

**Conference Disaster Plan  
Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference  
of The United Methodist Church**

List of Abbreviations:

CDRC – Conference Disaster Response Coordinator

CDRM – Conference Disaster Response Ministry

DDRC – District Disaster Response Coordinator

FEMA – Federal Emergency Management Agency

LTR – Long Term Recovery

UMCOR – United Methodist Committee On Relief

UMVIM SEJ – United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, Southeastern Jurisdiction

UMVIM – United Methodist Volunteers in Mission

VOAD – Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

## **Conference Disaster Plan Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church**

### **GOAL**

Effectively manage resources available to our churches before, during, and after a disaster, including:

- Information
- Supplies
- Volunteers
- Financial assistance

### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE**

The Conference Disaster Response Ministry (CDRM) Team working collaboratively with:

- District Offices
- District and Church Disaster Response Coordinators
- Volunteers (trained and untrained)
- UMCOR
- Local and state emergency management
- Other relief agencies and organizations

### **CONFERENCE DISASTER RESPONSE MINISTRY MISSION**

Resource and equip local United Methodist Churches and districts as they assist their communities and individuals to prepare, respond and recover from a disaster.

### **POLICY OF DEFER AND REFER**

When a District Office, church, pastor or congregant receives offers of help (volunteers, donations, etc.) from outside your area – even if it's from someone you know – thank them for their offer of assistance and refer them to the CDRM Team to respond and manage: defer and refer.

This helps us coordinate with other responding agencies and organizations to

- a. Avoid duplication of resources;
- b. Facilitate equitable sharing of resources;
- c. Refuse goods and services that are not needed;
- d. Ensure volunteers are properly trained and affiliated with a reputable organization;
- e. Protect the safety and security of both volunteers and those affected by a disaster;
- f. Get the right resources to the right place at the right time.

It also protects our churches from having to manage uninvited and potentially unaffiliated and untrained volunteers who – though well meaning – may cause additional problems for the church and/or the community.

This frees up the pastor and members of the church for ministry. The focus remains on the needs of the local church congregation and the affected community – not figuring out how to manage offers of assistance from outside the area.

This plan is divided into the four stages of a disaster:

**Stage 1 - Planning and Preparation** (before a disaster)

**Stage 2 - Warning** (a disaster is imminent)

**Stage 3 - Immediate Aftermath** (emergency response, relief, short-term recovery)

**Stage 4 - Long-Term recovery** (putting the community back together)

The roles of the CDRM staff, District Disaster Response Coordinators (DDRCs), local church disaster response coordinators, District Superintendents and the Bishop are each outlined in their own section so that you can quickly go there and see what you need to do.

**NOTE:**

To keep this plan as short and “user friendly” as possible, the plan was developed with the following assumptions:

1. Communication is critical to an effective response. Please make plans now to communicate your status and contact information immediately before and after an event with those who need to know. If you are in an evacuation area or your personal plan includes evacuation, please include pertinent information: when you will plan to leave, where you’re evacuating to, how to contact you, proposed plans to return, etc.
2. Your safety and the safety of your home and family always come first. Do not attempt to implement your responsibilities under this plan until your home and family are secure.
3. We adhere to the four “C’s” promoted by the National VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) and their local affiliates: cooperation, communication, coordination, collaboration.
4. If a task in your area of responsibility is labeled optional and you choose not to do it, please advise the CDRM Team so we can make alternate arrangements.

5. If there is no District Disaster Response Coordinator (DDRC) in your district, please interface with the CDRM Team who will either work with you directly or assign a trained volunteer. The CDRM Team has volunteers – point people – in every district. These are volunteers we know who will assist when needed, but they simply do not want a formal position or title. Please be assured that the CDRM Team is committed to getting you the help you need when you need it.
6. For purposes of this document, District Office is defined as any who have leadership responsibilities in that district. While this includes the District Superintendent, it also includes, but is not limited to, the District Administrative Secretary, District Lay Leader, and District Trustees.

## CONFERENCE DISASTER RESPONSE MINISTRY TEAM

### PRIMARY ROLE:

- Train and help United Methodist Churches and districts to prepare, respond, and recover from a disaster.
- Communication hub for the conference during a disaster.
- Coordinate the response of the United Methodist Churches in the Conference in collaboration with local, state and national agencies and organizations also responding to a disaster.

### **Stage 1: Planning and Preparation - Before Disaster**

1. Connect with churches through site visits, trainings, phone calls and emails to share the ministry.
2. Provide and communicate training opportunities for churches and volunteers.
3. Encourage churches to have a written plan for disaster response and share that plan with their District Office and the CDRM Team.
4. Maintain and update the Conference disaster plan for the coordination of resources in a disaster including:
  - a. Communication channels between the local church, District Office(s) and the conference
  - b. Receipt of donations
  - c. Offers of assistance
  - d. Requests for assistance
  - e. Deployment of resources to meet needs.
5. Assist the district in identifying a District Disaster Response Coordinator (DDRC). Work with the DDRC to help identify key volunteers to assist with district needs in the event of a disaster.
6. Train and develop early response and spiritual response teams.
7. Connect with local and state emergency management personnel and take an active role in the Alabama and Florida VOADS, as well as local VOADS, as needed.

### **Stage 2: Warning - Disaster Strike is Imminent**

1. Confirm communication channels with UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), Bishop, Districts, DDRCs and/or previously identified point people in the districts and appropriate volunteer team leaders.
2. Secure physical work area and identify alternate workspace in the event it's needed.
3. Work to prepare for implementation of the call center, if needed.

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

1. Work with the district(s) to determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected areas.
2. Communicate with the Bishop, the DDRC and District Superintendent in the affected district(s), and other appropriate conference staff and volunteers, as well as UMCOR, to assimilate information and coordinate the conference response.
3. If needed, implement the call center using conference staff to assist in fielding calls until volunteers are available.
4. Participate on Alabama and Florida VOAD conference calls and/or monitor situation reports (sit reps) as received from emergency management (local and state), FEMA and NVOAD (National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.)
5. Work with the Bishop and conference communications to disseminate information throughout the conference, as appropriate, including activation of the call center.
6. Serve as the communication hub for the disaster response, including:
  - a. Oversight of the conference call center;
  - b. Assisting districts and local churches as requested;
  - c. Communicating with appropriate agencies outside the conference: UMCOR, UMVIM SEJ, AL VOAD, FL VOAD, NVOAD, Emergency Management, FEMA, etc.;
  - d. Coordinating shipment and receipt of supplies and donations;
  - e. Coordinating volunteers in collaboration with the local church and/or community;
  - f. Deploying specialized teams (Early Response Teams and Spiritual Response Teams) when invited by the local church or community.
7. Collaborate with district(s) to identify possible staging areas for supplies, donations, volunteers, etc.

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

1. 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.
2. Collaborate and cooperate with responding agencies and organizations in the community to develop a Long-Term Recovery efforts committee or group (LTR.)
3. Encourage and assist the local UMC(s) to participate as an active member of the LTR.
4. Provide guidance, training and other assistance as requested by the local UMC(s) and/or the LTR.
5. Offer the UMCOR Case Management training to the LTR.

6. Communicate volunteer opportunities to individuals and teams from inside and outside the conference and coordinate their participation, as appropriate.
7. Inform the LTR about financial assistance (grants) that may be available from various organizations, including UMCOR, and assist with the UMCOR grant process, if appropriate.
8. Administer the CDRM grant process, if applicable.
9. Work with the District Offices, DDRCs, Bishop and appropriate conference staff to evaluate the conference response to a disaster and adjust the plan to reflect lessons learned



## **District Disaster Response Coordinator**

### **PRIMARY ROLE:**

- Communication liaison between the District Office, the district team, if applicable, the local church disaster response coordinators (or other church point persons) and the CDRM Team.
- Assist during the response phase as requested by the District Office or the CDRM Team.

**NOTE:** In the absence of a DDRC, the CDRM Team will work with the district directly and/or assign a trained volunteer(s) to fulfill these responsibilities.

### **Stage 1: Planning and preparation - Before Disaster Strikes**

1. Contact each church in your district (or area of responsibility) to introduce yourself and the CDRM Team. Make sure the church has your contact information in the event of a disaster and the CDRM Team contact information in case they cannot reach you.
2. Encourage the churches in your district to have a written disaster plan and to share the plan with the District Office and the CDRM Team
3. Encourage churches to connect with the CDRM Team for training.
4. As appropriate, promote the connection between churches, the conference and the CDRM Team.
5. Develop a disaster plan with the District Office so that everyone is clear on how communication will flow in the district in a disaster.
6. Review this plan annually with the District Office or as circumstances in the District Office change (new staff, new location, etc.)
7. Attend disaster trainings in your district when possible to get to know your churches.
8. Assist in raising awareness about UMCOR.
9. (Optional) Attend local VOAD meetings as the United Methodist representative. Identify designee(s) if you are unable to attend.
10. (Optional) Assist churches with planning, if requested.

### **Stage 2: Warning - District Strike is Imminent**

1. Confirm communication plans with the District Office and the CDRM Team.
2. Secure your physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternate workspace.

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

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

1. Work with the district and the CDRM Team to determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected areas of your district.
2. Communicate status and immediate needs to the District Superintendent and the CDRM Team.
3. In collaboration with district staff and/or volunteers and in accordance with the district disaster plan, contact churches in the affected area to get status updates. Updates should include a general assessment of damage to the church and the community.
4. As information becomes available, communicate status updates and needs to your District Superintendent and the CDRM Team so that we can share available resources.
5. 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:
  - a. contact their insurance provider to file a claim for damage to church property
  - b. contact the CDRM Team with other needs or offers of assistance/resources.
6. Coordinate information and needs with local emergency management personnel and other responding agencies and organizations as appropriate.
7. If invited, work with the CDRM Team to coordinate and participate in assessments of the affected area with the District Superintendent and others as assigned.
8. If needed, work with the District Office, district churches and the CDRM Team to coordinate resources and volunteers for the response.

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

1. Monitor the conference website and social media to see if help is needed and encourage churches to do the same.
2. Discourage churches from self-deploying.
3. Encourage churches to support the conference response and/or UMCOR with prayers and financial donations.
4. Encourage churches to provide other support only when they are invited to do so.

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

1. As appropriate, work with the CDRM Team to provide information and resources to further Long-Term Recovery efforts in your area.

2. Once a community begins Long-Term Recovery efforts, the focus of the District Disaster Coordinator transitions to planning and preparation. (optional)
3. Work with your District Office and the CDRM Team 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 (DDRC) and/or the CDRM Team and the Bishop.

**Note:** If a storm is approaching and your district does not have a DDRC, the CDRM Team will work directly with you and/or recruit a trained volunteer from your district to assist you.

### **Stage 1: Planning and preparation - Before Disaster Strikes**

1. Work with the CDRM Team to identify a DDRC.
2. Work with the DDRC and District Office staff to develop a disaster plan for the district.
3. Review this plan annually or as circumstances in the District Office change (new staff, new or no DDRC, change in office location, etc.)
4. Encourage churches to have a written disaster plan for their church and to share the plan with the District Office and the CDRM Team.
5. As appropriate, promote the connection between churches, the conference and the CDRM Team.
6. Encourage churches to connect with the CDRM Team for training.
7. Assist in raising awareness about UMCOR and UMCOR Sunday.
8. Encourage churches to know and work within the emergency management process when disaster strikes; discourage "lone rangers" and self-deployment.

### **Stage 2: Warning - Disaster Strike is Imminent**

1. Confirm and activate the district disaster plan with the DDRC, the Bishop and clergy in the district.
2. Coordinate with District Leadership to secure office and parsonage.
3. Determine which clergy are evacuating and confirm contact information.
4. Determine which churches are going to be the most vulnerable and advise the Bishop, DDRC and/or the CDRM Team.
5. Secure physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternate workspace.

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

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

1. Work with your DDRC and/or the CDRM Team to determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected areas of the district.

2. Communicate with the Bishop and the DDRC. (If there is no DDRC, communicate with the CDRM Team.)
3. In accordance with the district disaster plan, contact pastors in affected areas to assess physical, spiritual and emotional needs.
4. Coordinate care and resources for affected clergy and pastoral families in collaboration with the CDRM Team as appropriate.
5. When it is safe to do so, work with the CDRM Team to begin damage assessments with the DDRC and/or other personnel, including site visits to affected areas and churches.
6. Report on the condition of the community and church properties to appropriate conference personnel (Bishop, the CDRM Team, etc.)
7. 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:
  - a. contact their insurance provider to file a claim for damage to church property
  - b. contact the CDRM Team with other needs or offers of assistance/resources
8. Contact the CDRM Team as needed for assistance.

**If a disaster is NOT in your district:**

1. Monitor the conference web site and social media to see if help is needed and encourage churches to do the same.
2. Discourage churches from self-deploying.
3. Encourage churches to support the conference response and/or UMCOR with prayers and financial donations.
4. Encourage churches to provide other support only when they are invited to do so.

**Stage 4: Long-Term Recovery**

1. Continue to provide emotional and spiritual support to clergy and families as needed, referring them to appropriate resources as available.
2. Encourage and assist pastors to monitor their emotional needs.
3. Offer the option of pulpit supply as soon as feasible to pastors in the hardest hit areas.
4. Encourage local church participation in Long-Term Recovery efforts in the affected areas as appropriate.
5. Communicate with the CDRM Team any unmet needs that arise or areas that may need additional resources or other assistance.
6. Work with your DDRC and/or the CDRM Team to evaluate the district response to a 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 DDRC and/or the CDRM Team.
- Ensure the church has a plan to protect church property.
- Ensure the church has a plan to respond and provide assistance to their congregation and the community after disaster strikes.

**Note:** In the absence of a DDRC in your district, work directly with the CDRM Team and/or your District Office as appropriate.

### **Stage 1: Planning and preparation - Before Disaster**

1. Working with the pastor, identify a church disaster team. If the pastor is not part of the team, ensure there is a process for keeping the pastor informed and updated regarding activities before, during and after a disaster.
2. Lead the church disaster team in developing a church disaster plan, and communicate the plan with your church leadership and congregation.
3. Work with CDRC and Annual Conference staff to offer UMCOR and UMVIM training to prepare for a disaster. Key trainings include Connecting Neighbors, Early Response Team member training, and UMVIM team leader training (for LTR teams). Visit the CDRM website for more information on trainings.
4. Include in your plan a policy for:
  - a. referring people in need who contact the church for help;
  - b. managing volunteers (from the church or community) who contact the church to offer help;
  - c. managing supplies and resources - including financial donations-- offered to the church.
5. Review the church plan annually or as circumstances within the church change (building addition, new pastor or other leadership, etc.)
6. To begin the planning process, consider hosting and/or attending a basic disaster ministry training provided by the CDRM Team.
7. Share the church plan with your District Office and the CDRM Team.
8. Inform your church about UMCOR and encourage participation in UMCOR Sunday.
9. Take advantage of opportunities to raise awareness in your church about the CDRM Team, UMCOR and the resources available to the local church.
10. Contact your DDRC and/or the CDRM Team if you need assistance with any part of your planning process.

### **Stage 2: Warning - Disaster Strike is Imminent**

1. Working with the church disaster team, confirm the church disaster plan.

2. Check for updates from the DDRC, District Office, the CDRM Team and/or the conference web site.
3. If appropriate, secure physical work area and, in case of need, identify alternate workspace.

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

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

1. Determine if communication capabilities have been restored.
2. Activate the church plan.
3. Identify someone to take the District Superintendent, the DDRC and/or other conference personnel on a tour of the affected area, if appropriate.
4. Per your church plan and in coordination with the CDRM Team
  - a. work with other responding organizations to identify and meet basic needs for food, water, temporary shelter, etc.;
  - b. keep a separate accounting of disaster funding received, documenting all expenditures and including receipts where possible;
  - c. track all volunteer hours and report as directed by the CDRM Team;
  - d. organize clean up teams to go into neighborhoods, if appropriate;
  - e. prepare to receive volunteers and/or work teams who may show up to help.
5. Communicate regularly with your DDRC and/or the CDRM Team about needs and activities in the affected area.
6. Refer media inquiries to the pastor or the conference Office of Connectional Relations.
7. Contact the CDRM Team as needed for information and assistance.

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

1. Monitor the conference web site and social media to see if help is needed and encourage church members to do the same.
2. Discourage your church from self-deploying.
3. Support the conference response and/or UMCOR with your prayers and financial donations.
4. Provide other support only when invited to do so.

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

1. If your church is in a disaster-affected area, work with the CDRM Team to determine the level of involvement appropriate for your church in Long-Term Recovery efforts.
2. The CDRM Team encourages churches to take an active role in the formation and ongoing work of the Long-Term Recovery efforts organization in your

community and will work with you to provide guidance and assistance in that process.

3. If it is not already part of your plan, develop a policy for:
  - a. referring people in need who contact the church;
  - b. managing volunteers who contact the church;
  - c. managing supplies and resources – including financial donations-- offered to the church.
4. If your church is not in a disaster area, determine level of involvement for your church in Long-Term Recovery efforts in affected areas (providing work teams, supplies, funds, etc.).
5. Encourage your church to support UMCOR and/or the Bishop's appeals for disaster relief.
6. Working with your pastor, church disaster team, DDRC and/or the CDRM Team, 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 a disaster.
- Conference spokesperson for the United Methodist response to a disaster.

### **Stage 1: Planning and Preparation - Before Disaster Strikes**

1. Work with District Superintendents and office of communications to develop a communication plan.
2. Collaborate with the CDRM Team on the conference plan.
3. Along with the District Superintendents and the CDRM Team, encourage churches to have a written disaster plan and to share the plan with their District Office and the CDRM Team.
4. Encourage churches to connect with the CDRM Team for training opportunities and other planning and preparation resources.
5. As appropriate, promote the connection between the churches, districts, conference and the CDRM Team.
6. Assist in raising awareness about UMCOR as appropriate.

### **Stage 2: Warning - Disaster Strike is Imminent**

1. Confirm communication plans with District Superintendents and office of communications.
2. Coordinate with Conference Trustees to secure episcopal residence.
3. Determine who is evacuating and confirm contact information.
4. Secure physical work area and, in case of need, work with conference staff leadership, and the CDRM Team to identify alternate workspace.

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

1. In cooperation with the CDRM Team and the District Office(s) determine if communication capabilities have been restored in the affected areas of the district(s).
2. In accordance with the communication plan, contact District Superintendents in affected areas for status updates: personal, churches, communities.
3. Work with District Superintendent(s) and the CDRM Team to coordinate care and resources for affected clergy and their families.
4. When it is safe to do so, visit affected areas of the conference with the District Superintendent(s) and/or other conference personnel to offer support and encouragement.
5. In collaboration with the CDRM Team, determine what support is needed from UMCOR:
  - a. request an emergency grant from UMCOR (up to \$10,000);

- b. request UMCOR personnel, if available, to assist;
  - c. no immediate assistance required.
6. If the event is large or widespread, work with the CDRM Team to determine if there is a need for a special appeal for financial donations.

**Stage 4: Long-Term Recovery**

1. Continue to provide spiritual and emotional support for the District Superintendent(s) and affected clergy and families, referring them to appropriate resources as available.
2. Encourage the District Superintendent(s) to monitor his/her emotional needs.
3. Work with the District Superintendent(s) to provide pulpit supply as soon as feasible to pastors in the hardest hit areas.
4. Encourage local church participation in Long-Term Recovery efforts in the affected areas as appropriate.
5. Communicate with the CDRM Team any unmet needs that arise or areas that may need additional resources or other assistance.
6. Work with the District Offices, the CDRM Team and appropriate conference staff to evaluate the conference response to a disaster and adjust the plan to reflect lessons learned.