



# LOCAL CHURCH AND MINISTRY DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN

Working Draft

## Abstract

Provides a guide for disaster and continuity of ministry planning at the local church and ministry,  
level in the Oregon – Idaho Annual Conference

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## Why Plan and Prepare

No individual, home, ministry, church, or region is immune to natural or human-caused disaster. The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference is HUGE! We are exposed to a full range of potential natural and man-made disasters.

Everything in effective disaster response depends upon planning and preparation at the local church and ministry level. When a disaster strikes, the pastor and members of the local churches closest or within the disaster area will be the eyes and ears of the conference and the hands and feet of Christ in their community. It is the local churches responsibility to be in communication with the District Office, the District Disaster Response Coordinator, and the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator.

Disaster preparedness and response should be a continuous process that includes planning for action throughout the phases of disaster: **Readiness, Rescue, Relief, Recovery** and **Review**. In smaller disasters, these phases can move quickly, in larger ones, they can span several months or even years. Typically each phase takes ten times longer than the previous phase.



When disaster strikes, it is local churches that provide the first opportunity to respond to the physical and spiritual needs of their communities. This basic understanding—that disaster response is local—forms the foundation for the United Methodist Committee on Relief

(UMCOR) disaster training and response. First and foremost, preparation is our responsibility. UMCOR is a resource for our conference's preparation and response.

Having had no problems in the past gives little assurance for the future. Likelihood of disaster is greater than most imagine. And there's a critical problem with the attitude that says "If it happens, we'll deal with it." Too many times those regularly involved in disaster response have seen well-intentioned Christians delay, complicate, and confuse recovery efforts because they operate by impulse rather than understanding of how disaster response works. "Flying by the seat of their pants," with no pre-planning, training, or coordination, they duplicate aid to some victims while overlooking genuine need in others. Worse yet, sometimes their "good doing" inflicts additional harm.

Without training, well-intentioned volunteers can:

- Imperil a survivor's health, and
- Eligibility for financial assistance from insurance and the government.

Additional harm most often happens as helpers rush to do home repairs. They frequently carry the work too far. Untrained volunteers don't understand the law, insurance assessment procedures, or how certain repairs made too hastily can jeopardize a survivor's health (such as when flood damage is covered over before interior segments of walls and floors dry completely).

Partnering with local churches, Districts and Conferences, UMCOR provides the following:

- **Training.** UMCOR trains teams of volunteers.
- **Financial Assistance.** If the bishop contacts UMCOR for support, an emergency grant may be sent.
- **Expertise.** UMCOR's disaster-response experience and knowledge are made available to those in need.
- **Networking.** Getting connected with NGOs, volunteers, experts, local government, and other organizations can help communities recover from disaster.

It is never a matter of if disaster strikes, but when!

*If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!*

## Local Church and Ministry Responsibilities

Each local church and ministry location is responsible for their planning and training to respond to disaster. Their planning and response should provide for:

- Continuity of ministry in their community.
- Continuity of the business of the church or ministry, to include care for members and restoration of church property.
- Developing trained leaders for specialized roles such as early response, employing United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) response teams, and case management during long term recovery.

Each local congregation and ministry should develop their own plan and designate a Disaster Response Coordinator. The pastor should not be expected to fill this role. This person may be the lay leader or other person intimately familiar with the congregation and the community. The contact information for this person is to be provided to the District Office for use by the District Superintendent and Disaster Response Coordinator.

## Pastor

In the event of a real or potential disaster, the pastor should notify the District Superintendent as soon as possible that a crisis situation exists, and assess any damage to your household. If the pastor or the pastor's family is a victim, set aside their duties, request relief from the district superintendent, and work on their own recovery. Pastors in crisis should not rely on your their judgment. Listen to others.

## Disaster Response Coordinator

The coordinator responsibilities are to:

- Establish contact with the director or pastor and other church leaders.
- Work with the staff and leadership to verify and update the status of all members and those affiliated with the church or ministry. Particular attention must be paid to the disabled, homebound, and updating contact information for those who may have evacuated.
- Work with the director or pastor to establish contact with the District Superintendent and/or the District Disaster Response Coordinator in order to provide the status of your ministry or congregation and church property, and any urgent needs in your community. Separate ministries should contact their appropriate Conference supervisor.
- Establish contact with the local emergency management system in order to identify needs and provide assistance as requested.
- Provide specific needs assessments of any damage to church, parsonage, and other church property within 24 hours, if possible. This information is required by the Conference and UMCOR personnel.

- Work with other churches and volunteer organizations toward long-term recovery.
- Refer all media requests regarding the bishop's or the annual conference's responses to the Conference Director of Communications. Contact the conference Director of Communications for information on working with local media, developing key talking points, and coaching for local leaders during the crisis.

### Emergency Shelter Planning

Your church or ministry may be requested by the Red Cross to provide emergency shelter. Red Cross-approved shelters, whether in churches or schools, are covered by Red Cross liability and damage insurance. If you believe your church or ministry might serve as an emergency shelter, you should work with the Red Cross in advance to make certain you meet all applicable rules and regulations. Upon request, the Red Cross will inspect your facility to determine if it is suitable for use as an emergency shelter. To determine capacity, they look at a number of different criteria including: square footage of potential sleeping area, number of toilets, number of shower heads, space available for feeding, and accessibility. As a minimum they are looking for the following characteristics in an ideal shelter facility:

- Dormitory area of at least 1000 sq. feet.
- Eating area for at least 25 people
- 3-4 toilets
- 2-3 showers
- ADA accessible
- An indoor entry area where registration can occur
- A small room or two that can be used by disaster health or mental health services to provide assistance.

If a facility falls short in some area (e.g., showers), but is otherwise suitable, they look for a nearby facility (e.g., rec center) to fill the shortfall. If they determine your facility is suitable, an agreement will be signed specifying the terms and condition of its use by the Red Cross.

Your church should not open your own shelter unless you meet local building codes, are requested, you are willing to assume the costs of repair and liability, and you understand you will be fully responsible for any harm to residents or damage to the facility.

## Local Church and Ministry Continuity of Ministry Planning Checklist

This guide is adapted from the Idaho **Plan to Stay in Business Emergency Planning Guide**. It is provided to assist local churches in planning and responding to disasters. Preparation begins at home. All members of your congregation should be encouraged to:

- Get to know your neighbors.
- Learn about personal safety and resources available in your neighborhood and community.
- Improve home and church security.
- Build a sense of community.
- Once you complete your plan, it is easy to forget unless you maintain awareness through regular training and information sharing, and regular review to make certain it accurately reflects the needs of your church and community.

### Step 1. Assess Hazards that Could Affect Your Church & Community

Consider the potential impacts of hazards when developing your emergency plan. You can use the Vulnerability Analysis Chart as a tool to guide the process, which entails assigning probabilities, estimating impact and assessing resources, using a numerical system.

### List Types of Emergencies

In the first column of the chart, list all emergencies that could affect your facility, including those identified by your local emergency management office. Consider both:

- Emergencies that could occur within your facility
- Emergencies that could occur in your community

Below are some examples of emergencies or events to consider:

- Fires
- Severe weather
- Power/Utility Outages
- Hazardous material spills
- Transportation accidents
- Earthquakes
- Infectious Disease Outbreaks
- Loss of key staff

Consider what could happen as a result of:

- Prohibited access to the facility

- Loss of electric power
- Loss of Communications
- Loss of Critical Computer Systems/Critical Data
- Ruptured gas mains
- Water damage
- Smoke damage
- Structural damage
- Air or water contamination
- Explosion
- Building collapse
- Trapped persons
- Chemical release

### **Estimate Probability**

In the Probability column, rate the likelihood of each emergency's occurrence. Use a simple scale of 1 to 5 with 1 as the lowest probability and 5 as the highest.

### **Assess the Potential Ministry Impact**

Analyze the potential human impact of each emergency -- the possibility of death or injury. Use a 1 to 5 scale with 1 as the lowest impact and 5 as the highest.

### **Assess the Potential Property Impact**

Consider the potential for losses and damages. Again, assign a rating in the Property Impact column, 1 being the lowest impact and 5 being the highest.

Consider:

- Cost to replace
- Cost to set up temporary replacement
- Cost to repair

Example: A bank's vulnerability analysis concluded that even a "small" fire could be catastrophic to the business due to a computer system failure. The planning group discovered that bank employees did not know how to use fire extinguishers, and that the bank lacked any kind of evacuation or emergency response system.

**Assess the Potential Business Impact**

Consider the potential loss. Assign a rating in the Business Impact column. Again, 1 is the lowest impact and 5 is the highest. Assess the impact of:

- Business interruption/loss of critical business functions
- Employees unable to report to work
- Members unable to reach facility
- Church in violation of contractual agreements
- Interruption of critical supplies and services

**Vulnerability Analysis Chart**

Rate each criterion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being low and 5 being high.

Type of Emergency	Probability	Ministry Impact	Property Impact	Business Impact	Total

**Review the Results**

Review the total scores for each emergency. The lower the score the better. While this is a subjective rating, the comparisons will help determine planning and resource priorities.

When assessing resources, remember that community emergency workers -- police, paramedics, firefighters -- will focus their response where the need is greatest. Or they may be victims themselves and be unable to respond immediately. That means response to your facility may be delayed.

**Step 2. Have a Plan**

**List the Primary Contact as well as alternates.**

**Disaster Response Coordinator:** \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

If the Primary Contact is unable to manage the event, the person below will succeed in leadership:

**Alternate Contact (2)**      Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

If the Alternate Contact Person is unable to manage the event, the person below will succeed in management:

**Alternate Contact (3)**      Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Local Emergency Contact Information:**

**Dial 9-1-1- in an emergency for local or isolated emergencies.**

Pastor: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Trustees Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Church Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Gas/Heat Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Electric Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Insurance Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

County Emergency Management: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Step 3. Protect Your Investment**

#### **Identify Critical Ministry Functions**

- Identify critical resources and functions (refer to the table on the following page)
- Identify primary and alternate personnel to perform critical functions
- Provide training and equipment to ensure identified personnel can perform the functions
- Consider developing job aids, such as check lists, to assist alternates in performing those duties.

#### **Keep copies of important records off-site such as:**

- Building plans
- Pictures of the facility-inside and out
- Insurance policies (Declaration page should be sent to Conference Archives)
- Employee contact and identification information
- Bank account records
- Tax records
- Supplier and shipping contact lists
- Offsite backups of computer data

#### **Alerts and Warnings**

- Monitor the media in the area
- Enroll in your regional Alert and Warning System

#### **Insurance**

- Review and understand what your policy covers
- Keep in mind the cost of rental equipment, temporary workers, data recovery etc.
- Find out what records your insurance provider will want to see and store them offsite with your important documents.



## Utilities

Plan ahead for disruptions of utilities such as:

- Electricity
- Gas
- Telecommunications
- Water
- Sewer

## Fire Safety

Fire is the most common of all business disasters.

- Install smoke alarms, smoke detectors, and fire extinguishers
- Discuss who will alert the fire department and how they will do it
- Plan and discuss how to evacuate in a fire. Consider:
  - Fire exits
  - A safe place for all to meet for accountability

## Improve Cyber Security

Protecting your data and information technology system may not require experts.

Some things you can do:

- Use antivirus software and keep it up to date
- Do not open e-mail from unknown sources
- Back up your data and store it off site on easily transportable devices such as external hard drives, DVD disk, or flash (thumb) drive.
- [Subscribe to the Department of Homeland Security National Cyber Alert System](#) to receive free timely alerts on new threats and learn how to protect yourself in cyberspace.

## Step 4. Know How to Respond

### Evacuation

If local authorities tell you to evacuate, do so immediately. Identify who internally will:

- Order an evacuation of your business
- Shut down critical operations
- Lock doors
- Designate assembly sites for all workers, visitors, and customers
- Develop a system to account for everyone on your site
- Provide an all clear or return to work notification

### Shelter in Place

In some emergencies you may be asked to shelter in place. Act quickly and follow instructions. Identify who internally will:

- Order all to shelter in place
- Close all doors and windows
- Turn off ventilation systems
- Seal doors and windows

## Steps to help protect your assets every day.

### Secure Facilities and Buildings

- Secure entrances and exits
- Plan for mail safety
- Identify which equipment is necessary to keep your business running such as:
  - Machinery
  - Computers
  - Custom parts
- Plan how to transport, replace or repair vital equipment if it is damaged or destroyed
- Store extra supplies, materials, etc.

## **Secure your Equipment**

### **The force of disasters like fires, floods and earthquakes can damage or destroy important equipment**

- Conduct a room-by-room walk through to determine what needs to be secured
- Attach equipment and cabinets to walls or other stable locations
- Elevate equipment off the floor to avoid electrical hazards and damage in the event of flooding

## **Step 5. Talk to Each Other**

### **Provide for the well-being of your co-workers**

- Talk with staff frequently and practice what you intend to do during and after an emergency
- Set up a telephone tree, e-mail alert, text messaging, or call in alert to leave an “I’m okay” message (Text messaging has proven to be the most successful)
- Cross train if possible. Identify alternates to perform critical functions.
- Include emergency preparedness information in staff meetings or new employee orientations
- Encourage your employees to develop a plan for emergencies at home

### **Prepare for Medical Complications**

- Keep first aid supplies in stock and easily accessible
- Encourage employees to take basic first aid and CPR training
- Be sure to include people with disabilities in emergency planning

### **Support Employees after an Event**

Getting back to work is important to personal recovery. Some things you can do:

- Reestablish routines as soon as possible.
- Create opportunities where coworkers can talk openly about their experiences, fears and anxieties.
- Allow employees time at home to care for their families.

## How You Can Help in Your Community

You will be able to enhance your ministry to your members, neighbors, citizens, first responders and those affected by disasters when your church works together with other churches and public and private sector representatives on the same team.

- Get involved with your local, tribal and/or state Emergency Management Organizations.
- Attend Local Emergency Planning Committee meetings.
- Participate in training and exercises provided at no cost by your jurisdiction and the state.
- Assist in the development of protocols to integrate ministry into emergency management.
- Share resources during an incident or a disaster.