

SECTION TWO

TYPES OF

Spiritual Care

Summary

Spiritual care in disaster includes many kinds of caring gestures. Spiritual care providers include many people from diverse backgrounds. Adherence to common standards and principles in spiritual care ensures that this service is delivered and received appropriately.



Types of Spiritual Care



THERE ARE NUMEROUS ACTIVITIES AND GESTURES that provide spiritual care in times of disaster. As noted above, spiritual care includes anything that assists an individual, family or community in drawing upon its own spiritual perspective as a source of strength, hope and healing. In disaster, anything that nurtures the human spirit as a source of strength in coping with the crisis is spiritual care.

Many activities and services provided by disaster response agencies result in a sense of spiritual nurture for disaster impacted individuals. Indeed, the sight of a familiar disaster service emblem in a time of need may instill an immediate sense of hope and courage in someone impacted by disaster. This happens because the symbol or emblem has a history, a familiarity. In a sense, this too is spiritual care.

TWO



ALAN LOOKED OUT OVER HIS FIELDS. Litter and debris scattered to each horizon. It was even worse to realize that he was looking at the remnants of his own barn, shredded and blown across the land by the swirling winds of the storm.

Alan remembered milking cows and birthing calves in that barn. He recalled trudging through deep snow on bitter cold mornings and laughing with his son on warm summer afternoons—a liturgy of farm seasons centered on that classic, red-frame barn. It represented much more to him than a shelter for his cattle. And now it lay strewn across the fields.

The task of cleaning up hundreds of acres overwhelmed Alan. He couldn't even think how to start. The sound of diesel engines caught his attention in time to see dozens of men streaming out of buses. Elder Wilson introduced himself as the men went to work clearing the fields.

Alan was shocked by the generosity and impressed by the industriousness of these strangers. The image of these men in their wide brimmed hats and white shirts toiling under the sun bolstered his

Sometimes spiritual care is an activity or gesture which may not be performed with the direct intention of providing spiritual care, but which nonetheless results in a bolstering and nurturing of a person's spirit. Persons and agencies that provide this manner of spiritual care may include:

- Synagogues, mosques, churches and other houses of worship that open their doors as shelters, feeding kitchens and meeting places
- Persons who open their homes to provide shelter and meals for relief workers and those who have been impacted by disasters
- Persons who offer to substitute for a person's job responsibilities or to care for family members of those who have died
- Spontaneous vigils, memorials, or services which provide support to individuals and communities
- Spontaneous generosity of neighbors and local businesses to meet basic needs of survivors



spirits. He'd never felt such gratitude and he hurried out to help them. If they had come so far to help him, he would certainly do his part. As Alan walked toward them, Elder Wilson invited him aside.

"Let the men do this for awhile," he said. "I'm sure you've been working very hard for many days. It's terrible what happened here. I'm a farmer myself and it hurts me to see such destruction. How old was that barn?"

Helen joined them in the shade of the old oak tree and the three chatted and remarked the men's steady progress in the fields. Alan talked about building the barn with his father in 1932. Through good times and bad, the family had proudly worked and lived on this land. Elder Wilson consoled and encouraged Alan. He promised that he would remember Alan's family and the entire town in his prayers. Alan and Helen both felt the tears brimming in their eyes.

In a few hours the land was cleared. Alan and Helen served the men lemonade and pie and they marveled aloud that such a few hours could restore order to chaos and make friends of strangers.

Sometimes spiritual care consists of activities and gestures that are performed with the direct intention and goal of nurturing and bolstering the spirit. Groups providing this form of intentional spiritual care include:

- Community clergy, faith leaders and inter-faith leadership consortiums whose members not only share responsibility for their own faith communities but also make themselves available for providing spiritual care to the broader community; for example: visiting shelters, family assistance centers, etc.
- Trained, credentialed disaster spiritual care providers who are part of pre-planned disaster operations, who leave their regular tasks to provide critical response work with faith-based and secular disaster organizations and who work cooperatively to screen, train and supervise local faith leader volunteers
- Local communities of faith and houses of worship (mosques, synagogues and churches) that open their doors and provide hospitality for organized community-wide prayer and memorial services

These activities and gestures of spiritual care occur along the entire response continuum.

Many persons and agencies provide different modes of spiritual care. Some kinds of response require more extensive training than others. Faith leaders trained in traumatic loss may best staff some disaster spiritual care functions such as working in a disaster morgue with first responders.

LOCAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

As an integral part of the pre-disaster community, local spiritual care providers and communities of faith are primary resources for post-disaster spiritual care. Because local communities of faith are uniquely equipped to provide healing care, any spiritual care services entering from outside of the community support but do not substitute for local efforts. The principles of the National VOAD—cooperation, coordination, communication and collaboration—are essential to the delivery of disaster spiritual care³.



Most spiritual care providers in disaster will be the local community faith leaders. They will have different levels of education and training pertaining to their own faith tradition and its systems of instruction and certification. Their role is a crucial one—for they are *already* recognized by the community and will be sought out for spiritual support. They appropriately provide spiritual care for their own congregants and members; they also provide spiritual care for other members of the community who look to them in times of disaster or crisis.

Other spiritual care providers in disaster have more extensive training and certification for specific roles. Hospital chaplains, for example, typically have completed the education and certification to be a minister,



priest, rabbi, imam or faith leader in their own tradition. Additionally, they have completed a series of courses in a process called Clinical Pastoral Education. This training heightens awareness of diverse faith traditions and equips spiritual care providers to function effectively in specialized assignments such as morgue duty, death notification, special needs populations and unique cultural settings⁴.

Professional chaplains are able to become Board Certified Chaplains (BCC) through a number of cognate accrediting bodies for spiritual care. Organizations, including the Association of Professional Chaplains, set standards of training and education and certify chaplains who meet those standards.

Spiritual care may take many forms: from listening to the stories of disaster affected individuals to arranging and/or prioritizing familiar spiritual or religious resources to leading large community-wide events. Spiritual care has a tremendous ability to bolster the hope and coping skills



of persons struggling with spiritual issues following a disaster. Spiritual care also has the capacity to damage vulnerable persons if performed in an inappropriate way. Because of this delicate reality, it is crucial that agencies and groups providing spiritual care adhere to common ethical standards and codes of behavior such as the Disaster Spiritual Care Points of Consensus of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters.

Several disaster response organizations and professional spiritual care organizations have proposed guidelines and standards regarding spiritual care in time of disaster. The Emotional & Spiritual Care Committee of the National VOAD completed “Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines of the National VOAD” which can be reviewed in the Resources Section of this guide. Minimally, any guidelines developed for spiritual care in time of disaster should clearly articulate excellence in disaster spiritual care⁵:

- Respect for all expressions of belief regarding faith and non-faith
- Respect for each person’s rich diversity of heritage, language and culture
- Commitment to ethical practices that protect the vulnerable
- Commitment to collaboration with all disaster spiritual care providers, local and deployed
- Commitment to confidentiality
- Spiritual assessments to determine perceived and real needs and assets

Adherence to these principles is essential for spiritual care in a setting as public and as vulnerable as a community facing disaster. Those who have been impacted by disasters deserve to receive spiritual care in a manner appropriate for their own lives, cultures and faith traditions. When spiritual care providers from numerous agencies and organizations provide such care in a consistent professional manner, the service is embraced and cherished by communities in need.



SOME DISASTER SPIRITUAL CARE “DO’S”

Disaster spiritual care providers quickly learn that providing a quiet presence in the midst of turmoil brings hope, comfort and the recognition that one is not alone. Below are some helpful things to say and do when providing spiritual care in times of disaster.

Things to Say:

- “I am so very sorry.”
- “My heart is with you.”
- “I am here to support you in any way I can.”
- “You have my sincere sympathy.”
- “Friends here are with you at this time.”
- “My sympathy for your loss.”
- “You will be in my prayers at this time.”
- “My prayers are with you at this time.”
- “What can I do to support you during this time?”

Things to Keep in Mind:

- Avoid clichés.
- Don’t avoid a deceased person’s name.
- Never preach at people.
- Offer prayer if requested.
- Support people finding their own solutions to problems.
- Be cautious about giving advice.
- Permit persons to share their memories.
- Share your emotions sincerely.
- Encourage people to be connected to loved ones.
- Let people share their stories.



Spiritual care providers may find themselves providing care to people from cultures and faith traditions very different from their own. Even spiritual care providers with significant experience working in cross-cultural settings will nevertheless frequently encounter situations and needs for which they are unprepared.

DISASTER SPIRITUAL CARE IN DIVERSITY

Respect is foundational to disaster spiritual care. Spiritual care providers demonstrate respect for diverse cultural and religious values by recognizing the right of each faith group and individual to hold to their existing values and traditions⁶.

The most sincere and direct way to approach these moments is to be humble and to ask specifically about special needs that have not been met. Some useful cross-cultural considerations include:

- Understand and avoid stereotypes.
- Recognize that grief looks different in various cultures.
- Demonstrate respect.
- Recognize that it is difficult to express feelings in a second language.
- Be open-minded.
- Ask questions about things you don't understand.
- Remember that each person is unique.
- Let people choose their own interpreter. **Never** use a child as an interpreter.
- Be aware of issues of distrust that may arise from fears regarding immigration and governmental issues.
- Educate yourself about other cultures.

Some excellent materials have been prepared for in-depth training and preparation of spiritual care providers in times of disaster. These will be detailed in the references section at the back of this guide. Disaster spiritual care providers will consider themselves lifelong learners and be continually seeking new experiences, training, and education on topics including trauma, cross-cultural issues, world religions and disaster response.

