

## A Sample Disaster Response Plan

This sample plan serves as a starting point for Hartsville District churches which are developing plans for disaster response. You will find notes (in boxes) with further suggestions for your consideration. As you develop a specific plan for your congregation and your community, you may use any of the language found in this sample plan.

### DISASTER RESPONSE PLAN

For

\_\_\_\_\_ CHURCH

IN THE HARTSVILLE DISTRICT, SOUTH CAROLINA CONFERENCE

SUBMITTED TO THE CHARGE CONFERENCE [Date] \_\_\_\_\_

### INTRODUCTION

Disaster Response and Recovery is a vital part of the mission of \_\_\_\_\_ Church. We are called to love one another. One of the ways we can show the love and the hands, feet and face of Jesus is through the efforts we make in the community when times are hard. This plan allows us to lower the risks and dangers of a disaster (mitigation). Our plan also helps to guide us as we prepare for a disaster and respond to the conditions which will follow a disaster. We want to protect our facilities, and we want to protect and share Christ's love with members of our congregation and the people of our community. With this plan we will partner with other churches, with our district and conference and with local, state and federal agencies to be a loving witness in time of disaster.

### POSSIBLE THREATS

The threats considered most likely for \_\_\_\_\_ Church and our surrounding community are:

**Suggestion:** List the five or six which seem most likely. Then list other threats which were considered. Here are some potential disasters:

|                             |         |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Hurricane or tropical storm | Tornado |
|-----------------------------|---------|

Lightning  
 Nuclear power plant failure  
 Structure fire  
 Hazardous material spill – fixed facility  
 Hazardous material spill – transportation  
 Dam failure  
 Flooding/Heavy rains  
 Terrorism

Earthquake  
 Wildfire  
 Severe winter storm  
 Drought  
 Civil disorder  
 Motor vehicle accidents  
 Aircraft crash

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**Suggestion:** Your church may wish to identify various other church officers and assign to them some of the roles and responsibilities listed below. For example, the music director may be given responsibilities to protect musical equipment in advance of or following a storm or fire.

### TRUSTEES

Along with our pastor, the Trustees are responsible for the property of \_\_\_\_\_ United Methodist Church. The Trustees will help in the development and updating of our Disaster Response Plan. With guidance from our plan and from the Disaster Response Coordinator, the Trustees will be responsible for mitigation – all the efforts we take to lessen the effects of a possible disaster upon the people of our church and its facilities and ministries. Our Trustees have other responsibilities following a disaster. They are listed below under “Preparedness,” “Response” and “Relief and Recovery.”

### DISASTER RESPONSE COORDINATOR (DRC)

**Suggestion:** A complete job description for a Disaster Response Coordinator is attached to this sample plan as Addendum A. Your church may make changes and use it as seems best.

### PASTOR

Our pastor leads us in our response to disasters in our congregation and community and provides appropriate spiritual care for those who have been victimized by the disaster. Our pastor works closely with the DRC and the Board of Trustees to ensure that an excellent disaster response plan is developed and followed.

## MITIGATION

Our pastor and the Finance Committee will develop procedures to back up all financial files and membership records on a weekly if not daily basis. The DRC will consult with the Finance Committee twice a year to ensure that these procedures are being followed.

As indicated in the *Book of Discipline* the Trustees will keep inventories of church property and maintain adequate casualty insurance.

Once a year the Board of Trustees will review our facilities in order to mitigate the impact of possible disasters and will make changes and adjustments as warranted.

## PREPAREDNESS

**Suggestion:** If your church houses a daycare or similar childcare facility, the director should identify a tornado-safe room in the building and rehearse evacuation procedures on a regular basis.

The pastor and head usher will develop plans for how the church will respond to emergencies or situations of imminent danger during worship services. They will train the ushers in the procedures and review these plans twice a year.

In case a tropical storm or hurricane is imminent, the Trustees will secure all windows and doors and shut off all utilities as deemed pertinent.

The church will partner with a local individual or agency to provide CPR training at least once a year.

Our pastor and disaster response Coordinator will keep on hand documents which provide the roles, procedures and contact information for other local agencies. This includes government and non-government agencies, the Hartsville District and the South Carolina Conference.

The pastor and DRC will learn and be ready to utilize the chain of command for district & conference disaster response as well as local civil authorities.

The DRC, pastor and Board of Trustees chair will explore the possibility of our facilities being used by the American Red Cross or other agencies for post-disaster

sheltering or feeding. If an agreement is reached, then these persons will review it on a timely basis.

As part of this plan, the pastor and Church Council will develop and maintain a phone calling tree so that information can be disseminated in advance of a disaster such as a storm or as soon as possible following the disaster.

The pastor and the Disaster Response Coordinator will develop and maintain a list of special-needs or homebound members of the congregation. The pastor or designated members of the congregation will make contact with these individuals or their care-givers in advance of a storm to ascertain their plans and learn how the church might respond to their needs.

## **RESPONSE**

During and following a disaster, the pastor, DRC and other leaders of our congregation will follow this plan as closely as possible, understanding that every situation is unique. We will abide by the chains of command which are found in our plan and which are used by government agencies and the district and conference.

In time of disaster, our pastor and church members will first address the safety and personal needs of themselves and their families and do so before addressing the church's and community's needs.

As soon as possible following a disaster the Trustees will assess damage, report it to the insurance company, the DRC, the pastor and the Hartsville District office.

We will use our phone tree to follow up on the special needs members of our congregation. (See above.)

In case a disaster makes our church facilities unsafe for use, the pastor will locate and announce an alternative location for worship.

We will follow all previously agreed-upon understandings with the American Red Cross or other agencies immediately following a disaster.

Once conditions allow us to do, we will conduct a community canvass of damage, needs, etc. and convey our findings to the district office.

## **RELIEF AND RECOVERY**

Our pastor will maintain the church's regular worship schedule following a disaster, using an alternative location if necessary and hold one or more special worship services to address the spiritual needs of the congregation, the community and those taking part in disaster relief.

As we help our community to return to normal, our pastor is expected to take regular breaks from pastoral responsibilities in order to ensure his/her own physical, mental and spiritual health.

If a representative of the American Red Cross, UMVIM or other church agency, or a government agency requests use of our facilities following a disaster for the purpose of relief work, our pastor, DRC and/or Board of Trustees chairperson will determine the appropriate response and establish understandings which will guide the use of our facilities.

As relief assistance is provided to our church and community, our pastor and DRC will maintain communications with the district office.

If the assistance of an Emergency Response Team (ERT) of South Carolina Conference UMVIM seems warranted, the pastor will communicate this need to the appropriate conference official.

### **DISASTER RESPONSE MEETINGS**

Our Disaster Response Coordinator, Board of Trustees chair, Finance chair and pastor will meet at least twice a year to review this disaster response plan and confirm its implementation at all levels.

If the Church Council elects a Disaster Response Committee, the committee will be accountable to the Charge Conference through the Church Council. The Board of Trustees will elect a representative to serve on the committee, and the DRC will serve as chairperson. The committee will meet with the pastor at least twice a year, review this plan and update it as warranted.

## ADDENDUM A

### Local Church Disaster Response Coordinator Suggested Job Description

The Disaster Response Coordinator of \_\_\_\_\_ United Methodist Church plays a critical role in leading our congregation to prepare for and respond to a variety of manmade and natural disasters. The Coordinator works alongside the pastor and members of the congregation, as well as United Methodist volunteers and staff on the District, Conference and General Church levels. Additionally, the Coordinator helps the congregation to be aware of and share the resources provided by other agencies such as the American Red Cross and local and state disaster response agencies.

Duties and responsibilities for the Coordinator include:

- Work with the pastor, Board of Trustees and Church Council to develop and adopt a disaster response plan for the congregation.
- Keep the plan before the congregation and Church Council. Review it annually and make modifications when they are needed.
- Keep supplies, resources and lists up-to-date as called for in the plan.
- Develop and maintain lists of persons in the congregation who are certified for AED, CPR and/or First Aid.
- Learn the disaster response procedures and plans of the South Carolina Conference and of state and state-wide agencies such as the American Red Cross.
- Maintain communications with the District Disaster Response Coordinator, with the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator and attend training meetings as they are made available.
- Recruit members of the congregation to take part in UMVIM teams and other teams which respond to disasters in other communities.
- Arrange for members of the congregation to receive training in disaster response.
- Make contact with the county's disaster/emergency response officer. Learn how the church might effectively relate to the county's staff responsible for emergency response.
- Consider the development of a Disaster Response Committee for the church. If it seems best to form the committee, bring a proposal to the pastor and the Committee on Nominations and Development. Chair the committee if one is formed.
- Be accountable to the Charge Conference through the Church Council.

*Provided by the Hartsville District Committee on Disaster Response, 3-20-2012*

**ADDENDUM B****Questions to answer as you develop your church's disaster response plan:**

1. Has your congregation elected a Disaster Response Coordinator (DRC) and given him/her a list of duties and responsibilities?
2. Will your congregation elect a Disaster Response Committee? What will its duties be? How often will it meet with the pastor and representative of the Board of Trustees in order to review and update your disaster response plan?
3. Do you have adequate insurance for all church facilities, including the parsonage, and do you know how to contact your insurance carrier?
4. How will you contact your congregation, particularly if power or phone service is disrupted?
5. How will you help your congregation to evacuate or prepare if a storm threatens your area?
6. How will you secure and back up your church records?
7. How will your church be a "mission station"?
8. How will you partner with neighboring churches?
9. How will you tell your story?
10. Clergy, is your personal emergency contact information (including your cell number and your e-mail address) up-to-date with the conference and your district office and available to all members of the congregation?
11. How are you and your congregation preparing for the next disaster?