

## SECTION SIX

MITIGATION, PREPAREDNESS,  
PLANNING AND TRAINING AS

# Spiritual Care Components

## *Summary*

Community faith leaders have an important role in mitigation efforts. By preparing their houses of worship and themselves for disaster they help build resilient communities. Training for the role of disaster spiritual care (DSC) provider is essential before disaster strikes.



# Mitigation, Preparedness, Planning and Training as Spiritual Care Components

IN THE CYCLE OF DISASTER RESPONSE, long term recovery ultimately gives way to a post-disaster time when communities concentrate on mitigation and preparedness for a future disaster. While all communities prepare for disaster, in the past it was chiefly communities that had actually suffered a significant incident that worked the hardest on preparedness. This seems no longer to be the case. Mitigation planning and organized preparedness have held an urgency for all communities and this has certainly improved all levels of response capacities.

Spiritual care providers and community faith leaders have an important role to play in pre-disaster mitigation, preparedness planning and training. This role concerns preparedness for both faith communities and for spiritual care providers.

SIX



**FOR WEEKS THE COLUMN OF SMOKE ROSE** from the debris pile in the old quarry. It seemed like a permanent part of the skyline. But one day the smoke was gone. The fire was out. The debris was gone. The clean-up was over and the roar of bulldozers was replaced by the staccato of hammers.

The community faith leaders met and were surprised to note that not one storm-related item was on their agenda. There were still daily reminders, of course, but other realities were asserting themselves again.

“A thought occurred to me yesterday,” said Rev. Adams. “We learned so much from the storm. I’m proud of how we took care of our community and each other. I don’t want to lose that momentum. Do you think it would be a good idea to make disaster preparedness a standing issue on our agenda?”

## FAITH COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS

Faith community centers (churches, mosques, temples, synagogues and other centers of faith) are public gathering places where people receive spiritual edification and a sense of belonging. It is wise for these centers to concentrate on preparedness for disaster. Faith communities may consider planning for the spiritual care needs of their members in a number of ways.



The group discussed ways to prepare for any future disasters. They considered sessions on self-care for faith and community leaders. They would ask the hospital chaplain to lead a session on trauma. They would work with the Town Council representatives to coordinate municipal disaster preparedness. They invited the local Emergency Manager to have a representative at their meetings. They applied for membership in the local VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster). The more they brainstormed, the more excited they became. Their first official act was to elect Pastor Beth to work with emergency managers as the first disaster preparedness liaison from the community faith leaders' alliance.

“We will all work hard together,” Beth said. “We may one day face something else that we can’t imagine now, but we will be ready in every way we can.”



Mitigation and preparedness activities that houses of worship can consider include:

- Forming partnerships for sharing buildings and space with other community groups
- Creating a faith community telephone tree
- A disaster Go-Box (a box containing all the supplies, resources and information that one might need to access in case of disaster)
- Identifying hazards and hazardous materials in the faith community's facilities
- Identifying leaders within one's faith community
- Collaborating with local emergency management agencies in planning and preparedness for disaster
- Communicating and partnering with disaster response agencies
- Identifying volunteers who could provide labor and services to their faith community and the larger community when disaster strikes
- Advocating the identification of hazards throughout the community
- Advocating on behalf of vulnerable populations throughout the community
- Donating financial and other resources to disaster response agencies

Many religious bodies have disaster response divisions and free-standing organizations that can provide literature, materials, training, resources and consultation to assist houses of worship in understanding and planning for disaster. Community faith leaders will want to be acquainted with these organizations and to form relationships before disaster strikes.

Because faith communities often function as places of refuge when disaster strikes, careful planning and preparedness can greatly enhance a community's resilience.



## SPIRITUAL CARE PROVIDER PREPAREDNESS

We have discussed how the role of disaster spiritual care provider is distinct from the kind of spiritual care that community faith leaders provide for their own members. Community faith leaders naturally provide spiritual care in a way familiar to their members, which incorporates the symbols, rituals and traditions of their faith traditions. The role of disaster spiritual care provider involves being committed to the three basic principles we introduced in Section I:

- Offering hospitality and a ministry of presence
- Meeting people where they are
- Minding the concept “Do No Harm”

When briefed and prepared for disaster response, community faith leaders generally adapt well to providing appropriate and respectful disaster spiritual care. Moreover, community faith leaders can benefit from training and orientation to this specialist role before disaster strikes.

Many disaster response agencies with an interest in spiritual care have designed and sponsored training opportunities in functioning effectively in times of disaster for community faith leaders. Spiritual care providers who understand disaster response activities and are connected to disaster response agencies before disaster strikes benefit from:

- An appreciation for religious and spiritual diversity
- An orientation to strategies for managing personal stress in an effort to mitigate secondary traumatic stress
- Specialized skills for responding to disaster
- An orientation to the National Response Plan (NRP) and Incident Command Structures
- Knowledge of the disaster response community
- An orientation to the National VOAD Disaster Spiritual Care Points of Consensus and Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines (see Section 7)



The continuous public awareness of threats of terrorism and frequent natural and human caused disasters has enhanced interest in preparedness, which has led many community faith leaders and spiritual care providers to seek specialized training. Especially in large cities, considerable attention has been paid to identifying partnerships for providing appropriate and respectful spiritual care in times of disaster. The National VOAD's basic principles of Cooperation, Communication, Coordination and Collaboration serve to strengthen partnerships among agencies and organizations—both from secular and faith-based spheres—to include spiritual care as an integral part of the disaster response continuum.

The Resources Section of the National VOAD website provides information on where community faith leaders and spiritual care providers can find resources on training in all the areas mentioned above. Further, disaster planners can find information in the National VOAD Disaster Spiritual Care Points of Consensus, Disaster Emotional Care Points of Consensus, and Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines in the following section. We hope that this guide will help disaster planners and community faith leaders create meaningful partnerships to provide for the spiritual needs of disaster victims and response workers in the future.

