

Sample Church Disaster Plan

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

For First United Methodist Church

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A plan designed to help the church prepare the physical facility before a disaster strikes and then respond to the needs of the local church, community and area following a disaster.

This manual has been adapted for FUMC from materials provided by the North Carolina United Methodist Church Disaster Response guidelines.

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this disaster response manual is to provide a high level of self sufficiency for First United Methodist Church (FUMC) without over extending the church's means. Following a local disaster, there are a number of tough questions to be answered when everything around the church may be seriously damaged or destroyed or necessary services are not available. The key is preparation to save valuable time and reduce frustration in the days and weeks pre and post disaster. It is the hope that being well prepared will help FUMC accomplish this.

This plan will focus on steps for each of the following areas:

1. Securing the local church facilities before a disaster strikes
2. Assisting, where needed and practical, with the congregation's preparation for a disaster
3. Disaster response with a focus on the church, community and Wilmington District

OVERVIEW OF FUMC DISASTER RESPONSE PLAN

The FUMC Disaster Response is designed to care for the victims of any type of disaster including the people in our congregation and our community, in the event a disaster strikes at home or in the surrounding area. In order to do this, we will:

1. Train FUMC volunteers in disaster response, from early responder phase through recovery phase.
2. Designate the church as a point of contact for assistance after any disaster either natural, environmental, man made or economic as long as it is structurally safe and out of danger from other influences of the disaster.
3. Immediately follow up with our congregation, identify their needs, and offer assistance from the emergency phase through recovery, paying special attention to the needs of senior citizens, persons with physical disabilities, children and youth.
 - a. This means FUMC needs to have immediate access to families who live on specific streets or within a set of zip codes.
 - b. We will also have a calling process with assignments, questions to ask, and instructions on how to report back the results of personal contact.
4. Relay information to the FUMC pastors about the needs and resources that FUMC can provide (who passes it to the District Superintendent and the DS then passes it on to the conference).

5. Organize volunteer teams to help feed, shelter, offer pastoral counseling, and repair teams to help secure homes in the surrounding community.
6. Cooperate with emergency response personnel and damage assessors by passing along information about needs in particular areas.
7. Cooperate with NC Conference personnel and MERCI.
8. Become a spiritual and resource hub of the community.
9. If not impacted directly, FUMC may be a center of mission coordination, funding, distribution, and sending volunteer in mission teams as needed.

CONGREGATION IN RESPONSE

Church Organizational Roles and Areas

Suggested support teams within the church to enable effective response:

Emergency Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination with pastor, church leaders, local governmental agencies • Communications
Congregational Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact with every household in the congregation identifying needs and status
Administrative Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep records of service and assistance giving by family received? • Keep records of congregation needs and status • Donation control • Food and supplies
Pastoral Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer vigil, crisis intervention and counseling
Clean-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer coordination • Clean Up, salvage, and repairs
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setup for cooking and food distribution, water, sanitation, rest and recuperation

Staff Support of Pastors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insure the safety of the pastor and family both immediately following the disaster and during recovery.
Church Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security of church property, insurance, damage/status of church property, place of worship, coordination of repairs to church property.

Emergency Coordinator

- Notify pastor and teams of emergency situation.
- Coordinate with all assistants and teams available.
- Coordinate with all local government and enforcement agencies.
- Keep pastor informed.
- Insure shepherds have seen to their flock and oversee administrative evacuation.
- Provide a clearinghouse for information.
- Provide guidance and support to all teams and pastor during event.
- Oversee formation of Disaster Response Committee with a Chairperson

Congregational Contact

- Make contact with every household in the congregation
- Identify needs, status and situation

Administrative Coordinator

- Insure a smooth as possible operation at all times.
- Prepare and keep up to date preplans in adequate supply.
- Keep a journal of all activities.
- Help manage financial records and see to availability of funds.
- See to safekeeping of church records.
- Maintain member and shepherd records.
- Maintain video record of church and all related property inside and outside.
- Provide immediate post disaster video for insurance, historical record and public relations or call for aid.

Supplies

- Maintain pre disaster supplies.
- Manage incoming supply trucks post disaster.
- Implement a system of distributing goods and services.
- Keep a journal.

Pastoral Care

- Prayer vigil for the recovery, naming congregational persons and needs
- Crisis intervention
- Counseling
- Identifying food and ongoing needs
- Follow-up with homebound persons

Clean Up

- Assemble teams to clean up and put back in use all church facilities.
- Assemble teams to help clean up the community paying close attention to the elderly.
- Coordinate work teams with local agencies.
- Report any dangerous or emergency situations that arise.

Support

- Setup water distribution.
- Setup area for rest and recuperation.
- Setup other areas as needed

Staff Support for Pastors

- Insure the safety and housing of the pastor and family.
- Provide and insist on days off and time away for pastor and family for personal recovery and to guard against burnout.

Church Property

- Security of church property
- Coordinate with insurance companies
- Assess damage/status of church property
- Secure temporary place of worship
- Coordination of repairs to church property after insurance assessment

FUMC will follow the guidelines and directives of all local authorities. We will keep a journal of everything done; record the events with picture and videos. These will be important documentation of the disaster and may be useful in obtaining more help and materials when needed. *We will remember in all that we do, that God calls us to serve with our hands and hearts, following the lead of the Holy Spirit as a witness to God's love in the world.*

Identify People in the Church and Community

Before a hurricane (disaster) is eminent, people in the church and in the community will be identified by their ability to help, their needs and frailties rather than just where they live whether or not they go to FUMC.

1. A secure list of people and their addresses will be prepared, including a city street map or a county road map with a numerical or alphabetical code to mark their residences or places of business.
2. List the resources that these people have and are willing to share during times of emergency or need. This list will include things like 4 wheel drive vehicles, tractors, heavy equipment, chain saws, food supply, generators, water supplies, hand and power tools, commercial and/or HAM radio equipment, technical skills, mechanical skills and other professional skills such as those who can provide basic labor

Information such as the following will be available but treated as confidential:

- correct addresses and directions to residence and business
- any major health problems, i.e. insulin dependent diabetic
- telephone and cellular numbers
- radio frequencies and call signs
- sort list by last name, by address, by resources, by location, by skills

Example:

Billy Bob Smith
4141 Hy Tyde
Hampstead, NC
Single, 50's, Fisherman,
4WD, Welder, Chains Saws,
Generator, Boats, Ice Machine

Special Care for Persons with Special Needs

Special Care ministries, ChristCare or Stephens Ministers, provide shepherding within FUMC. In a crisis, they may wish to expand their focus to include persons beyond the congregation. Their list of congregation needy includes persons confined to their bed or restricted by a wheelchair or walker and persons who would need assistance in providing more than basic care for themselves. The care givers are assigned the position of shepherd to look after the needy in times of crisis including seeing that they are evacuated to where they can be cared for during a disaster. Additional shepherds may need to be recruited to help with grocery shopping, doctor visits, medicine management, keeping the home safe and any other tasks that the person can no longer do for themselves. The Shepherding List takes a certain amount of responsibility off of the pastor and emergency coordinator by knowing that a responsible person is looking after those who will need caring for until family members can take over or aid in evacuation.

Identify Needs Within the Congregation

The first level of response is to the FUMC congregation, then the community and then the state. The existing church directory is a list of the congregation and will be used by the FUMC Disaster Response Team to contact all of the congregation and then report back to the Disaster Response Committee Chairperson regarding the specific needs following a disaster.

1. When hurricane warnings are issued for this area, it is recommended to contact the congregation before the storm with the purpose of identifying who will be evacuated and who will stay in the area.
2. After a storm or other disaster FUMC will concentrate on person-to-person contacts to identify conditions and needs. The calling process:
 - a. Sections of the membership list are assigned to a leader who then contacts those persons on his/her list.
 - b. If the person called does not answer, the caller continues until someone is reached and the list is complete. If someone should definitely be at home and there is no answer, the caller should go check on that person or family. It is important to keep calling until all have been reached.
 - c. Record the person's response, noting if there are injuries, crises, and special needs and if the home is habitable. Use the following questions to glean a better understanding of urgency and needs:
 - i. Do you have any damage to your home?
 - ii. Do you need help? What are your needs?
 - iii. Can you continue living in your home? Do you have a place to stay?
 - iv. Are your driveway and doors clear?
 - v. It is recommended that you contact your insurance company and take photos?
 - vi. Do you know what agencies to contact for help?
 - vii. If you are okay, are you willing to offer help to others and if so, what type?
 - d. Contact the emergency post by phone or in person immediately and report your findings.

Respond to Urgent Needs

We will be prepared as early responders, to organize volunteers that can help with debris clearance, temporary safety repairs, roof coverings, food supplies, and other needs as they arise. FUMC owns a disaster response trailer that will eventually be stocked with tools, supplies of tarps and nails, generators, mud pumps, sump pumps, ladders and various other items that will be necessary for emergency response.

For absolute minimum preparation, the trailer will be stocked with:

- 20 each 16' X 20' tarps, 10' X 12' tarps 4 large boxes of button cap nails
- 1000' of 1/4" nylon rope
- 6 claw hammers
- 2 wrecking bars
- 2 sledgehammers
- 2 each 41b. Hammers \
- 4 rough-cut saws
- 4 wedges
- 2 each 8' step ladders
- 2 each 14' extension ladder

All ladders will be made of fiberglass for safety reasons. Enough canned, non-perishable food and bottled water for four people for three days should be stored (checked every 6 months). This would be considered a minimum amount of food and water just to care for work teams if the team leaves the local area.

Volunteer teams will be organized and routed on assignments in response to the needs of the congregation and in collaboration with the District UMC churches through the Wilmington District Disaster Response Task Force. Under no circumstances will church teams be sent until the NC Emergency Management gives clearance for volunteers to be on site (i.e., downed power lines are no longer a safety issue).

Volunteers can bring their own chain saws for debris removal, but each volunteer must operate their own chain saw. FUMC will not assume responsibility for persons using this type of equipment.

Volunteers must sign a waiver of liability and medical information forms, leaving a copy of their driver's license and health insurance cards with a designated FUMC staff member prior to being dispatched on a volunteer team.

PROTECTING FUMC FACILITIES AND DATA

The following text on protecting FUMC facilities and data is the recommendation of the NC Conference.

Protection of the church is imperative. It is not possible to bodily protect every board

and window of the church building, but steps to protect important records and items within the building can be taken. As for protecting the building, MERCI recommends that unless FUMC is the only structure left standing or there is some well defined strategic reason to designate it as such, one of the most important rules to follow is that *FUMC should not be designated as an evacuation shelter or relocation center.*

Trustee Responsibility for Church Property

The Board of Trustees and the pastors are responsible for the local church facilities. However, it is important to assign specific responsibility for each of these areas and to protect vital church records.

- Other than the pastors, who is responsible for securing the doors and windows and shutting off the gas, water and electricity?
- Who is responsible for gathering records or valuables?
- Who is responsible for keeping inventory and insurance up to date?
- Who will check for damages after a storm? If the church is damaged, where will you meet for worship?
- Can you evacuate your committee?
- How are church records protected? Is computer data backed up and regularly stored in a safe off-site location?

Use of FUMC Property as a Shelter

If FUMC is offered to be a designated emergency shelter, an approved agency, such as the American Red Cross, will first need to inspect the building and facilities and either accept or reject it as a shelter. If it is accepted as a shelter and if there is a disaster in the area the approving agency will take control of the church facility and after the imminent danger has passed, volunteers will take over and they will operate as needed from the church.

It is important to think ahead on this decision because it is possible that everything will be removed from the sanctuary for conversion to a warehouse, a hospital, a clinic, administrative facilities or even an emergency nursing home. FUMC will no longer have control of anything until the controlling agency relinquishes control of the facilities. FUMC leadership needs to be very cautious about letting any agency have control over the church building and grounds under our sphere of responsibility. Therefore it is strongly recommended that FUMC not be used as an emergency shelter.

Securing Church Records

Records must be protected if there is a warning with time for gathering certain items. Computerized records should be backed up each time they are updated; three different people should maintain at least three copies of the backed up files. If a laptop computer is available and has adequate memory, download files and records so that you have an active record system that can be set up in a remote site. Keep in mind the church privacy policy.

If the church system is destroyed, the importance of this simple protective measure will make an important difference. Some disasters give no warning and no area is exempt from possible destruction. This stands true even for those who live in an area that has never been affected. Natural disasters know no direction or boundaries.

Securing Other Assets

If there is prior warning of hurricane and flooding, protect more than church files:

- Place important books and records that are too bulky to remove on top of the highest furniture available that will not easily float or upset in high water.
- Put computers and other movable electronics on the highest object that is sturdy and will not float easily if they cannot be evacuated. This will give a marginal chance of saving them if the water does not get over 2 or 3 feet deep.
- Cover everything that is placed for protection with 6-8 mil plastic. Use several layers in case one or two are pierced or torn. Use duct tape to seal and secure the plastic.
- As a last measure, place a tarp over protected items to add one last measure of protection in case the roof is lost or windows break.
- Raise anything of value as high off the floor as possible. This includes furniture, Bibles, hymnals and anything of value that is easily movable.
- **The altar cross, candles, chalice etc. should be evacuated with the pastor or other designated person. These items will be necessary in setting up a worship center if the church is destroyed or heavily damaged.**

Trustees will not take chances in occupying a damaged church building until it has been inspected and have written verification that it is safe to occupy the building. Remember, the building is only a church house. The people, the Body of Christ, are the church.

Insurance policies on the building, contents and property should be reviewed and updated annually. Many items of definite value are purchased and never added to

inventory lists or covered by insurance. There should be an inventory of everything that has any value. Make a photographic inventory with a still or video camera. Keep three copies and give them to three different responsible persons.

FUMC AS A SPIRITUAL CENTER

If the church is not heavily damaged and is safe to occupy, it must remain open as a spiritual center. Even if the whole area is demolished, there will be a need to conduct some sort of Sunday Service. It may be for prayer, for gathering to see who and what is still standing, for information passing and for just what ever is necessary. But, the service must be held in the face of all odds, the people will need it and they will depend on it.

The church will become the local spiritual center as well as the focal point of any response/recovery efforts. The churches outside the affected area will be the rallying point for volunteers, supplies, administration, and prayer vigils. Keep the doors open to the spiritual refuge.

In the event that the church facilities are declared unsafe for any reason, the pastor and available members of the Board of Trustees will select a site where worship can be held. If the church should fall victim to the disaster and not be safe for occupancy or remain only as a pile of holy rubble, at least find a tree, tent or awning to gather under. Set up a homemade altar and make a cross to adorn it. The pastor and the victims will need this Holy Ground to turn to at this time.

Take the time before an emergency or some disaster strikes to covenant with other churches, including other denominations, so that you may enjoy that cooperative atmosphere in the wake of some disaster. The covenant with other churches will make your program stronger and more efficient especially when outside help is days or weeks away.

DISASTERS – NATURAL AND HUMAN GENERATED

We are not invulnerable to disaster. Depending on our geographical location, we can suffer from snow, ice, flood, extreme heat, hurricane, tornado, tsunami, earthquake, and strong wind. We must also consider the possibility of forest fires, hazardous materials and nuclear accidents, electrical blackouts, droughts and the results of disasters such as layoffs, plant closings, and loss of wages due to disasters. This program is not just about hurricanes and storing up some groceries, a radio, some

water and a few cans of beans. This program is about response to the neighborhood and community when a disaster strikes. It makes no difference if disaster affects 10 people or a million people, the basic preparatory methods and initial response and information gathering are the same.