

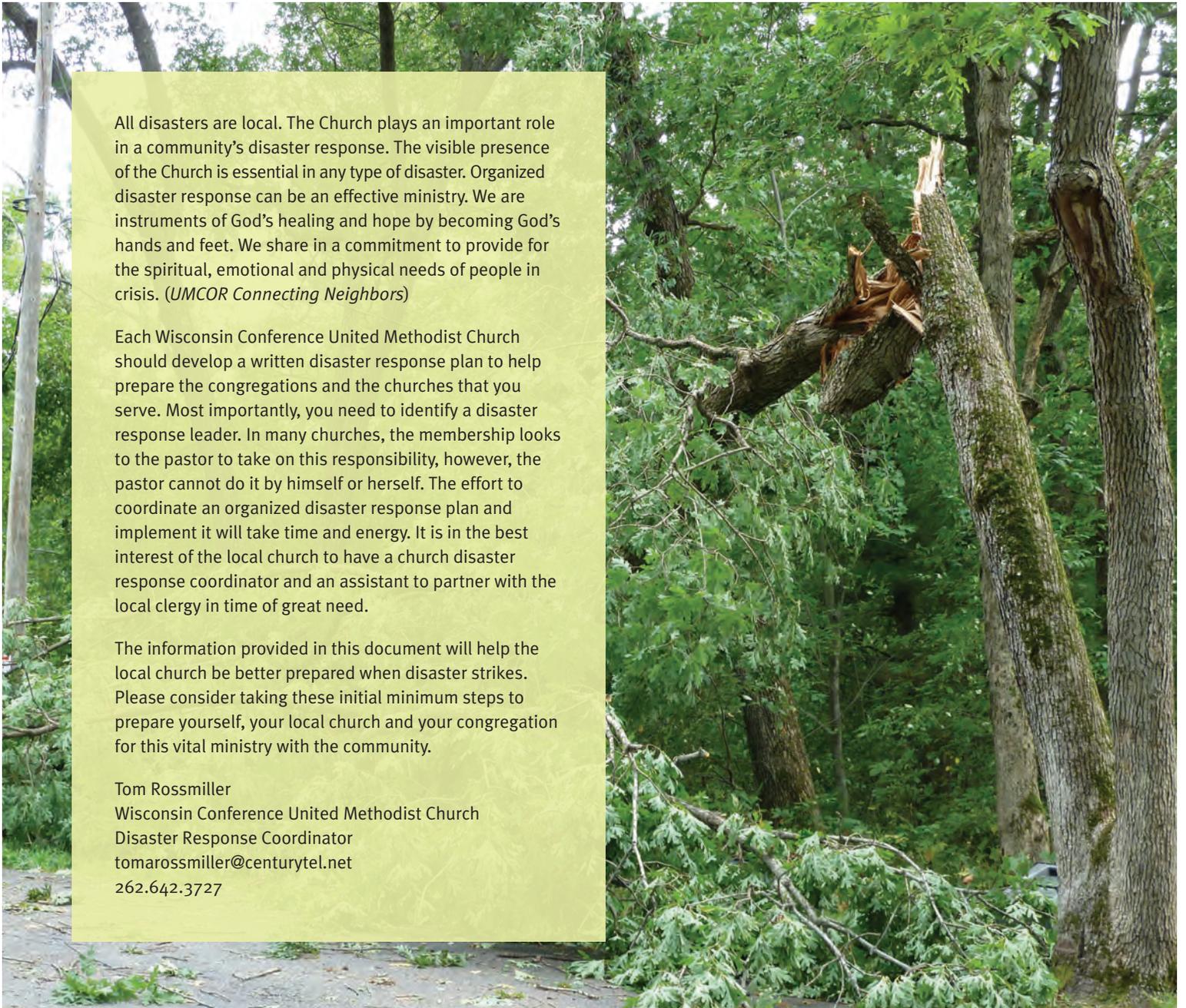
Local Church Planning Guide for Disaster Preparedness

All disasters are local. The Church plays an important role in a community's disaster response. The visible presence of the Church is essential in any type of disaster. Organized disaster response can be an effective ministry. We are instruments of God's healing and hope by becoming God's hands and feet. We share in a commitment to provide for the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of people in crisis. (*UMCOR Connecting Neighbors*)

Each Wisconsin Conference United Methodist Church should develop a written disaster response plan to help prepare the congregations and the churches that you serve. Most importantly, you need to identify a disaster response leader. In many churches, the membership looks to the pastor to take on this responsibility, however, the pastor cannot do it by himself or herself. The effort to coordinate an organized disaster response plan and implement it will take time and energy. It is in the best interest of the local church to have a church disaster response coordinator and an assistant to partner with the local clergy in time of great need.

The information provided in this document will help the local church be better prepared when disaster strikes. Please consider taking these initial minimum steps to prepare yourself, your local church and your congregation for this vital ministry with the community.

Tom Rossmiller
Wisconsin Conference United Methodist Church
Disaster Response Coordinator
tomarossmiller@centurytel.net
262.642.3727





FACILITIES

Insurance

Does your insurance policy:

- Meet the minimum requirements of your denomination or mortgage holder? When was the last estimate on the value of your church property? How accurate are the figures? Are you insured for purchase price or replacement value?
- Cover the cost of recent additions or high value items, such as stained glass windows?
- Cover the cost of temporary rental of another facility in the event your church is severely damaged or destroyed?
- Cover the cost of temporary rental housing for the clergy staff in the event that it is severely damaged or destroyed?

Loss of the clergy residence does not relieve the church of the responsibility for housing the clergy. Your church policy may not cover the cost of replacing the clergy's personal items. (Pastors should acquire their own renter's policy. Also, a renter's policy may not cover the pastor's personal items in the church.)

Facilities Protection

In the event of a disaster (severe storms), you should:

- Turn off the utilities, if ample time is available.
- Cover the windows, if ample time is available.
- Take down or secure any exterior swinging fixtures, such as signs or lights.
- Secure loose items around the church.

A quick survey should be made to identify the types of items that need to be secured.

Any trees or branches that pose a direct threat to church property should be removed.

Most of the damage from storms comes from fallen trees or branches. No one should check on the church during the course of a storm. Members and the pastor should remain indoors at home or in a shelter.

CHURCH RECORDS

Among the most valuable assets of your church organization are your records. Safeguarding them should be a matter of simple routine and limited expense. If your records are not kept safe, trying to restore them after a disaster will seem like a disaster in itself.

Here are some simple things to do now:

- Put your vital records in a fireproof and waterproof safe. This should include all historical records.
- It is best to not keep any money in the safe, and to clearly mark the safe "for church records only".

- Make sure the safe is big enough to hold the kind of oversize books that are normally used. Blue prints and/or construction drawings are a vital part of the records that a church should protect from fire and water damage.
- Use a safe deposit box for those records that are not used frequently, such as deeds, insurance papers, mortgages.
- If your church uses a computer for its finances or other vital functions, be sure your treasurer backs up his or her work and takes the disk home, and returns information to the church if kept at home.
- Store the regular membership and other specialized data in the safe, in either hard copy or digital files. The secretary should take backups home, or house them in another safe space.

RESUMPTION OF SERVICES

The survival of the church after a disaster very often depends on how quickly the congregation(s) can meet together after the event. Failure to assemble for an extended span of time may make it very difficult for the church to retain its identity.

Among the highest priorities are:

- The resumption of worship
- Assembly in small groups
- Continuation of key outreach and service ministries
- Ongoing nurture of the active membership and participants

To this end, determine who will:

- Locate a suitable alternative meeting space, such as a school, and get an estimate of what it would cost to rent. If possible, get an informal arrangement that would allow your church to relocate quickly. Check with the judicatory for its guidance. Consider a reciprocal agreement with another local church to share a facility.
- Provide pastoral services in the event that the pastor and/or the pastor's family is directly impacted by the disaster.
- See what teachers will be available for Sunday school. It may be necessary to combine classes temporarily.
 - Confirm that small group leaders are able to meet in alternate locations.
 - Confirm that ministry leaders will continue to function in alternate locations.
- Publicize the fact that church will be held at an alternative time or place when necessary.

Many people will be listening to the radio or local television station(s). Generally, this is the best method for getting the word out. Ensure the congregation knows where to get broadcasted information, and have at least two local stations communicate the message. If the church has a website, place a statement with pertinent information on the home page.

SPECIAL MINISTRIES

Disasters offer the church opportunities to minister both to members and to the community. While churches may not be involved with all of the following, they should at least consider which ministries they are willing to perform.

Contact your District Superintendent for guidance and support, and be as specific as possible about priority needs. Your Disaster Response Office may also be able to assist several churches that combine their disaster response efforts. We can bring resources and training to churches that request them.

When planning, determine who will:

- Check on members to assess who has been especially affected.
 - It is always a good idea to have a strategy and process to call all the shut-ins before the storm and promise to follow up afterward.
 - In the event of an evacuation, contact the local County Emergency Management office to tell them of those needing special transportation.
- Investigate whether or not the church can be used as a shelter.
 - The decision to do so must be made before a disaster hits.
 - The decision will require some research and planning.
 - Your local Emergency Management office, social service organizations, the Red Cross or the local Salvation Army office may be willing to help you with requirements.
- Work with the pastor to identify special needs in the community. The assistance provided by the church should not be limited to church members.
- Prepare to expand or develop a distribution system for food, water or other items.
 - This may involve joint planning with other churches. Remember, there will be no lack of need for critical items.
 - It is most important to develop the strategy and process, identify early volunteers and facilities, and prepare to receive other volunteers from outside the area.
- Trustees should decide if the church can be used to house volunteers.
 - This is a trustee decision; do not leave this decision to a well-meaning member or the pastor.
 - This decision should be made prior to the disaster.
 - Plans should be made for minimizing the impact to local church programs.
 - Before you accept them, ensure that volunteer teams are totally self-sufficient with food, water, and bedding.
 - If your church is willing to house teams, notify your district offices and your other disaster relief partners.

- Trustees should decide if the church may be used as a coordination point for church disaster relief projects.
 - This may entail the use of the church's office, or setting up a new office, funded by the local church.
 - The church's relief programs often last from six months to a year after the event.
 - This may include administration of grants and coordination of volunteer teams coming into the area.
 - Usually this is not disruptive to church programs, and does much to enhance the church's reputation in the community.
 - Remember, before agreeing to these activities, check with your local clergy.
- Organize a church volunteer team to assist disaster victims outside your immediate area.
 - Provide adequate training for your people to be an effective witness to the healing power of God. Make sure they remember this is ministry as well as disaster response and recovery.
 - Sending individuals or a team from your local church can be an excellent way to focus your ministry.
 - The team's experience will also help your local church prepare for a disaster in your community.
 - Remember: a team consisting of untrained "do gooders" can be as bad as having no team.
- Engage in any of the above programs with other groups, associations and agencies as partners, and be sure to get the agreement in writing.
 - Agreements should speak to liability, reimbursement, repairs, etc.
 - Don't be shy about running the agreement by your attorneys before signing it.

FUTURE PLANNING

Review the plan annually and reappoint those who will be responsible in the event of a disaster.

Taken from *Community Arise*



Who to Call at the Conference in the Event of a Disaster

Conference Center	888-240-7328	North East District Office	920-991-0548
South West District Office	608-837-0056	Director of Connectional Ministry	888-240-7328
North West District Office	715-835-5181	Director of Communication	888-240-7328
North Central District Office	715-835-5181	Disaster Response Coordinator	262-642-3727
South East District Office	414-271-5080		

DISASTER RESPONSE SIMPLE STEPS GUIDELINE

(Please post this chart.)

ASSESS NEED FOR RESPONSE

