

**THE ASSEMBLY
NATIONAL DISASTER RELIEF FUND TRUSTEES
A NATIONAL APPROACH TO DISASTER RESPONSE
through Recovery Programs and Funding Guidelines for those
Programs.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The 'Disaster Relief Fund of the Uniting Church in Australia' (hereinafter referred to as 'the Fund') was established by the Assembly of the Uniting Church so that the church as a whole could provide assistance in disaster situations within Australia in order to assist in the recovery of individuals and communities. The Fund is administered by a group of trustees appointed by the Assembly Standing Committee. The Administration Services Manager of the National Assembly Secretariat is Secretary of the Trust.

2. BACKGROUND

From its inception in June 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia has had a deep commitment to working with people and assisting communities where there is need. This commitment has been demonstrated to the people of Australia by the vast network of community service programs and agencies conducted by the Uniting Church.

In addition, the Uniting Church has developed a significant role in supporting and caring for those individuals and communities within Australia who have been affected by natural disaster, or by the catastrophes caused by human evil or mismanagement. This has been built upon the experience gained when the United Church in North Australia played such a significant role following Cyclone Tracey in Darwin in December 1974.

In every State, the church has responded to the particular needs of people affected by natural or 'event' disasters. Although the responses have differed according to the needs presented in the situation, the level of preparedness, and the philosophies and attitudes operating in each synod, there has been a growing awareness within the church that such occasions call for the church to provide ministry and care for communities in distress.

As a consequence, the Uniting Church has developed a great deal of experience and expertise in this area of concern, with both formal and informal involvement in every major Australian disaster since the inception of the Uniting Church in 1977.

The Uniting Church in Australia has also conducted a number of national conferences, with the intention of sharing the experiences of the different synods, and raising awareness within the whole church. The first of these was held in 1982 in Adelaide. Since 1991 they have become an annual event. It was recognised at the 1991 conference that there was a need to: prepare a paper about the role of the Uniting Church in disasters, to develop guidelines upon which the disaster response of the Uniting Church is based and to establish the principles to guide the distribution of funds.

3. PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY RECOVERY FROM DISASTER

- 3.1** Disaster recovery is an area of social concern related to the long-term effects of disaster on individuals and communities who have had that experience. Historically, planning for disaster response had focussed on immediate response and relief activities. The orientation was toward physical relief and the immediate response in the aftermath. Even the recent attention to the mental health needs of affected people were thought of as a short-term matter. One of the consequences of this approach was to perceive 'recovery' as an activity which commenced once the immediate response activity or program had concluded.
- 3.2** Experience has shown that recovery commences from the moment of impact. From that time, people who are affected by disaster or trauma require information, resources and personal support. Thus, recovery is an activity which proceeds concurrently with, and not consequent to, normal disaster response activities.
- 3.3** Recovery, however, involves more than merely replacing what has been lost or rehabilitating individual people who have been traumatised. It is a complex social process which involves all levels of the community – individuals, groups, and organisations. It is also a developmental process whereby communities are assisted to attain a proper level of functioning.
- 3.4** Recovery from disaster involves an enabling and supportive process based on the provision of information, resources, support and specialist services. It has become increasingly clear that recovery at both a personal and a community level may take many years. The planning of involvement in disaster recovery is a long-term process requiring a commitment in time, not of weeks, but of months and years.
- 3.5** The aim of recovery cannot be understood any longer just as a matter of a return to the past, or a getting back to what is 'normal'. Everyone involved and every community are changed by the experience of the event. Indeed, because the experience is so intense, disaster can become the context for people not only to find new meaning in their personal lives but also to discover a heightened sense of community. At such a time, it is important to have people with experience in and understanding of these

processes available to act as facilitators to assist and support those who are working with affected communities.

3.6 In summary, recovery is now understood as a complex and dynamic process which involves:-

- 1 recognition of the changing needs in communities,
- 2 an awareness that individuals and communities are changed by the event,
- 3 the integration of a wide range of services and agencies with an acknowledgement of the importance of operating within existing local networks and structures,
- 4 the co-ordination of support offered by outside agencies with the existing community resources,
- 5 a recognition of the particular goals, priorities and methods of each community.

3.7 Recovery can no longer be regarded as a welfare activity, but rather as a community development process. Recovery means the community functions in an effective and comprehensive way with community cohesion and with the people having a sense of identity following the disruption to the continuity of life.

3.8 Experience has shown that communities recover best when they manage their own recovery and that disaster affected people will, given the information, support and required resources, make appropriate organisational and personal recovery decisions.

3.9 It is therefore the role of outside agencies, whether government or non-government, to ensure the provision of those resources, information, specialist services and support that are required in order to help people to plan and manage their own recovery.

4. A MISSION OBJECTIVE

The Uniting Church, believing that it is called to serve the world for whom Christ died, and in particular to care for all those who are in need, commits itself to the service of those people amongst whom it lives and ministers and for whom it offers a special ministry at the times when disaster threatens or occurs.

5. PRINCIPLES WITH REGARD TO DISASTER RESPONSE AND COMMUNITY RECOVERY

The Uniting Church:

- 5.1** Commits itself to be involved in response to disaster, and in particular to the recovery of disaster affected individuals and communities.
- 5.2** Will work with existing Commonwealth, State, Regional and local organisations responsible for disaster response and recovery.
- 5.3** Will recognise and work through the established processes and structures that pertain in each State.
- 5.4** Will seek to work with other churches in any response to disaster and therefore commits itself to the tasks of liaison and networking in order to ensure consultation and co-operation.
- 5.5** Will offer its support through the presence of counsellors and people to undertake pastoral ministry to disaster affected individuals and communities in the immediate aftermath of an event designated as a disaster.
- 5.6** Will provide (from the resources and experience of the whole church), specialist advice and support for parishes, presbyteries, or synods in order to ensure that the responsible church body can fulfil its mission objectives in relation to a particular disaster.
- 5.7** Is committed to the belief that communities recover best when they manage their own recovery, and will seek to work directly with all those government and non-government, professional and voluntary agencies and individuals which share a similar belief and commitment.
- 5.8** Will seek to become involved in the development of appropriate recovery policies and plans, where those of the responsible authorities are in conflict with these mission objectives.
- 5.9** Will commit itself to address the long term needs of disaster affected communities and individuals through:-
 1. the provision of ongoing pastoral care,
 2. ensuring appropriate information is available for affected people,
 3. working as an advocate on behalf of disaster affected people and communities in order to ensure that they have access to the information, support, specialist services and resources they require in order to plan, manage and sustain their own recovery.
- 5.10** Will take a community development approach to disaster recovery, seeking to encourage, resource and empower the local community.
- 5.11** Will commit itself to consultation with local individuals and groups in order to ensure that decisions concerning any plans are in accord with local needs and aspirations.

- 5.12** Will work with synods and presbyteries to ensure that local ministers are aware of the principles and policies guiding the Uniting Church in its response to disasters.
- 5.13** Will seek through synod initiatives to ensure the appropriate resourcing of all nominated church staff by the provision of regular up-dated information, and training in the various aspects of disaster recovery work including:
1. disaster recovery planning and management principles,
 2. community recovery from disaster,
 3. pastoral and psychological issues in both the short and long term aspects of human recovery,
 4. crisis intervention and outreach programs,
 5. models of church and community response to disaster,
 6. training in disaster recovery principles and in pastoral and community care for student ministers through the church's training facilities.
- 5.14** Will ensure that pastoral support and care are arranged for the care-givers, both ministerial and lay, who become involved in disaster recovery.
- 5.15** Will ensure the availability of stress de-briefing programs for both professional and voluntary staff.
- 5.16** Will maintain and publish guidelines in relation to the administration of the Fund which are in accordance with these objectives.
- 5.17** Will seek to develop a common approach within Australia, which takes account of local needs and aspirations, and recognises that the resources of the whole church are to be shared and made available to every synod and presbytery in time of need.
- 5.18** Will seek to ensure the regular coming together of the relevant synod representatives for discussion and the sharing of experiences and resources.
- 5.19** Considers that worship is a significant agent in personal and community recovery and healing and so seeks to develop liturgies which will be a resource for the whole church as it seeks to minister, preach and live out the good news of God's grace and love in Jesus Christ, especially in times of disaster.
- 5.20** Believes that worship is most likely to be helpful if it is designed and presented within the community where the disaster took place and is led by people from the local community.
- 5.21** There may be public rituals which will assist the local community. Children often have a key role in such rituals.

6. THE PURPOSES OF THE FUND

The Constitution of the Fund sets out its purposes in the following terms. These have been accepted by the Taxation Office and the Fund has been registered as a 'deductible gift recipient' (DGR No 900 026 129), with taxation exemption being available on gifts over \$2.00. The Constitution states that the purpose of the Fund shall be to receive contributions and make payments for:

- a. The relief of poverty, sickness, suffering, distress resulting from a major disaster which has occurred in any part of Australia.
- b. To provide such relief, both through the immediate provision of assistance to those affected by the disaster, and also through the provision of counselling and other support services necessary for the total rehabilitation of people so affected.
- c. To provide such relief to people regardless of class, colour or creed, as a public benevolent service."

7. PRINCIPLES FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS

- 7.1** Local people will be fully consulted. The wider the community consultation the better so that the church does not cut across the local community process.
- 7.2** The Fund will not normally provide or fund services which are available through the Government eg a Community Health Centre. It may however, be appropriate to provide funding for a service which will then elicit a Government grant.
- 7.3** The Fund may be used to initiate or establish a program which will continue after funding ceases.
- 7.4** The Fund is not to be used for recurrent expenditure beyond a period of reasonable recovery.
- 7.5** The Fund is to be used for those projects and programs that are accountable to the people who are being served through the program or project.
- 7.6** Programs and projects receiving money from the Fund are to supply one or more reports to the Trustees of the fund who are accountable to the Assembly.
- 7.7** The Fund can make money available to people or agencies to establish services which the disaster showed to be lacking or which were destroyed or damaged through the disaster.

- 7.8** The Fund can be used to establish programs or support projects which benefit a local community and which includes not only those who were directly affected by the particular disaster but other people in the community as well.
- 7.9** The Fund will endeavour to avoid providing money in ways that lead people to become dependent. There comes a time in disaster recovery when the services need to be available for the whole community and not only to those materially affected by the disaster.
- 7.10** The Fund will contribute towards projects which promote a sense of community spirit, or which provide or reinforce essential and urgent support services to help individuals, families and communities in their recovery.

8. PRIORITY GIVEN TO THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS

- 8.1** In distributing funds directly or in the provision of services priority will be given to the most vulnerable groups. Examples of these are:
- 1 Those who are under increased stress as a result of sickness, ill health or age.
 - 2 Those who are under increased stress due to pre-existing social situations – eg. marriage or family relationship difficulties, unemployment.
 - 3 Those who lack adequate financial resources due to debt, or such things as limited income.
 - 4 Those who may have been unjustly treated as a result of decisions made by government departments or other agencies, particularly in regard to cash relief eligibility or insurance recompense.
 - 5 Minority groups and those who are isolated within their communities.
 - 6 Single parent families without access to wider family support.
 - 7 Those who have had a particularly traumatic experience as a result of the disaster or event.
 - 8 Those who having suffered no property loss themselves, feel guilty when they compare themselves with others and who try to over compensate to their own detriment.
- 8.2** Particular care should be taken when making grants to individuals or families. Some problems with this are:

1. Individuals in disaster affected areas will always have needs to which available funds could be applied. As a general rule, disasters generate more requests for help than there are funds available to meet the requests.
2. Any agency with funds to distribute will find itself having to determine, sometimes without adequate or reliable information, which of the applications should be supported. Anomalies are inevitable.
3. Few agencies have either the systems or the people capable of assessing and distributing individual grants on a large scale.
4. Organisations which take on distributing funds without clear guidelines can inhibit the recovery of the community by contributing to the sense of dependence and injustice, because inevitably some people worthy of assistance will miss out.

9. THE ROLE OF LOCAL PEOPLE IN FUND DISTRIBUTION

In some situations it is appropriate for the minister or parish chairperson to have cash available to meet emergency circumstances. Normally, however, any distribution of funds will use the following procedures:

- 9.1** Check to see if some community based scheme is being organised.
- 9.2** If necessary take a role in developing community based schemes by contacting other welfare organisations.
- 9.3** Where community based support can be developed, any major Uniting Church contributions to individuals and families should be channelled through it.
- 9.4** If the community based distribution is not feasible, seek to operate through a Presbytery committee. It is essential to adopt a system whereby there is decision making by more than one person.
- 9.5** In particular every effort should be made to avoid giving local ministers sole responsibility for making decisions about how funds are to be distributed to individuals or families.
- 9.6** Appropriate records are to be kept and be available to the administering agency.
- 9.7** Significant gifts to the local church situation from sources other than the Fund should be reported to the Fund.

9.8 As soon as possible after expenditure, but no later than 6 months after receipt of funds from the Fund, a reasonable account of how the money allocated by the Fund has been distributed or spent should be sent in writing to the secretary of the Trustees. It is suggested that a copy of such reports be also forwarded to the secretary of the relevant Presbytery and Synod.

10. UNITING CHURCH STRUCTURE RELATING TO DISASTER RECOVERY RESPONSE

10.1 Whilst the Fund was established primarily as a financial mechanism to provide support at a time of disaster, it has necessarily developed a commitment to longer term involvement in recovery programs.

10.2 The Trustees of the Fund normally meet twice per annum in what is known as the 'National Disaster Fund Trustees Committee'.

10.3 The Fund encourages each synod to appoint an officer responsible for Disaster Recovery Response.

10.4 The synod officers responsible for Disaster Recovery Response normally meet annually with the Trustees of the Fund in what is known as the 'National Disaster Recovery Consultative Group' and this meeting is followed by a joint meeting of Synod Disaster Co-ordinators and Disaster Fund Trustees.

10.5 Synod officers are encouraged to:-

1. arrange liaison with presbyteries and other relevant church and community groups.
2. arrange training programs so that there are competent people to respond in disaster situations.
3. establish links with the State Disaster Response and Recovery Authorities.

10.6 The role of the Fund is to be supportive of synod and presbytery initiatives but not to become involved directly in disaster recovery response preparation or training.

11. PROCEDURES FOR ACTIVATING THE USE OF THE FUND AT THE TIME OF DISASTER

11.1 The key person in activating the use of the Fund at the time of a disaster is the President of the Assembly.

11.2 The President may act out of his or her own knowledge and ask that the Fund be activated and make an appeal to the Church.

11.3 Normally prior to this happening there would be consultation involving the President, General Secretary of the Assembly, Secretary of the Trustees and Moderator or Secretary of the relevant Synod(s).

12. USUAL PROCEDURES FOLLOWING A DISASTER

PHASE 1

12.1 The Secretary will:

1. Contact the Secretary of the Synod where the disaster has occurred for a report.
2. Contact the relevant Synod Disaster Recovery Officer and the appropriate officers in the relevant presbytery for further information.
3. Report this information to the General Secretary and the President.
4. If they feel an appeal should proceed then the Secretary contacts the synod secretaries to inquire of the likelihood of an appeal being made in their synod.
5. Report this information to the President and General Secretary.
6. If the President and General Secretary feel the appeal should proceed then the procedures move to Phase 2.

PHASE 2

12.2 The Secretary will:

1. Call a meeting of the Trustees of the Fund.
2. Ask the Assembly Communications Unit to assist the President in preparing a press release and to assist with the production of appeal information.
3. Inform the synod secretaries that the appeal is proceeding.
4. Consult with the Assembly Secretariat Services about the receipt books.
5. Arrange for the printing of the receipt books.
6. Arrange for the distribution of the receipt books to the synods.
7. Arrange with the Assembly Communications Unit for the distribution of the appeal information to the congregations.

PHASE 3

12.3 The Secretary secures information so that the Fund Trustees can decide upon their response. In this regard, the Secretary:

1. Contacts the Synod Disaster Recovery Officer.
2. Clarifies what the line of communication will be eg, in some cases all negotiation will be done with the synod officer, in other situations it may be appropriate to work with the chairperson of the presbytery.
3. Indicates to the relevant person in the synod or presbytery that the Fund will receive requests for help that are consistent with the Fund guidelines.
4. Contacts the local people to give a message of support.
5. Receives requests for assistance from the Synod Disaster Recovery Officer or other designated officer.
6. Places requests before Fund Trustees.
7. Sends financial help via the relevant synod agency or more directly if requested to do so.
8. Monitors the progress of the situation with the Synod Disaster Recovery Officer.
9. Arranges press releases through the Assembly Communications Unit to the synod communications network.

PHASE 4

12.4 The Secretary:

1. Receives reports from the communities or agencies that have been helped.
2. Clarifies any additional funding requests.
3. Places all relevant information before the Trustees of the Fund.
4. Arranges for all monies to be deposited and receipt books returned.
5. Writes to secretaries of synods to thank them for their support.
6. Arranges with the Assembly Communications Unit for the President to do a press release of appreciation.

13. MANAGING THE FUNDS

13.1 All moneys received will be receipted and deposited by the Assembly Secretariat with the Uniting Church (NSW) Trust Association unless otherwise approved by the Trustees.

13.2 No money shall be allocated, promised or distributed from the Fund without the prior approval of the Trustees.

13.3 • The Secretary may in the case of a “major disaster”, seek the approval of Trustees to urgently allocate funds to a specific area of need. Funds may only be released under this provision on the understanding that a “major disaster” has occurred in the view of either (in the following order):

- i. the Moderator, following consultation with the Synod Disaster Co-ordinator; or
- ii. the Synod Secretary, following consultation with the Synod Disaster Co-ordinator; or
- iii. the Synod Disaster Co-ordinator

and the concurrence of a majority of National Disaster Fund Trustees.

• In the event of a disaster being classified as a “major disaster”, an attempt be made to contact all Trustees by telephone (and other appropriate means as necessary) within 24 hours to obtain the Trustees’ concurrence to release of funds from the Disaster Relief Fund.

• Upon agreement being reached as to the occurrence of a “major disaster”, the Trustees be authorised to give either:

- i. immediate emergency welfare assistance through the church or other channels; and/or
- ii. longer term assistance to meet rehabilitation needs through counselling support

with funds being authorised for release according to the following criteria:

- over \$150,000 - unanimous agreement of 6 Trustees*
- up to \$150,000 - agreement of 4 Trustees*
- up to \$50,000 - agreement of 3 Trustees*
- up to \$20,000 - agreement of 2 Trustees*

A record of such calls, including approvals and disapprovals, is to be kept for inclusion in future minutes.

13.4 At least twice per year the Secretary will provide the Trustees with full details of:

1. funds invested (balances)
2. interest accrued
3. moneys received
4. moneys spent or allocated

13.5 Annual audited reports on Fund shall be prepared for distribution to members of the National Finance Committee, with a copy being forwarded to the Trustees of the Fund.

14. AUTHORITY TO ACT

The Trustees may at times authorise one or more of their members to act on behalf of the Trust.

15. GUIDELINE REVIEW

The Fund Trustees are asked to keep the guidelines outlined in this paper under review and to amend them as appropriate from time to time.

1.11.2000

**Stephen K Pearson
Secretary**