (How is the church involved?):**
 - Develop a purpose statement, or a set of purpose statements, that illustrate the basic actions planned to be taken by the church in response to a disaster.

- **Organization:**
 - Rather than "re-inventing the wheel" by spending a lot of time and effort in coming to a consensus on how to organize the disaster response team, we strongly recommend that you adopt the ICS organizational structure which is used and recommended by UMCOR and emergency service organizations throughout the U.S.A.

- **Responsibilities:**
 - As a play on words, this section could be titled: "Response Abilities".
 - Using the ICS structure, determine the roles and responsibilities for each position based on your specific circumstances and the role your church chooses to play in a disaster.
 - Start with the role you want the Church Council or Administrative Board to fill in oversight of the disaster ministry and then move on the pastor, the Disaster/Incident Coordinator, and so on through the remainder of the disaster organization.

- **Conclusion:**
 - This is a good place to end the basic plan.
 - The plan should be kept concise, easily understood and not caught up in minutia.
 - Procedures for each position are required, but due to their nature of being specific to a position and constantly changing, they should not be included in the basic plan. It is recommended that each position have a binder which contains the basic plan, overall policy on how the church carries out disaster response, procedures for that position, and other pertinent material to assist in carrying out responsibilities such as directories, phone numbers, resource lists, etc.

After the Plan

Remember the section called *Chart your Path?* You aren't through when the written part of the plan is finished! After you conclude the writing, you still need to:

- Gain approval from the Church Council or Administrative Board,
- Obtain commitment from the church staff and those people you need to act on the Disaster Response Team
- The church needs to exercise (practice) the plan through desk-top simulations so the folks involved get a feel for what decisions they need to make and actions they may have to take in an actual disaster
- The church needs to test (pass or fail) the plan to see if the methods and equipment to be used in the disaster response center will actually work or not.
- Following exercising and testing, the results need to be reviewed to determine “soft spots,” and weaknesses requiring change or modification to help the system run smoothly.
- Then you need to go back to the drawing board and modify the plan to incorporate additions, changes or modifications that need to be written into the plan.
- After the plan is perfected as much as it can be, the congregation needs to be informed, training of volunteers needs to be started, and supplies and equipment needs to be gathered, or at least earmarked, for use when the response center is activated.
- You may desire to seed a Disaster Response Fund to provide immediate funding following a disaster. As busy as you may be attending to the safety, security, sanitation and feeding needs of the congregation, the district and conference will be expecting you to assemble damage assessment figures, work out a disaster budget and perform other administrative paperwork required by the conference to go forward to UMCOR with a disaster request. You may need to spend several days doing the paperwork among the other ministry demands being made of the team, but if there is no electricity at the church, you may need to rent an emergency generator, and to do that you will probably need access to cash.

Good luck in your endeavors, and if you find some stumbling blocks you can't climb over, call your DS or conference office and ask if their Disaster Coordinator can help. **You are not alone!**