

DISASTER RESPONSE
LOUISIANA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
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It is the purpose of this document to begin a conversation concerning a comprehensive plan which will guide the Louisiana Conference in its response to disasters. The plan should be broad in its scope, and it should be designed to fit well with the policies and operational procedures which are in use by The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Louisiana Conference of The UM Disaster Response, Inc.

In the book, *The Resilient City*, edited by Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella, it is asserted that “The process of rebuilding is necessary but, by itself, insufficient condition for enabling recovery and resilience ” This seems obviously to be an assumption which should be embraced by the disaster response efforts of the United Methodist Church. Ours should always be a work of spiritual care and recovery as well as the rebuilding of “bricks and mortar”. Hopefully, as we put together a comprehensive document we will look toward the restoring of communities in their totality.

Louisiana is susceptible to a wide range of disaster possibilities. In recent years we have been affected by hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, floods and numerous other kinds of disasters. In addition to these natural disasters we are often mentioned as a possible target of terrorism due to the large petro-chemical industry in our state, and the significant ports on the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

The church has an obligation and a high calling to respond to the needs of human beings when they are facing some of the most challenging times in life. We know that in times of trouble people will turn to the church for both their physical and spiritual needs. While it is impossible to plan for specific situations which disasters may bring, we can prepare ourselves in a general way so that when a disaster occurs we are able to act responsibly in the midst of chaos.

Disasters Require at Least a Four Part Response:

I. Preparation:

1. Local Church Preparation:

There should be a local Disaster Coordinator in each local congregation. These may be designated by the pastoral charge, local municipality, civil parish, geographic region or in what ever manner seems most effective. These local Disaster Coordinators will be the first line of contact for the church when a disaster strikes in that locality. They will immediately

communicate with the district superintendent and with the district coordinator and to the Executive Director of the LADRM, in order to begin the process of determination regarding the nature and gravity of the problem and to begin to develop a plan of response.

- (a) A written plan indicating how to account for the total membership of the congregation.
- (b) A plan for pastoral care for the membership of the congregation (Particularly the most vulnerable such as the elderly, infirm and those with special needs).
- (c) Information regarding church records (including financial and membership), special artifacts, etc. Where are these items stored? Who has responsibility for them? A disaster plan for the finances and financial responsibilities should be in place in the event that the normal procedures are not available. Etc.
- (d) Documentation regarding insurance coverage indicating agent, company and amount of coverage. Where are these documents stored? Who has responsibility for them?
- (e) Implement an alternate plan for condition business of the church should the normal board/committee structure be interrupted.

2. District Preparation

There should be a District Disaster Coordinator in each district within our annual conference. These may be designated by the District Superintendent and District Ministry Team. These District Disaster Coordinators will be the second line of contact for their district and local congregation within their districts. They will immediately communicate with the district superintendent and with the Executive Director of the LADRM, in order to begin the process of determination regarding the nature and gravity of the problem and to begin to develop a plan of response.

Each district will be asked to establish a team of 3-4 persons who have a passion for assisting in time of emergency. This team will be chaired by a District Disaster Coordinator who will be appointed by the district superintendent in consultation with the Executive Director of LADRM. This team will be provided necessary training. This training may be made available at the level of the annual conference and may call upon the resources of UMCOR as well as The American Red Cross and others as deemed appropriate. These task forces should in turn provide training and orientation to local congregations and other appropriate district groups.

- (a) A written plan indicating how to account for the total membership of the congregation within their district.
- (b) A plan for pastoral care for the membership of the congregations and clergy (Particularly the most vulnerable such as the elderly, infirmed and those with special needs).

- (c) Information regarding all of their churches: financial, membership and other records, special artifacts, etc. Where are these items stored? Who has responsibility for them? Etc.
- (d) Documentation regarding insurance coverage indicating agent, company and amount of coverage. Where are these documents stored? Who has responsibility for them?

3. The Annual Conference Preparation:

Each District Disaster Coordinator, along with members from the Disaster Response personal will make up the Conference Disaster Response Team. This team will be appointed by the Bishop and Provost of the Conference. The resident Bishop, the Provost, and the Director of Conference Administrative Services will serve as ex-officio as needed. The chair will be the Executive Director/CEO of LADRM, and under the governing board of the LA Conference of The UMC Disaster Response, Inc.

The responsibilities of the Conference Disaster Response Team will be the following:

- (a). Meet regularly (at least twice a year) for training, planning and updating regarding issues related to disaster response within the bounds of The Louisiana Annual Conference.
- (b). Maintain lines of communication with The American Red Cross, Louisiana VOAD, and FEMA at the state level and encourage such communication at the local level.
- (c). Provide periodic training and useful materials to district and local personnel.
- (d). In cooperation with UMCOR, The American Red Cross, FEMA and other civil and faith-based authorities, to coordinate all the work of Louisiana United Methodist Disaster Response in making a helpful and redemptive response to disaster.
- (e). When it becomes necessary for the IRIS System to send out a message to either one of our districts or to the annual conference, it will be the responsibility of the resident Bishop or the Provost to issue any and all announcements!**

In order to fully and effectively implement the disaster response plan there should be a staff member (Executive Director/CEO of LADRM) at the annual conference level. The staff member should report to the Board of Directors of LADRM; the Bishop, Provost and may have a job description which includes additional responsibilities. This person is appointed by the Bishop and Provost of the Conference and may be either lay or clergy.

There should be consultation with the conference chancellor in order to clarify any legal issues regarding the work of disaster response.

Spiritual Care Teams should be formed as one way to make sure that people receive the pastoral and spiritual support that they need in the aftermath of the disaster. While all our response should have a spiritual foundation, these teams may be made up of persons who are strong in faith, caring in spirit and who have been trained for this important need. Their work in spiritual recovery is certainly just as important as physical labor and it will have the benefit of adding the unique dimension of a faith response to the total response which the church makes to the disaster.

Many issues regarding Disaster Response cannot be planned for in an advance. However, several matters may be considered before a disaster actually occurs. Some of these issues which will be addressed by Annual Conference and District Disaster Response Teams are as follows:

EVACUATION: We understand that the responsibility for evacuation rests with the civil authorities. However, we would like to provide assistance in whatever way are possible. The Red Cross program "Brother's Keeper" is one way that this can be accomplished. In this program we would attempt to match congregations from one part of the state to others in another part. They could then work out details as to how they could be of help to each other in times of emergency. This, of course, would be handled within the established structures of those authorities who would have primary responsibility for the evacuation. Since this is essentially a Red Cross program. They would be award of our involvement in this way.

Local districts and congregations will need to be prepared for their participation in this program. Of course the program is totally voluntary. However, it will provide any congregation an opportunity to do something concrete and helpful when problems arise.

There will need to be training which will assist congregations to know the kind of equipment and supplies they might need, the kind of volunteer help which may be required and other information which will assist them as they assist others.

It is the normal rule of the Conference that our pastors and churches will follow any evacuation called for by the Governor or other civil authorities in the time of a disaster.

SHELTERS: Shelters are generally handled by America Red Cross. Many churches can be shelters. Churches should be prepared to follow and contact with America Red Cross and follow their regulations when being used as a shelter. If the availability of a facility is limited in any way this should be part of the understanding up front so that there will not be confusion later on. There should be one conference-wide agreement between The Louisiana Annual Conference and the American Red Cross regarding the use of United Methodist Churches for shelters. This agreement could take into account the reality of possible contingent circumstances, but it should serve as the basis of the working arrangement between the districts and local congregations and the local Red Cross chapters. This agreement should be signed by the resident Bishop or designate and appropriate person representing The American Red Cross.

It is not a requirement for a congregation to provide staff in order to be a shelter. However, it may well be that some of the church members may function in the role of staffing the shelter. That would be the decision of the Red Cross and would require a specific kind of training. The same kind of arrangement will be in effect regarding food.

In cases where there are church members with special skills such as M.D., nurse, counselor/Social worker, foreign language skill, etc., these may be coordinated with Red Cross.

The availability of the following should be provided to Red Cross:

1. Strike teams which are trained and prepared to move in and assist with recovery in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.
2. Volunteer teams which are trained and prepared in long-term recovery.
3. The "job Specific" types of skills which these teams possess.
4. There should be determination at the district and local church level as to whether the volunteer's teams are willing to only serve locally, or if they envision going into other areas.

This work, and the preparation for it, provides a wonderful opportunity to employ the means of grace in Christian discipleship. District Disaster Response Teams and local congregations should be sensitive to this opportunity and discover ways to grow in faith as they prepare for and function in response to disaster.

The Annual Conference Disaster Response Team should, in cooperation with the district task forces provide for the special services which may be needed regarding the following services:

1. Health Services
2. Special issues related to house fire disasters.
3. Mass care teams which receive special training from UMCOR/RED CROSS in responding to major disasters of a massive nature.
4. Disasters related to terrorism, particularly regarding the potential for terrorism against the petro-chemical industry in Louisiana.
5. To address the needs of Congregations and affiliated groups of The Annual Conference with issues of public health, i.e. H1N1.

II. RESCUE

This phase of disaster response is primarily, if not totally, in the hands of the civil authorities in the community. This phase will occur in the hours or days immediately following the disaster. In some instances this work may actually be going on during the disaster. It is during this time that authorities try to ascertain the number of casualties, assist survivors, rescue the injured, reclaim the bodies of deceased, deal with emergency problems regarding dangerous electric lines or rising water, ect.

If a church is serving as a shelter, this would be a good time for pastors, counselors and other helping professionals to be available. People may not know the fate of family members or other loved ones. They may not know when they can return homes. Indeed, they may not know if they still have a home to which to return. Pastoral/spiritual care teams, crisis counseling and other spiritual emotional support will be essential during this time. These must work within the framework of the civil authorities if the civil authorities are providing guidance.

It is also true that congregations which are long distances from the disaster may have members or constituents who have family being directly involved. Preparation should be made as to how best to respond given the specify situation at the time.

It is also during this time that volunteer teams who would be willing to go to the disaster area to assist in recovery will be making their preliminary preparations for the work that they will do. It is imperative that all groups coordinate with the District/Conference and/or civil authorities responsible for the leadership of the response.

III. EARLY RESPONSE TEAMS

Early Response Teams are trained and facilitated by the denomination-wide **United Methodist Committee on Relief**. In the Annual Conference the Director of VIM will train all ERT's. Early Response Teams do not become involved in long-term recovery, and they do not come into a conference without an invitation from the Conference Disaster Response authorities.

The purpose of ERTs is to:

1. Provide immediate assistance to those in greatest need.
2. Assure victims of the care and concern of the church.
3. Give visibility to United Methodist presence.

ERT must have training certification which is crucial to the effectiveness of their work. This training and certification, as well as supervision and deployment will be directed by the Director of VIM with consultation of Director of Disaster Response.

It is suggested that every local church put together a disaster response kit which would be available for us in time of emergency. These kits should contain such items as are deemed necessary by the conference and district disaster teams.

Previous experience has shown that two items which are most helpful in the early response to disasters are break-down showers made available for those who are working in disaster relief and large amounts of ice and water for victims as well as workers.

IV. LONG TERM RECOVERY

This is probably the most strenuous and least noticed part of disaster response. It is also the portion of disaster response in which the church may be called upon to play its most important role. Major disasters such as a large hurricane, tornado, or major flood may require years to overcome. Persons who have the least in the way of individual resources will be the ones who will need help the most and the for longest time. The church will have an opportunity to meet people in the time of great need and offer help in the name of Jesus Christ. Much of what is done will be to the “least, last and the lost” of the people in our communities. It will often receive little notice.

The Louisiana Conference of The United Methodist Disaster Response, Inc., will need to address the manner in which long term response should be managed. It may be necessary to hire a temporary local director of response who would manage the specific operation on scene.

There are normally two major areas of concerns related to long term disasters.

- (1) Rebuilding/repair/new building
- (2) Case Management

Rebuilding and other building projects normally require paid staff and volunteer teams with varying levels of competency. Case management requires professional staff, either paid or volunteer. Paid staff are the basic of most of this response.

A major and most critical part of the long term response is the plan for dealing with unmet needs. In the aftermath of major disasters and following a period of recovery, there will be a lengthy period of time in which it will be important to have an on going process of assessing the needs that are still not met. Some of these will be due to a lack of knowledge or information on the part of the person who has the need. Some of it will be because errors may have been made earlier in the process. Whatever the reason for the unmet need, there must be a team of person whose majored responsibility is to receive these requests for services and see to it that they are directed to the proper place in order to be met. The Unmet Needs Committee will be multi-agency allowing for a corporate response to those needs that have been missed.

THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

The city of New Orleans presents a unique and potentially tragic situation with regard to hurricanes and /or flooding. The city sits several feet below sea level and utilizes an elaborate system of pumps to regent flowing in normal circumstances. It has been estimated by experts from the American Red Cross that a major hurricane hitting at just the right place could flood the city up to the second and third floors of buildings in some areas.

It has also been estimated that there are in excess of 100,000 people in New Orleans with no means of personal transportation making evacuation an especially difficult problem. There is limited number of routes which could be utilized in evacuating well over one million people from the city and immediate surrounding area.

The Louisiana Conference of The United Methodist Disaster Response, Inc. and the Annual Conference leadership should address the potentially tragic situation with regard to New Orleans. Contingency plans should be developed which will have the intent of lowering the risk of human loss in the event of major disaster. The New Orleans District Disaster Response Team should be involved in a conversation.

Revision by:
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