



Western PA Conference
The United Methodist Church

Disaster Response Plan

In Partnership with



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SECTION ONE: SCOPE AND PURPOSE

I. Purpose of Plan

To have in place, a structure that clearly explains who does what; when and under what circumstances when a disaster strikes within the conference. The conference disaster response plan provides guidelines, suggestions, and specific assignments for various conference personnel who will be involved in the response to a disaster.

The resources available to the local church (i.e. volunteers, money, expertise, etc.) are limited and the need for the connectional system to support and undergird these efforts to alleviate human suffering is necessary. With this in mind, the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church (WPA) is setting up a structure that will enable the local churches to minister to persons in need as the result of a disaster.

Our purpose:

- To provide immediate relief for human need and to respond to the suffering of persons in our communities caused by natural, civil or man-made disaster.
- 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.
- To work cooperatively with United Methodist Communications in promotion of the UMCOR Sunday (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing) offering.
- To work with UMCOR to create printed, audiovisual, electronic and other resources to interpret, support and communicate with districts and churches concerning the appeal for help and information related to the disaster response ministry.
- To assist and train district coordinators and local church disaster coordinators to proactively support ongoing issues related to disaster relief.

The goal of the Conference disaster response is to address the physical, social, spiritual and emotional needs of individuals and families through caring ministries. The Conference embraces UMCOR's values for disaster ministry:

- We affirm the dignity and worth of persons by involving them in their own recovery, enabling those affected by disasters to take responsibility for relief and recovery work.
- We deliver aid to people without regard to race, religion, politics, or gender.
- Wherever possible, the Conference seeks to work with other religious and secular organizations to pool resources and avoid duplication of efforts.
- We avoid tying the promise of its relief and development activity to any religious or political viewpoint.
- We welcome the good efforts of countless volunteers, individuals and churches who support us through gifts, prayers and service.

II. What is a Disaster?

A disaster is any specific event which results in overwhelming physical, economic and/or emotional damage to a community. It results in significant harm to people and property, disrupts the normal pattern of living and/or overwhelms a community's ability to respond. There are four levels of disaster that establish how the response plan functions.

- **Low Level** – involves a limited number of households; assistance is provided by local churches and districts, with notification to the district superintendent and CDRC.
- **Medium Level** – involves an entire community or several scattered communities, assistance provided by organizing district response through the District Disaster Response Coordinator (DDRC), District Superintendent (DS) and the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator (CDRC). Conference Early Response Teams (ERTs) are usually requested at this level. The CDRC may notify and/or request supplies from UMCOR and advance funding if needed.
- **High Level** – involves a wide geographic area and requires a massive response by state and national agencies. Disaster response committee organizes a conference-wide response to the crisis and assists districts and local churches. ERTs will be requested by the CDRC, ERTs must wait until affected area is ready and has sent an invitation. The conference will request assistance from UMCOR. The Bishop may request help from other Conferences if the CDRC determines it is needed. The affected area is usually eligible to receive a presidential declaration of emergency and may be eligible for aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- **Catastrophic** – destroys infrastructure, will need ERTs. ERTs must wait until affected area is ready and has sent an invitation. “An event resulting in a large number of deaths and injuries; extensive damage or destruction of facilities that place an overwhelming demand on state and local response resources and mechanisms.” As in the High-Level disaster the CDRC and Disaster Response Committee (DRC) organize a conference-wide response to the crisis and assists districts and local churches. The Conference will request assistance from UMCOR. The affected area(s) is usually eligible to receive a presidential declaration of emergency and may be eligible for aid from FEMA.

A. Phases of a Disaster

There are five phases of a disaster

- **Readiness** – the initial phase of a disaster is a time for planning how to respond and training volunteers (ERTs) that will respond after the disaster occurs.
- **Rescue** – rescue/emergency is the phase that covers the period during and immediately following a disaster. During this phase, public agencies provide emergency assistance to preserve life and property.
- **Relief** – relief immediately follows the rescue/emergency phase and sometimes the two activities may coincide. During the relief phase, work is done to help prevent any further damage from occurring. Families may be allowed to return home at this time or may still be in temporary housing/shelters if homes are significantly damaged. Conference personnel (ERTs) are beginning to assess the damage and the

- conference's ability to respond and provide long-term assistance if needed. Conference ERTs begin working to prevent further harm and make homes safe, secure and sanitary.
- Recovery – recovery follows the time of providing relief work. It continues until all systems return to normal or near normal operation. Short-term Recovery restores vital life support systems to minimum operation conditions. Long-Term Recovery may go on for months – even years – until the entire disaster area returns to its previous condition or undergoes improvement with new features that are less disaster prone.
 - Review – review occurs after each phase and at the completion of a recovery effort. Participating organizations and agencies come together and discuss what worked well and what did not. From these discussions there is usually a recommendation to the communities on ways to improve response for the next event.

B. Individuals or Groups Involved with the Implementation of the Conference Disaster Plan

There are eight individuals or groups of conference personnel involved with the implementation of a disaster response. The involvement of these seven will depend upon the level of the disaster and activity needed at each phase of a disaster.

- Bishop
- Director of Connectional Ministries (DCM)
- Conference Disaster Response Coordinator (CDRC)
- Missional Engagement Coordinator (MEC)
- District Superintendent (DS)
- Disaster Response Committee (DRC)
- District Disaster Response Coordinator (DDRC)
- Local Clergy

C. Disaster Response Teams

WPA organizes and sponsors three types of disaster response teams

- Early Response Teams (ERT) – fully self-sufficient teams bringing their own tools, food, water and housing, they are trained and supported by the CDRC and the Mission Engagement Coordinator. They provide help in the relief phase to evaluate damage and work to bring homes to a safe, secure and sanitary condition.
- Assessment/Casework Management Team – they coordinate initial assessments of damage and recovery needs of families. They also coordinate the material purchase and volunteer teams doing the work.
- Volunteers in Mission (VIM) teams – teams trained and supported by the Missional Engagement Coordinator providing help in the recovery phase to bring homes to a habitable condition.

SECTION TWO: SITUATION

I. Conference Overview

A. Counties: There are 26 counties in the WPA Conference:

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| 1. Allegheny | 14. Forest |
| 2. Armstrong | 15. Greene |
| 3. Beaver | 16. Indiana |
| 4. Bedford | 17. Jefferson |
| 5. Butler | 18. Lawrence |
| 6. Cambria | 19. McKean |
| 7. Cameron | 20. Mercer |
| 8. Clarion | 21. Potter |
| 9. Clearfield | 22. Somerset |
| 10. Crawford | 23. Venango |
| 11. Elk | 24. Warren |
| 12. Erie | 25. Washington |
| 13. Fayette | 26. Westmoreland |

B. Districts: There are 10 districts in the WPA Conference:

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. Butler | 6. Greensburg |
| 2. Connellsville | 7. Johnstown |
| 3. Erie-Meadville | 8. Kane |
| 4. Franklin | 9. Pittsburgh |
| 5. Indiana | 10. Washington |

C. Churches: There are approximately 810 churches within the boundaries of the WPA

II. Hazard Analysis – Types of Disasters

- **Natural Disaster:** storms, earthquakes, floods or other natural phenomena
- **Technical Disaster:** carelessness, accidental, or intentional abuse of the environment
- **Economic Disaster:** sudden loss of income due to shifts in the local economy
- **Civil Disaster:** riots or civil disturbances in a community
- **Accident:** traffic accidents, fires, or other tragic occurrences with broad implications
- **Man-made Disaster:** acts of violence or any intentional act that results in physical, emotional and/or spiritual crisis for a community

SECTION THREE: STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

This is the Western Pennsylvania Conference version of the “Incident Command System” (ICS) used by most fire and law enforcement officials at all levels of government. You can review the government version of the ICS, by going to the FEMA website for complete instructions: www.fema.gov/training and search for NIMS courses.

I. BISHOP RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Will consult with Conference Disaster Response Coordinator to determine the need for UMCOR involvement.
- Request Bishop’s appeal and/or UMCOR assistance as appropriate.
- Assist in preparation of statement through the Communications Director.

II. DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Notify Conference and District Disaster Response Coordinators.
- Notify Conference Communications Director.
- Notify the Director of Connectional Ministries.

Should resources be beyond what the church and district can provide the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator shall dispatch a team to evaluate the damage. This should include the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, the District Disaster Response Coordinator, the Conference Missional Engagement Coordinator, Bishop, District Superintendents, pastors or designees of the effected churches and the Conference Communications Director.

III. CONFERENCE DISASTER RESPONSE COORDINATOR RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Contact the Bishop.
- Contact the District Superintendent.
- Coordinate an assessment team to physically review the disaster area as soon as safety permits. CDRC should also know at that time to what extent resources from the church are going to be available.
- Notify the Conference MEC, particularly if assistance from VIM teams can be utilized.
- Contact the Conference Communications Director.

If the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator is a Clergy person, the bishop may relieve the pastor of her/his local church duties, with pay, and arrange for a temporary substitute to fill in until s/he returns.

IV. DISTRICT DISASTER RESPONSE COORDINATORS RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Notify other District Coordinators if needed (with Conference Disaster Response Coordinator permission).
- Share the responsibility for contacting churches in the affected area.
- Contact Conference Disaster Response Coordinator with the information gathered.
- Notify the Missional Engagement Coordinator with information gathered.
- Notify the contact with the local township, municipal, borough, or city Emergency Management Coordinator. Each Municipality in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is required to have a local coordinator. The purpose of this action is to give the local government a contact person for the church.
- Notify Conference Communications Director. All persons involved will be informed that the Conference Communications Director is the office which will handle all official press releases.

V. LOCAL CHURCH RESPONSIBILITIES:

Each local congregation should have a Church Disaster Response Coordinator. This person would be responsible for the church and implementing church policies when a disaster strikes. Each church should also have a Deputy Disaster Response Coordinator; this can be SPRC chair, Mission Chair, or the Ad Council chair. The contact information for this person is to be sent to the District Office with a copy forwarded to the District Disaster Response Coordinator.

- Assess the general situation and physical needs of the people in the affected area. Notify the District Superintendent and the District Disaster Response Coordinator
- Provide specific needs assessments of any damage to churches or parsonages within 24 hours if possible
- Refer all media requests regarding the Bishop's or the annual conference's responses to the Communication Director

SECTION FOUR: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

I. DIRECTOR OF CONNECTIONAL MINISTRIES RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Assist the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator in any way possible.
- Assist the Bishop and District Superintendents in any way possible.
- Assist the Communications Director in any way possible.

II. CONFERENCE MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR (MEC)

- Supervise staff and District staff to oversee the Administrative Support for the incident.
- Maintain and make contact with persons who are willing to assist in disaster work.
- Consult with District and Conference Disaster Response Coordinators to find out where resources are most needed.
- Work with Communications Director to assist with press releases on how and any way volunteer and resources will be needed.

III. COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

- Gather information about the event.
- Coordinate releases both externally and internally, prepare public statements for release by the Bishop.
- Prepare media kits for the press.
- Prepare information on how to give resources and funds to the project.
- Train and advise support staff on how to handle calls by those manning telephones, maintain files and media information on the event.

IV. CONFERENCE DISASTER RESPONSE COMMITTEE CHAIR RESPONSIBILITIES

- The Conference Disaster Response Coordinator is the chair of the Committee. He/she is the point of contact for coordinating disaster response and disaster related efforts at the conference level.
- It will be the responsibility of the Western Pennsylvania Conference to make annual training available to the District Disaster Response Coordinators and others who would be involved in disaster work.
- A copy of a Disaster Coordinators list will be updated regularly and distributed to each District Superintendent, and Disaster Response Coordinator.

V. SPIRITUAL CARE COORDINATOR

- Spirituality is an essential part of humanity and as such, every person can benefit from spiritual care in time of disaster.
- The Spiritual Care Coordinator's primary responsibility is to offer a listening presence that says the church cares.
- Attempt to reduce the terrible aloneness survivors feel and to connect survivors with long-term disaster recovery systems.
- Gather information and provide support and information about the recovery process and available services.

VI. FINANCE DIRECTOR

- Maintain adequate records of the disaster response income and expenditures.
- The existing Conference voucher system will be used to record and track expenditures.
- The Finance Director has the authority to designate a person or persons to sign vouchers.
- The CDRC will also keep adequate records of purchases and expenditures for audit trail purposes.
- The Finance Director is ultimately responsible for the record keeping.

VII. EASTBROOK MISSION BARN DIRECTOR

- Provide centrally located warehousing and logistical support for receiving and distribution of donated and purchased supplies.
- Provide coordination of disbursements and receiving of supplies with ecumenical and government agencies.

VIII. CONFERENCE CHANCELLOR/LEGAL COUNSEL

- Provide information on liability for legal implications.
- Review statements and releases for legal implications.
- Provide a list of other lawyers to be contacted if s/he cannot be contacted or is out of the area.

IX. KEY THOUGHTS:

- **The Conference Disaster Response Team members are not First Responders. They do not rescue or engage in lifesaving work requiring specialized training and certifications.**
- The community “owns” the disaster.
- However, it is important to establish a United Methodist Church Presence, to continually assess needs and to have a coordinated response to the disaster.
- The Bishop, Director of Connectional Ministries and the Communications Director are the only persons authorized to speak to the media regarding the annual conference’s damages from, or our response to a disaster. If a reporter asks about district or annual conference damages your response should be:
 - I want to make sure we give you the most accurate and up-to-date information. Our Communications Director can best help you. If you give me your contact information, deadline and topic you are calling about they will return your call as soon as possible.

- Complete a Media Inquiry sheet and contact the Communications Director, Director of Connectional Ministries, District Superintendent or District Disaster Response Coordinator as soon as possible.

SECTION FIVE: ADMINISTRATION and LOGISTICS

Disaster Response Funds for/from the Conference fall into three categories: General Administrative Funds, Reserve Funds and UMCOR funds as requested by the Bishop.

I. **General Administrative Funds**

The General Administrative Fund is used for the following:

- Regular administrative expenses of the committee, not associated with any particular disaster including travel/mileage expenses
- Material and equipment used for/with disaster relief in general
- Disaster training including conferences, workshops, etc.

II. **Reserve Funds**

The DRC provides guidelines to expedite the relief effort, which are designed to explain the limits of available assistance. All monies raised for disaster relief will be made available for the relief effort until either the funding runs out or requests are no longer submitted.

All funds collected through the Bishop's appeal or direct contributions will be used to assist in current disasters within the bounds of the Western Pennsylvania Conference. This fund will be used both for grants and administrative costs associated with disaster relief. When collections exceed the demands of a current crisis, the remaining funds will be used for future disasters. Excess funds collected specifically for disasters within the Western Pennsylvania Conference shall be used only with the approval of the DRC. Excess funds collected specifically for disasters within the Western Pennsylvania Conference will not be used beyond those bounds without the recommendation of the DRC and the expressed approval of the Bishop and the Cabinet. Such expenditures may only be made when a crisis of overwhelming magnitude strikes which exhausts all church appeals and which demands a moral decision to commit funds designated for local use.

III. UMCOR and other Church Funds

The Conference will establish a system for receiving UMCOR funds as requested by the Bishop. As a general agency of the church, UMCOR may not enter a conference without the invitation of the Bishop and involvement of the conference in a leadership role. UMCOR serves as a channel through which the resources of the UMC can assist local ministries.

All UMCOR grants are provided with the understanding that the conference money will be used first, before UMCOR money is expended. It is also assumed that UMCOR funds are needed only if projected recovery costs will exceed funds available within the affected conference, including any money raised through special conference appeals for the disaster. UMCOR money is to be used in addition to conference resources, not in place of them.

All requests for UMCOR funds must be accompanied by a proposed budget outlining how disaster money is to be spent. The exception is the request for the initial grant which can be provided upon request of the Bishop. However, the initial grant amount must be shown in the budget when written. A budget must accompany further requests for funds. Given the fluid nature of disaster, during the early weeks the budget will be revised as the picture of need emerges. Please see the UMCOR Funding Policies and Guidelines for details on requesting UMCOR funds and the process for the ultimate close out of a disaster.

IV. Donations – Cash Donations vs. In-Kind Donations:

Donation management is a complex process which must be carefully planned before the process begins. Donation management begins when the phone is answered and a donor makes the offer or asks the question, “What do you need?” Properly responding to the offer and question will result in better donation management in disaster relief efforts. Please remember that a record must be made of every donation, including: name, address, phone number, amount of the donation, and use preference.

An individual at the Conference level should be designated as Donation Coordinator and provide regular reports to the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator and the Conference Treasurer’s office.

Cash donations are usually the best help in a disaster situation. However, it is common for individuals, businesses, and community organizations to offer food, clothing, clean up items and building materials. These gifts are called “in-kind” donations. Some of these “in-kind” gifts may be badly needed, but they often arrive in huge quantities. When unnecessary and inappropriate supplies descend on a disaster area, it can become another disaster in and of itself. Never ask for nor accept donations of clothing.

The position of the conference is that cash donations are preferred over in-kind donations. Cash donations will always be accepted. The conference does not have to accept in-kind donations.

Donations of in-kind gifts should be strongly encouraged to contact UMCOR at the Sager-Brown Center in Baldwin, LA to ascertain if the in-kind gift is needed. Note: individuals and churches

collecting goods for a particular disaster are expected to pay the cost of transporting those goods to the Sager-Brown Center. It is appropriate to tell donors to send their in-kind gifts to another recognized agency in disaster relief such as the Salvation Army or Goodwill.

V. Grant Procedures

Quickly evolving disaster response operations require considerable flexibility in disbursing money. Paper trails and good accounting are essential for all transactions. While conference procedures must be followed, a way must be established to dispense funds rapidly. In disaster situations, survivors cannot wait until the end of the month for checks to be issued. The responsibility for disaster response spending rests on the Disaster Response Committee and Conference Disaster Response Coordinator.

The Conference Disaster Response Committee:

- Sets the limits of grants
- Approves block grants
- Considers all waivers

Once the limits of funding are set, the District Superintendent and his/her Case Manager has approval for approving household grants within the affected areas. Only when a request exceeds a specified limit with the DR Committee become involved to help determine if the request will be honored. The pastor shall be an important link in the assistance effort. District Superintendents are urged to keep the need for direct involvement in the relief effort before their pastors.

Policies

The Disaster Response Committee must approve any exceptions to policy in advance. The following policies apply:

- Duplicate grants are discouraged.
- Who can apply? ALL individual households.
- Who can make the request? Local pastor, church committee, DS, designated agent or the Bishop.
- DRC
- The Conference Treasurer's office will authorize disbursement of all funds.
- A letter will accompany the check which will identify the fiscal agent and the expectations of the expenditure of funds. A quarterly report will be given to the CDRC indication how funds have been disbursed.

VI. Types of Grants

A. Block Grants

Block grants are used by local churches, organizations, and agencies to:

- Provide direct relief to the survivors of disasters

- Administrative overhead
- Direct relief as the situation dictates

Unless previous arrangements are made, grant funds remaining after the relief effort ceases will be returned to the Disaster Response Committee. The system of recapture must be clearly explained to the recipient prior to grant approval. The following conditions for the use of grant monies are:

1. Monies will be spent following the funding policies and guidelines established by UMCOR. They are as follows:
 - Designated funds can **only** be used in the named disaster.
 - Designated funds can be used in the humanitarian recovery effort except these funds can never be used for the repair or rebuilding of disaster-damaged church property.
 - Designated funds will be used in a manner consistent with United Methodist disaster response guidelines – in an appropriated way for disaster need throughout the disaster area regardless of a person’s race, color, economic status or religious affiliation.
2. An accurate accounting of all expenditures of monies is expected on a quarterly basis and is to be sent to the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator of the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church.
3. When all conference monies have been spent, a final accounting will be given indicating how all monies from the recipient organization have been spent.
4. Funds may be transferred to the local account of recipient. Remaining funds will be returned to this conference upon the dissolution of the recipient organization. A grant may be made on a permanent basis with no expectation for return of funds.

B. Rebuilding Grants

Rebuilding grants are provided to individual households for rebuilding or repair of structures damaged as a result of the disaster. The fund may be used to purchase building materials.

Requirements:

- The pastor/designee completing the form must personally inspect the damage or verify that the recipient is a disaster survivor.
- Grants are awarded on the basis of household, rather than per family. Multiple families living in the same household shall be considered to be one household.
- Check with the Red Cross or FEMA before submitting a rebuilding grant.

Note: A Conference grant will reduce the amount of money the household receives from other agencies if it is a duplicate benefit.

- If a household receives welfare or food stamps, make checks out to creditors or merchants rather than the household.
- Grants will not exceed \$3,000.00 per household, unless approved by the Disaster Response Committee. Waivers may be requested.

- The grant may be supplemented by a grant to a volunteer team assisting the household.
- The Disaster Response Committee or the designated Long-Term Recovery Committee (LTRC) will assign the control number.
- Checks are sent in the care of the minister who completed the application.
- Whenever possible, checks will be made out to the vendor or institutions to which the money is owed.

SECTION SIX: Plan Development and Maintenance

The Disaster Response Committee will:

- Prepare and maintain this conference disaster plan as a part of our disaster response responsibilities.
- Receive and review recommendation for change of this plan and make sure the changes are published to all positions in the plan.

Miscellaneous:

- A copy of this plan will be available through the conference office.
- We will establish a page on the conference web site that will have copies posted of the conference plan and any other material created by this committee to assist the local church response in disasters.

SECTION SEVEN: APPENDIX

There are many private and church groups plus numerous state and federal agencies organized to respond to disasters. The definitions of the following acronyms will help disaster response workers understand the sponsorship and scope of work of some of the more common organizations and agencies involved in disaster response.

ARC: American Red Cross

CWS: Church World Service. This is the relief arm of the National Council of Churches. It is also an umbrella for the disaster work of participating denominations.

DRC: Disaster Response Committee. It is used within this plan to refer to the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church Disaster Response Committee.

FEMA: Federal Emergency Management Agency. FEMA coordinates the Federal Response Plan, which brings together federal agencies with responsibility in disaster assistance to state and local communities. Most help is for the repair of infrastructure, i.e. bridges, roads and river channels. Individual assistance to homeowners is in the form of low-interest loans administered by the Small Business Association. The Individual and Family

Grant program (IFG) also awards some grant money to victims and is a program shared between federal and state governments. FEMA can only come to a state's aid at the invitation of the state's governor and with the approval of the President in the form of a disaster declaration.

Interfaith: A community based, nonprofit, long-term recovery agency consisting of representatives from local faith groups and largely funded by their denomination.

Salvation Army: A nonprofit whose international arm is noted for its feeding, casework, warehouse management, and other relief efforts. The Salvation Army is a church denomination and very much a part of the Wesleyan heritage.

SBA: Small Business Administration. Disaster survivors must call the SBA in order to be eligible for disaster funds. SBA offers loan up to \$200,000 to repair disaster damaged primary residences. Homeowners are renters are eligible for loans up to \$40,000 to replace personal property such as furniture, appliances and clothing.

UMCOR: United Methodist Committee on Relief. UMCOR is the avenue through which the United Methodist work in refugee relief and resettlement, world hunger and poverty, and disaster response in over 120 countries.

UMVIM (also VIM): United Methodist Volunteer in Mission. A church program that links volunteers with projects worldwide. UMVIM and UMCOR have developed a partnership for Early Response Teams and other efforts in disaster response.

VOAD: Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. This is an assembly of many churches, temples, mosques, and other religious and non-religious tax-exempt organizations who, in unity work with the local, state, and national government to bring relief to stricken areas of the United States.