Providing Spiritual Care in Times of Disaster
Nebraska Disaster Chaplain Network

- A program of Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska (IMN).

- IMN is the state ecumenical agency.
  - Helps faith organizations work together to provide ministries that they could not provide or provide as well on their own.
Nebraska Disaster Chaplain Network

- Asked to coordinate the faith response to disasters by the State of Nebraska.
  - Designated in the State All Hazards Behavioral Health Response And Recovery Plan.

- The only state-wide faith response to disasters that trains, credentials and deploys Disaster Chaplains within the context of secular response.
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Video clips from:
FAITH & DOUBT AT GROUND ZERO
A PBS “Frontline” video
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Available from www.pbs.org
Nebraska Disaster Chaplain Network

- Our purpose is to provide Spiritual First Aid and Emotional Support.
What Is Spirituality?

- Spirituality is that part of ourselves that strives for meaning.
All Human Beings Are Spiritual

- Because all seek meaning in their lives.
When A Disaster Happens

- People ask the “Big Questions”
  - Questions about Meaning
  - Questions about God
The “Meaning” Questions

- Why did this happen to me?
- Why did ____ have to die?
- I want to die – why can’t I just die too?
- Whose fault is this?
- Is ______ (perpetrator) going to be punished for this?
- What did I do to deserve this?
- What good can come out of this suffering?
- What’s there to live for?
- Why can’t ____ do something to stop this?
- Am I special because I survived and ____ didn’t?
- What’s expected of me now that I survived?
The “God” Questions

Disasters also often cause people to ask questions of meaning specifically related to God or their understanding of a Higher Power.

They need the opportunity to ask these questions, out loud, without answers being offered.
Normal “God” Questions

- Why didn’t God take me instead?
- Did God do this to punish me?
- Does this mean I owe God my life now (that I survived)?
- Why does God make so many good people suffer?
- Why does God let bad things happen?
- Why did God hurt little kids?
Normal “God” Questions

- Why doesn’t God answer my prayers?
- How will I know if God is telling me something?
- Why does God allow evil in the world?
- Who keeps God in line?
- Is there life after death? Heaven?
- Did God choose me to suffer for some special reason?
- Is there anything I can do to make God stop this?
Normal “God” Questions

- Where was/is God when I needed God?
- Where was/is God in this disaster?
- What if I am angry at God?
- What will happen to me if I hate God or curse God?
- To whom can I talk when I feel this way about God?
- Will ____ (perpetrator) go to hell for this?
Aren’t We Getting Into Religion?

- There is a BIG difference between religion and spirituality.
- Spirituality is universal – we all seek meaning.
- Religion is a specific way that people are seeking.
- Not all religions are the same.
- But all aim to interpret the meaning of life.
Dictionary Definitions

☐ Spirituality:
  ■ Relating to, consisting of or affecting the human spirit.

☐ Religion:
  ■ A set or institutional system of religious attitudes, beliefs or practices.
  ■ The service and worship of God or the supernatural.
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<tr>
<th>Pastoral Care</th>
<th>Spiritual Care</th>
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<td>- Usually provided by <em>pastor or other leader of a faith community</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Provided by a faith leader who is designated by the faith community to oversee the faith and welfare of the community <em>in accordance with a mutually received and agreed upon system of beliefs, actions and values</em>.</td>
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| - Provided by a trained chaplain who recognizes that the norms of the chaplain’s *own faith tradition or belief system do not automatically apply*. |

| - Usually provided by a *trained chaplain* not affiliated with the individual’s faith community (if any) |

Nebraska Disaster Chaplain Network
Pastoral Care

- Relationship developed within the socially contracted context of a care recipient’s *usual religious or faith community*, wherein the “pastor” or faith leader is the community’s designated leader, who oversees the faith and welfare of the community.

Spiritual Care

- Relationship developed in the *unique context of the care recipient’s experience of crisis or trauma* (ie. disaster, illness, injury) or *life situation* (ie military service, incarceration) and outside the context of the care recipient’s usual religious or faith community (if any).
Pastoral Care

- Supports the care recipient’s unique spiritual quest for meaning, purpose and sense of place and connectedness, in the context of relationships with self, others, nature and the faith tradition which the pastor/faith leader and the care recipient hold in common.

Spiritual Care

- Supports the care recipient’s unique spiritual quest for meaning, purpose and sense of place and connectedness, in the context of life-altering events as well as their relationships with self, others, nature and possibly a faith tradition / Higher Other.
Pastoral Care

- *Focuses* the care recipient’s unique quest in light of the faith community’s shared / authoritative norms.
- Is often *uncomfortable* with and unprepared for the ambiguity and unanswered / unanswerable questions.
- A spiritual community’s faith leader offers “pastoral care” to all members of his/her faith community.

Spiritual Care

- Allows the care recipient’s unique spiritual quest to take precedence over any established norms.
- Is *comfortable* with or expects ambiguity and unanswerable questions.
- A chaplain offers “spiritual care” to all and “pastoral care” to those who invite it.
Pastoral Care  Spiritual Care

- The term “care recipient” is used for purposes of clarity only. It should be recognized that the provision of both pastoral and spiritual care implies a mutual relationship from which both parties benefit.
Why Disaster Spiritual Care?

- 43-50% of people with emotional problems turn first to religious/spiritual leaders for help.
- Prayer, faith and spiritual practices are the most widely reported methods for coping with traumatic life events.
- 96% of Americans state that they believe in God or a Higher Power.

Koenig, Spirituality in Patient Care
Why Disaster Spiritual Care?

- Faith leaders are approachable – there are no waiting lists and little or no stigma.

- There is a spiritual component to the process of healing following a disaster that can best be addressed by a chaplain.
What Is Disaster Spiritual Care?

- Listening to the stories of people’s disaster experience.
- Hearing cries of distress.
- Promoting a sense of safety and security.
What Is Disaster Spiritual Care?

- Providing a spiritual presence of healing and hope – a reminder of God’s presence.

- Helping people find available resources and support their efforts to find solutions which will be appropriate for their individual situations.
What Is Disaster Spiritual Care?

Disaster Spiritual Care is devoting presence, attention, and respectful assistance to helping people discern what is the meaning in their lives now, in this new environment of destruction and pain; and how they will seek to live out that meaning as the recovery unfolds.

Foster McCurley, 2003
“Spiritual Distress”

- “Spiritual Distress” is a nursing diagnosis approved by the North American Nursing Diagnoses Association.

- “Spiritual Distress” may be experienced by those who are faced with some sort of extreme challenge in life and are left questioning the reason for such an occurrence (eg. Illness, bereavement, broken relationship, etc.)
Defining Characteristics - Spiritual Distress

- Alteration of behavior or mood, evidenced by anger, crying, withdrawal, preoccupation, anxiety, hostility or apathy.
- Questioning the meaning of existence and the reason for suffering.
Indicators of Spiritual Distress…

- Emotions / feelings such as:
  - Apprehension
  - Fear
  - Loneliness
  - Anxiety / Worry
  - Guilt
  - Hostility
  - Apathy
  - Preoccupation
Indicators of Spiritual Distress…

- Unable (emotionally or physically) to participate in spiritually nourishing activities and/or religious practices.
- Very anxious or very unwilling to talk about feelings.
- Very open or very closed to spiritual care / support.
- Questions moral or ethical implications of what has happened.
- Gallows humor.
- Displacement of anger toward team, family and/or religious representatives.
- Nightmares or sleep disturbance.
Indicators of Spiritual Distress…

- Expresses concern with meaning of life / death.
- Expresses concern with any belief system.
- Expresses anger toward higher power.
- Questions meaning of suffering.
- Verbalizes inner conflict about beliefs.
- Verbalizes concern about relationships with deity / higher power.
- Questions meaning of own existence.
Faith & Doubt at Ground Zero

- Two Stories
Who Can Give Spiritual Care?

- A person who is secure in his or her own faith.
  - That doesn’t mean he or she has all the answers.
  - It means that she or he doesn’t have to push what is meaningful to them onto someone else.
- A person who is willing to listen
- One who knows the “power of presence”.
Who Can Give Spiritual Care?

- A person who is willing to serve.
- Not necessarily a religious professional.
- Someone who provides a spiritual “safe space” in the midst of chaos.
- Perhaps, a helping hand, a bottle of water or a companion in the journey.
- One who offers “Comfort”.
Comfort

- From the Latin –
  - Com: With
  - Fortis: Strength

- Literally: “to come alongside with strength” or “to make someone stronger”
The Need For Spiritual Care

- Because we are more than physical beings. And depending on the type of traumatic event and the meaning we give to it (the narrative we tell), our minds and spirits also suffer deep hurt.
Who Needs Spiritual Care?

- Disaster Chaplains
  - Put their own oxygen mask on first.
  - Expect to be in the midst of chaos, and be personally affected.
  - Use their own spiritual resources for strength.
  - Have a “spiritual companion”.

Nebraska Disaster Chaplain Network
Who Needs Spiritual Care?

- Victims
  - Need a companion.
  - Who listens with the heart.
  - Is a non-anxious presence.
  - Isn’t trying to “fix it”.
  - Present to another’s pain.
    - Not removing it or relieving it.
Who Needs Spiritual Care?

- Responders
  - Need someone who is “there for them”.
  - Understands their weariness.
  - Understands their dedication.
  - Doesn’t have an agenda.
  - Is a compassionate friend.
Who Needs Spiritual Care?

- Family
  - Of victims, responders and chaplains

- Friends

- Community
Spiritual challenge of dealing with traumatic situations

- “There isn’t a worldview rooted in any location, culture or country that will not be significantly challenged upon exposure to front-line humanitarian work. Yet very few … organizations specifically prepare staff for this stress.

From Stress and Trauma Handbook  John Fawcett, Editor, World Vision  p. 152
Who Can Be A Disaster Chaplain?

- Actively participating in a faith journey.
- Letter of recommendation from the leadership of that faith expression.
- Letter of recommendation from someone with whom they work.
- Providing one additional reference.
Who Can Be A Disaster Chaplain?

- Desire to provide a ministry of presence – “water bottle ministry” – rather than “pastoral ministry”.
- Willingness to work with people of all faith traditions or no expressed faith.
Who Can Be A Disaster Chaplain?

- Complete “Disaster Chaplain 101”.
- Willingness to participate in on-going training.
- Provide list of training and experience which applies to work as a disaster chaplain.
Who Can Be A Disaster Chaplain?

- Complete the application.
- Agree to the “Code of Ethics”.
- Participate in an interdisciplinary screening interview.
- Permit a background check.
Who Can Be A Disaster Chaplain?

- Growing in understanding of spiritual care.
- Participate in “response feedback” opportunities to hone personal skills, deal with trauma responses and continue to develop disaster ministry proficiency.
- Willingness to maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
Interview Process

- Each candidate is interviewed by an interdisciplinary team.
- The team consists (whenever possible) of representatives from Behavioral Health, Public Health, Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska, a Regional Disaster Chaplain Coordinator, and a CPE trained Hospital Chaplain.
Interview Process

- Each member of the team will comment on the strengths and concerns that each candidate presents.
- A candidate needs a 2/3 recommendation from the interview team to be accepted.
- A background check is conducted of each candidate prior to their being accepted.
The Role of the
Disaster Chaplain
Responding to Spiritual Distress

FIRST THINGS FIRST!

Spiritual distress can only be addressed AFTER survival needs have been attended to:

FOOD, SHELTER, CLOTHING, SECURITY & PHYSICAL HEALTH
Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Self Actualized Person

Harmony, Unity, Beauty, Justice, Goodness, Desire to help others, Compassion

Spiritual Health

Intellectual Needs

Mental Health

Social & Emotional Needs, Love & Self Esteem

Emotional Health

Clothing Security

Physical Health

Basic Needs

Survival: Food, Shelter

Meta (beyond) Needs

Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs
As Immediate Needs are Addressed…

People in crisis report experiencing a variety of spiritual needs AFTER they feel assured that their basic needs have been/will be met.*

*This assurance comes ONLY when those assisting them are calm, competent, capable, knowledgeable, and can begin to be seen as trustworthy. BUILDING TRUST IS THE CRITICAL FIRST STEP IN DISASTER SPIRITUAL CARE!
The Disaster Chaplain does not try to convert, but rather observes needs; listens to the anger, hurt, frustration, and pain; and provides support.
Building Trust…

- Be there, but don’t overwhelm. NO AGENDA!!
- Silent presence is golden.
  “Preach the Gospel always. Use words if necessary.”
  *St. Francis of Assisi*
- Explain what is happening/will happen next.
- Know your way around – to whom you can refer problems. Advocate when you can.
- Don’t make promises you can’t keep!
Building Trust

- Identify IMMEDIATE needs and try to meet them (hospitality). (Always ASK first. “What can I do to help you?”)
- Don’t offer too many choices or request too many decisions at first.
- Don’t force decisions/actions a person is not able/ready to make.
- Just BE THERE! Remember the meaning of COMPASSION!
Spiritual Needs of People Experiencing Disaster

- A need to make sense of the disaster/loss.
- A need for purpose and meaning in the midst of disaster/loss.
- A need for spiritual beliefs to be acknowledged, respected and supported.
- A need to transcend the disaster and the self.
- A need to feel in control and/or give up control.
Spiritual Needs of People Experiencing Disaster

- A need to feel connected and cared for.
- A need to acknowledge and cope with the realities of destruction, devastation and death.
- A need to forgive and be forgiven.
- A need to be thankful in the midst of what has happened.
- A need for hope.
- A need to understand that what they are feeling is normal.
Disaster Ministry Includes:

- Caring for individuals in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.
- Always looking toward entrusting the individual to the care of their own spiritual support system.
- Beginning the process of helping the individual establish a “New Normal”.
Disaster Ministry Includes:

- Assisting Pastors and Congregations
  - Increase their understanding of the impact of disaster.
  - Helping them to know that disasters impact the spiritual, psychological, social and cultural aspects of a community.
  - To be aware that they will also be affected even if the disaster did not touch them directly.
Disaster Ministry Includes:

- **Service to Communities**
  - Raising understanding about the impact of disasters on individuals and the community.
  - Facilitate the communication between community agencies.
  - Promote and/or strengthen community services, programs, and resources to recognize and meet the needs that become apparent.
Disaster Ministry Includes:

- Service to Disaster Ministry through Nebraska Disaster Chaplain Network.
  - Participate in ongoing training.
  - Recruit new chaplains.
  - Support their orientation and work with them as they gain experience.
  - Share in evaluation and ongoing development of this ministry.
Spiritual Care “Do’s”

- **Listen to me** without assuming, explaining or imposing your beliefs. Accept my doubts. Talk only if necessary.

- **Validate my feelings.** Affirm the injustice of what has happened to me. Don’t use platitudes, clichés or sugarcoat. Affirm that you are glad I am there/safe.

- **Accompany me.** It’s *not* about: having answers, telling me what to do; needing to provide solutions or fix problems. Be patient with me.
Spiritual Care “Do’s”

- **Be present for me** even/especially without words. Saying you’re sorry is often enough. Use touch, as appropriate. (Read my cues.)

- **Honor my stories** and allow me to tell them over and over again if I need to.

- **Provide reassurance.** As issues arise, educate me about the normal grieving process. Remind me this isn’t all there is to life.
Spiritual Care “Do’s”

- **Remember me** when everyone else has gone back to their normal routines.
- **Allow** my appropriate, non-destructive expressions of *anger* toward God and others.
- **Remind me** that everyone has to find his or her own answers and way of understanding.
- **Help me** find out how to meet the basic needs of myself and my family first.
Spiritual Care “Do’s”

- **Affirm** my search for spiritual/faith based answers without imposing your own beliefs, faith, agenda.
- **Support** my faith/spiritual beliefs and practices.
- **Give me** options, not answers – but only when I ask you directly. Encourage me to work out my own plans as you listen.
Spiritual Care “Do’s”

- **Allow me** to express *all* my emotions without restriction. (As long as doing so does not pose a danger to myself or others.) Let me cry, scream and yell if I need to, so that I can begin to move forward in the grieving process.

- **Assume** the “L” posture and try to sit down with me when I’m upset or angry. Don’t stand over me.
Disaster Chaplaincy “Don’ts”

- Don’t assume you know what I feel, think, believe. Let me tell you.
- Don’t argue with my beliefs or try to convince me to believe as you do.
- Don’t respond with platitudes or clichés, or try to take away or invalidate my pain.
Disaster Chaplaincy “Don’ts”

- Don’t try to explain or give answers to my questions.
- Don’t voice opinions regarding blame for the occurrence or participate in criticism of emergency workers, methods or facilities.
- Don’t be afraid of my anger or take it personally.
Standards of Care

- Spiritual care will be provided by someone within the faith tradition of the affected person whenever possible.

- Personal and professional integrity: truthfulness, honesty, compassion and careful attention to those whom they help is expected.
Standards of Care

- Objective, appropriate, holistic support and a comforting presence is given.
- Protection from current and continued harm.
- Support through advocacy for spiritual and emotional health, including resources to strengthen lives, when requested.
Standards of Care

- Consistent spiritual care appropriate and sensitive to faith beliefs and traditions.
- Freedom from unwanted gifts of religious literature or symbols; evangelistic and sermonizing speech; and forced acceptance of specific moral values and traditions.
Standards of Care

- Respect for confidentiality.
- Reasonable and reputable referrals for professional services; referrals delivered with appropriate expertise and skill (so that the person feels empowered by the referral).
Standards of Care

- Disaster Chaplains may have other skills and roles, (LMHP, EMT) which they do not use in their role as a Disaster Chaplain.
We Are Not Alone

- Disaster Chaplains serve as a part of an interdisciplinary team.
- They work along-side of Behavioral Health and Public Health professionals.
- They respect what others can do and do not get in the way of rescue or recovery operations or what Public Health or Behavioral Health can do better.
Disaster Chaplain

Code of Ethics
Code of Ethics

- DO NOT PROSELYTIZE.
- Maintain Confidentiality.
- Disaster Chaplains are VOLUNTEERS.
- Recognize their personal and professional limits.
- Know their boundaries.
Code of Ethics

- Remain Flexible.
- Demonstrate Sensitivity to ALL faith traditions.
- Avoid Speculation.
- Are aware of ALL affected.
- Follow Incident Command Structure.
Incident Command Structure

- NDCN will only activate chaplains under the authority of Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).
- Disaster Chaplains always work in conjunction with Behavioral Health.
- Disaster Chaplains are NOT “Lone Rangers”; they are part of an overall response to a disaster.
Deployment Process

- Regional Disaster Behavioral Health Coordinator
- Regional Disaster Chaplain Coordinator
  - only dispatched in coordination with behavioral health, public health and emergency management
  - work with mental health
  - in pairs
Behavioral Health Regions and Local Health Departments

Nebraska Disaster Chaplain Network

Nebraska
July 2004

*LB 692 passed during the 2001 Legislative Session and provides funds to qualifying local public health departments.
Deployment Process

- Regional Behavioral/Public Health calls Regional Chaplain Coordinator.
- Regional Disaster Chaplain Coordinator calls the chaplains:
  - Who to report to
  - Where
  - How long
- Disaster Chaplains do **not** self-deploy!