

## **Opportunities for Churches and Houses of Worship to Assist People in Crisis**

### **Develop Resources**

1. Develop a library of sacred text and faith-based resources and publications relating to trauma, victimization, healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. (Books and publications that are *visible* to crime and trauma victims reduce victims' fear of stigmatization and invite conversations and disclosures about traumatic events in the lives of hurting people.)
2. Provide space! Identify locations in your church or house of worship that can be a comfortable meeting place or "compassion center" that can offer safety to individuals and families affected by community violence. This can be a safe place for families and friends of victims to meet privately, especially if the church or house of worship is located near a courthouse. In Jonesboro, during the trial of the youths charged in the schoolyard shooting, the local Baptist church provided space, volunteer support and food for family and friends awaiting the outcome of the highly publicized trial.
3. Develop liaisons with other helping agencies, services and programs. Have a list of resources that can support or provide for basic needs (food, utilities, clothing, shelter, emergency assistance, etc.)
4. Coordinate with other resources. Offer special educational programs and workshops on topics such as *Grief and Loss, Healing, Getting through the Holidays, Traumatic Grief, and Forgiveness, Domestic Violence, Child Abuse* and others. Invite community experts and local victim assistance staff to present workshops on these topics and to address specific concerns and questions of church or house of worship members.

### **Provide Education and Training**

1. Educate congregants about possible feelings, reactions and needs of crime victims and their families. **DON'T FORGET THE VICTIM** especially if the church also has a prison ministry. Oftentimes, victims feel injured the second time by the church because they are neglected or ignored. Remember that your presence is the most powerful gift that you can give to a person in pain.
2. Encourage church and house of worship leadership to prepare and deliver sermons and messages about evil and suffering.
3. Provide training to volunteers and lay leaders who have an interest in helping people in crisis. Identify and develop a trained support network within the house of worship to assist victims and survivors.
4. Identify members of the faith community with special skills and gifts, individuals who are skilled with children, elders, individuals with disabilities, culturally diverse populations and other more vulnerable populations.

5. Help meet the spiritual needs of victims. Identify “victims in the pews” and provide prayer and spiritual support. Provide for spiritual safety and allow anger at God.
6. Plan a “*How Your Church, House of Worship, or Faith Community Can Help Victims*” community seminar. These can be co-hosted by various human service agencies and other appropriate community agencies, organizations and businesses.
7. Learn more about traumatic or complicated grief, grief experienced by family members of homicide victims. Be there for the long-term. There is no closure to complicated grief.
8. Learn about compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma. Learn how to respond to caregiver needs following a tragic event or prolonged exposure to crisis.

#### **Plan and Host Commemorative Activities**

9. Organize candlelight services or memorial services during Christmas and other religious and holy days.
10. Have a special commemorative service with prayers and sacred text related to transformation, healing, forgiveness during special commemorative days and recognized memorials times.
11. Join National Night Out prevention effort in the community. Plan a prayer walk.
12. Host victim support group meetings monthly in partnership with MADD or other victim assistance organizations or programs.

#### **Develop Policies and Partnerships**

13. Report any suspected cases of child abuse and develop policies and provide training within the house of worship to ensure the protection of children.
14. Develop church/house of worship policies and guidelines for selection of any individual that works with children, nursery school staff, faith leadership, youth pastors and youth ministers to protect children and the church from potential harm and criminal liabilities.
15. Develop a crisis management protocol and crisis intervention strategy for your house of worship. Keep it somewhere other than the house of worship or church building in case you are unable to access the material.
16. Develop partnerships with local ministries that help people in crisis and determine the program needs. Provide *practical* support such as:
 

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ transportation</li> <li>▪ home visits</li> <li>▪ locks and safety devices</li> <li>▪ help with translation</li> <li>▪ help with filling out forms</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Funding for special projects.</li> <li>• Space for training events.</li> <li>• Clerical support, grant writing</li> </ul> |
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