

Intro to Emotional and Spiritual Care

The National VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) council has released a set of guidelines to assist local VOADs in attending to the emotional and spiritual needs of survivors. In the document, they highlight the fact that spiritual care is essential to the recovery process.

“Disaster spiritual care is a process through which individuals, families, and communities affected by disaster draw upon their rich heritage of faith, hope, community, and meaning as a form of strength that bolsters the recovery process.” -from the NVOAD Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines

There are several important things to keep in mind when engaging in spiritual care after a disaster. Some are listed here in this bulletin. For a more comprehensive look at this aspect of Disaster Ministry, please access the entire guide at this link: http://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2014/04/national_voad_disaster_spiritual_care_guidelines_final.pdf



Why Consider This Ministry?

Spiritual care after a disaster is often an unmet need in West Virginia. As faith-based organizations, we may be called upon to serve in this capacity whether we're ready or not. Being prepared can only improve outcomes!

Disasters are often traumatic events. NVOAD defines trauma as:

an event outside the usual realm of human experience that would be markedly distressing to anyone who experiences it;

the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV; APA, 1994) defines trauma exclusively in terms of the exposure to human suffering, i.e., personal

or vicarious exposure to severe injury, illness, or death.

A trauma, therefore, may be seen as a more narrow form of critical incident (a crisis event that causes a crisis response).

After a disaster, people can experience a wide range of emotions, including (but not limited to):

- Grief
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Post-traumatic stress

Navigating these emotions while also attempting to recover physically is a daunting task for any survivor.

What It Is

Disaster spiritual care is part of the broader crisis intervention process. This process is not psychotherapy, but is an acute short-term helping process designed to accomplish the following:

- STABILIZATION after the initial impact of trauma
- REDUCTION OF SYMPTOMS
- PROMOTE RESILIENCE AND COPING
- RETURN TO ADAPTIVE FUNCTIONING -or- REFERRAL to continued care by a specialist (e.g. legal aid, mental health, specific religious provider) as appropriate

In order to be done well, it is recommended that ministers be trained. Priests and Religious are often equipped to carry out this ministry. Chaplains also have many skills that are necessary in this work. Lay ministers (in other words, regular people) can receive training in this area as well.

What's Next?

Please contact Lora Pierce if you and/or your Parish Disaster Ministry are interested in taking on this important role. As always, thank you for everything you do for our community!

Questions? Contact Us!

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