

A Pastoral Guide For Response to Collective Trauma

For Regional Leaders

Checking in the with Local Leaders

Personally contact each of your local clergy and parachurch ministry leaders to ask:

- How are you?
- How is your congregation / organization? (Are there any in your group who are direct survivors of the event?)
- What would be most helpful for you and your congregation / organization right now?

Providing Immediate Resources

Resource any clergy or leaders who have direct survivors or live in close proximity to what happened

- Have ready a list of denomination leaders and local therapists they may call as needed. If you don't know any local therapists personally, encourage them to call on who they know and trust
- Encourage them to proceed through local response practices listed below

For Local Leaders

Checking in the Members and Neighbors

First, check to see that everyone in your congregation / organization is out of harm's way.

- Are there direct survivors among your congregation / organization who are now at the hospital, in hotels, or making their way home?
- If people are in the hospital or at a hotel, how long till they return home?
- Is your congregation / organization in direct proximity to survivors who came from out of town and are now in the hospital or local hotels?

Self Check

- How impacted are you? Does this bring up the personal past for you in a debilitating way? Is what happened overwhelmingly meaningful to you because of what was done or who was impacted? Do you feel you can be an effective leader right now for others who are grieving by lending a stable self to others who feel especially vulnerable and frenetic? For the last question, if not, communicate clearly to a responsible person who can assist in delegating an assistant in your place. If yes, proceed.
- Make time for a brief meal and some water and proceed.

Immediate Congregational Care after Collective Trauma

Gather

- Plan a gathering for tonight that at least includes fellowship. It may include a vigil as well. Designate space for children, youth, and families to share their stories of impact in informal, self-paced ways. Have refreshments available or a pot-luck meal. Whether a part of a vigil or in a self-paced way, like with stations around a room, provide opportunities to light candles, write a lament or statement of grief, write a wish for how things could have gone better, write a blessing for survivors, draw pictures. If young children are around, designate a play area with age-appropriate toys. The gathering should be planned for 2-3 hours, as people need.
- Depending on proximity and number of people impacted, a second night of similar activity may prove helpful.
- Is your congregation an appropriate place for local community responders to gather and find some respite? For example, do you have a community hall where people can find refreshment or meet with a local therapist?
- Will you or members of your congregation participate in planning and/or attending local community-wide vigils?

Caring for Children and Youth

As your congregation gathers, consider helpful ways of interacting and talking with children:

- If you are avoiding discussing explicit details for age-appropriate reasons, simply acknowledge that many young people and adults are very sad right now because people died and were hurt by someone who was very angry about something. As they ask questions, follow their lead. It's ok to say you don't know (like, you don't know exactly what the something was the person was angry about). Be very careful not to guess, assume, or project answers to things you do not know for certain.
- If you discuss explicit details, stick to facts and follow older children or teenagers' lead in discussion.
- Invite younger children to draw or color about what they may be thinking or feeling.
- Invite older children and teenagers to draw, color, or discuss what they may be thinking or feeling.
- Do not force anyone to draw, color, or talk, but rather present the space and be available to observe or listen.
- Acknowledge what they express . . . For example, "It sounds like / seems like, you're thinking about / feeling . . . [use their words or images]". Clergy and leaders also ought to acknowledge what parents express, too.
- Identify information about who to contact for help or assistance. If they are in the hospital, ask if they feel they have enough support there or whether there's anyone else who might also be helpful for them or they are having trouble contacting (i.e., family, friends, therapists, etc.). If they are in the congregation, have a list ready of yourself, local therapists, teachers, or other reliable trustworthy adults who may be offering assistance for grieving children and youth.

Worship

- Quiet yourself and pray, with gratitude, for the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- Consider the Scripture for this week in light of what's happened. It may be just right, or you may feel a nudging to include another passage.
- Consider the music for this week in light of what's happened. What first sounds will welcome the congregation to worship in light of what's happened? What hymn or song to begin?
- Consider the prayers. What words reflect where the congregation is right now and the presence of God amid sorrow, grief, and mourning?

- Consider the experiences of children and youth for worship in light of what's happened. Do your ordinary practices provide opportunity for children and youth to express, explore, and practice their spirituality in light of what's happened? Are there any changes that should be made in order to ensure children and youth feel included with the whole of the congregation. Will teenagers also have space to meet with youth leaders, aside from the whole of the congregation, as needed?
- Either in writing or speaking, include somewhere in the service clear information about who to contact if grief experiences feel overwhelming.

Ongoing Congregational Care after Collective Trauma

- Proceed with planning any funeral / memorial services needed among your congregation.
- Consider whether your congregation may be appropriate for offering funeral / memorial services or reception services to local families whose loved one died and who may not have a formal church community and may be looking for one.
- Consider having prayer stations available during the week for members to make use of as desired
- As you begin to move forward, members of the congregation / organization may feel a range of impact, with some ready to move forward more readily than others. Resuming ordinary practices can go on, and may feel stabilizing to many people, while also providing ways for people who feel more impacted to find resources by keeping prayer stations open for a couple weeks, posting a referral list for therapists, and having a few more fellowship opportunities where individuals or families most impacted can express their experiences in self-paced ways.

Keep in Mind

- Present trauma often reminds people of past trauma, particularly events or experiences they did not perceive as being effectively cared for. It is normal for survivors to bring up the past. Consider ways you can care for the past and the present together.

- Children and teenagers process along developmental stages. They will revisit past events, to process anew, as they develop more capacities to do so. Knowing this can help you not to force children and youth to process through language or concepts they cannot fully appreciate yet (i.e., extensive talk therapy, metaphors, euphemisms, etc.), while also recognizing they may seek out caring adults at later stages in order to review what happened and their experiences.
- Trauma overwhelms a person or a group's capacities to cope. Trauma, like healing, art, and beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. What overwhelms one person, may not overwhelm another person for a range of reasons. Let the survivor be the guide for what feel debilitating.
- As survivors feel they have effective resources to cope, they find their way through pain and suffering. Focus on identifying what resources feel truly effective to survivors and helping connect them with those opportunities.

For more information, visit www.ictg.org