

## Tips for Providing Spiritual Care in Times of Disaster

### Occupational Chaplains Association Purpose in Disaster Relief [1]

To prepare a team of compassionate spiritual caregivers to serve their community during times of natural or man-made disasters. Trained men and women will offer local, state, and national disaster relief leaders and government authorities on-site assistance in meeting needs of people in coping with trauma, injury, loss of life and property.

### What a Pastor or Church Leader can Do

1. Pastors and religious leaders should solicit from their congregations trained chaplains or mature godly men and women who are willing and available to serve as spiritual caregivers in disaster relief situations in their community. Remember your goal is spiritual care not evangelism, these people need help to restore the basics of their life, they need love, comfort, hope and a listening ear. Matthew 25: 35-36 provides perspective for the disaster scenario. Hopefully evangelism will come after a helpful relationship of trust is built.
2. Provide orientation in a mini crash course on what to do in pastoral and spiritual caregiving. If a hospital hospice, police or other trained chaplain is available consider having them provide an orientation for your people. [By all means, when the emergency is past, initiate a training program for your church.]
3. Equip these men and women for service; the following list seems minimal, be sure to add to it as the project unfolds and you discover other vital necessities. Identification lanyard [ROA w VOAD] in order to get into a restricted area; Mobile phone, service tent or table, chairs for meetings, ROA UPCI identification banners or signs; if overnight, a cot, sleeping bag, flashlight, basic food and water supplies, personal medicines, toothbrush, etc. A chain-of-command list of community and go-to church contacts [with phone numbers] working the disaster; electronic Bible or I-Pad. If available, a list of comforting Scriptures to give desperate people, tracts to encourage, personal cards for later contact. Names of other chaplains or spiritual leaders for referring cases if known. These may be acquired on site.
4. Deploy chosen properly identified individuals to the distribution centers or area where needed, and assign them to serve whoever is in command.
5. Set up a **Spiritual Care Center** (table, tent) in the compound under a banner of the UPCI – ROA where people will be coming for relief, or in a church area (Family or Rec Center) where people drive in for supplies and food. Be prepared to go greet them in their vehicles as they receive the supplies and drive on. A card to contact you later might be desirable.

6. Circulate among other spiritual caregivers and meet the senior officials in your area make yourself known [don't be shy] and get to know and come to appreciate them as you serve. You are all there for the same purpose – providing relief in for disaster victims. If you have free time, offer to help out in other ways. A chaplain may pack or deliver boxes of supplies and food to autos, or help off load trucks by hand. This is a chance to befriend and make yourself valuable to them.

7. As you encounter victims inquire as to their experience and impressions they have of their need. LISTEN to them, pay attention to children, be ready with a word to comfort and bring peace. Quote Scripture sparingly but use the stories of scripture all the time!

8. Seek their permission before you engage in intense spiritual care, i.e. “May I pray with you? May I share a Scripture with you?” When praying publicly, take care not to draw undue attention and embarrass them. Make the prayer short and to the point. Pray in JESUS NAME! our privilege. Be as private as possible, the prayer is personal for them (or their family) and you want to build, not burn the relationship bridge. Allow God to use your good name with them later.

**As you discover other areas not noted above please let me know so we can refine our approach to Disaster Relief**

### **OCA Purpose in the Disaster Relief Plan**

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### **What a chaplain should know**

#### **What is a disaster and how does relief and recovery develop?**

The American Red Cross defines a disaster as **an emergency that causes the loss of life and property, and a disruption in which survivors cannot manage without spiritual, monetary, or physical assistance**. Disasters may be human-made (e.g., terrorism, industrial accidents) or natural (hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, wildfires, etc.). By far the greatest need in the southeastern US is natural disasters.

#### **Know the Four Phases of Disaster**

**1. Rescue.** The primary task is to save lives and property. Essential personnel include emergency medical, firefighting and law enforcement professionals. Nonprofessionals may be able to give first aid and call for help. Chaplains may be called on to supply Spiritual

care. In floods people stranded or cut off from travel must be rescued by boat or helicopter and many private individuals and groups go into action; viz the 'Cajun Navy'. Rescue is under the direction of National agencies such as FEMA, Red Cross assisted by recognized volunteer non-profit agencies, churches, businesses and community service groups. Unless recognized by the national agency in charge a volunteer group may experience rejection of their efforts to "get into" a devastated area to help. Reach Out America [ROA] is the VOAD approved agency representing the UPCI, and chaplains will need a badge to identify them as a part of ROA. A chaplain may expect to join chaplains from other denominations who will be providing spiritual care at this time. Learn who is in command, who to go to for help, when to refer a case that is beyond your resources to help. Cooperate with the rescue teams even if your task is passing out bottled water or blankets.

**2. Relief.** The major task in relief is to create safe and sanitary conditions for survivors and emergency personnel attending to them. Many agencies, including faith communities [churches] provide temporary shelter, food, water, clothing, health care, and pastoral care until people can resume their normal life. This phase might last for a few days or weeks and in the case of severe disasters, many months. A chaplain may expect to provide comfort, encouragement, hope and spiritual care to people who are 'on-hold' at this time.

**3. Short-term recovery.** The major tasks include damage assessment, restoration of utilities, temporary repair, reestablishment of communications, and maintenance of civic order. There is often need for clearing away debris, trees, homes destroyed by tornado or flood. These functions are usually considered beyond the means of a spiritual caregiver who serves victims and families in spiritual and emotional care. Service agencies (utility companies, fire departments, FEMA, Red Cross, etc.) provide experienced personnel and equipment to lead volunteer workers for this phase. The chaplain stands ready to provide individuals on cleanup crews counsel encouragement, comfort and prayer, to help them deal with trauma experienced in the completion of their duties. When conditions are considered safe people may return to their homes and begin long term recovery.

**4. Long-term recovery.** Principal tasks are rebuilding homes, roads, lives and communities. Chaplain should expect long term service in conducting grief counseling and dealing with the physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

### **Spiritual Care a Chaplain can offer.**

During the Rescue Phase chaplains may be used to supply spiritual and emotional care to victims as follows:

1. Work with rescue teams to assess the needs of uninjured survivors not in need of immediate medical attention
2. Deal with family separation, reassure with hope, try to contact family,

3. Death notification to the next of kin might be necessary as the rescue operation proceeds. Be sure the identification is correct and do so with another chaplain or Law officer
  4. Comfort the bereaved, get permission to pray with them, share Scriptures, leave a tract or list of Scriptures to comfort them. If you have a supply of Bibles, ask if they want one.
  5. Recommend further mental health attention. If you are unable to assess or deal with their needs refer them to a more experienced caregiver, a physician or psychiatrist for care. This may be and is usually accomplished from and in conjunction with a First Responder or Crises command post or hospital tent established in the area.
- Having spiritual and pastoral caregivers on crises teams has advantages recognized by government and private organizations who ask for chaplains. OCA and the UPCI must endeavor to meet the need with trained men and women.

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