

CHAPTER IV: HOW CAN WE HELP

PRAYING, VOLUNTEERING AND DONATING GOODS AND MONEY

An individual, family or parish response to a community hurting from a horrific disaster is one of the greatest gifts made. An appreciation and understanding of the Body of Christ and our connectedness to one another encourages many to see the suffering Christ among us and touch Him.

Praying

First and foremost, our faith calls us to be a people of prayer, constantly dialoguing with the God who loves us and created us. An important role within the parish disaster committee is that of spiritual support coordinator. When recruiting for committee membership, scan the parish population and existing organizations for someone who would be interested and best suited to lead this effort.

Does the parish currently have a prayer chain or prayer group? If so, is there a natural leader who would be willing to serve in this capacity on the parish Matthew 25 disaster committee? Does the parish have a Deacon(s)? Would he be willing to assist in spiritual support activities?

Defining Spiritual Support Activities

As we prepare for a disaster with activities before, during, and after a disaster, our prayer activity should coincide with our preparation.

Before

- Distribute - via church bulletins or other means - prayers specifically tailored to a variety of potential disaster situations (i.e. hurricanes as hurricane season begins, inclement weather, anticipation of war).
- Develop and submit Mass intentions specific to potential disaster situations to the liturgy committee for inclusion in Sunday liturgies.
- Determine in advance where the Eucharistic Liturgy will be celebrated in the event that the parish is damaged. Seek the support of your partner parish.
- Identify in advance the nearest American Red Cross shelter (if it is not the parish) and determine if Mass can be celebrated on site.
- Invite counselors to provide a workshop on dealing with the human spirit in crisis, grief, and the shock of dealing with a disaster.
- Participate in the "Isaiah Project" lay ministry. (See the Matthew 25 program manager for details)
- Encourage prayer groups and prayer chains to pray regularly.
- Determine who the vulnerable parishioners are and include them on a prayer list.

During

- Pray!
- Stay connected with the parish through prayer.

After

- Pray!
- Based upon the work of clean-up volunteers, determine those individuals and families in need of prayers as a result of a disaster.
- Refer those most distraught to Catholic Charities for counseling.
- On the anniversaries of significant community and national disasters, hold a prayer service in remembrance.

The diocesan office of worship will provide sample prayer intentions and liturgy remembrance materials. The Internet contains a wealth of information and recommendations as well. The Church World Service website: www.cwserp.org/training/liturgy.php can provide some good resources. An example is provided on the following page.

CHAPTER IV: HOW CAN WE HELP

HOW TO MARK THE ANNIVERSARY OF A DISASTER WITH HEALING

Healing After a Tragedy

There are many anniversaries in the life of the gathered people of the body of Christ. Some of them are joyous—birthdays, wedding anniversaries, class reunions—and some are anniversaries of loss and grief. Commemorating these events and sharing them is a gift of our life together. Just as we remember the events of a wedding and celebrate the happy memories and the years spent together, anniversaries of loss also replay themselves in our lives.

The emotions at the time of loss—fear, sadness, anger, loss of control, and others— frequently resurface around the anniversary of that loss. Bringing these subconscious reactions into our shared consciousness is the beginning of a healing ministry.

September 11, 2001 is an anniversary not just for the survivors, families and communities hit by the terrorist attacks, but for the nation as a whole. Whether or not we choose to commemorate this event, most of us will be affected by it so the question is, *“How can we respond as a community of faith?”* *What can your congregation do on this anniversary or other anniversaries of painful disasters, or during a disaster itself?*

The first thing to recognize is that reactions of anger, fear, grief, and sadness are normal. We should plan our faith responses to include grief and thanksgiving, recognizing that we will each respond differently.

- In newsletters/bulletins, share articles that discuss reactions: fear, sadness, a sense of powerlessness, hopelessness, anger, restlessness, tenseness, body aches, susceptibility to illness, nightmares, and the need for comfort (food or alcohol for adults, blankets or cuddlies for children).
- A media blitz is a sure thing after a tragedy. Expect that replays of the event will be shown over and over. Each viewing or remembrance can trigger more responses. It may be best to take a break from the media. Create peaceful environments at home and in church for prayer and play, time together and space to be alone.
- Plan a worship service of prayer and commemoration, of grief and hope, such as a candlelight vigil on Sept. 11. Use the litany written for this occasion.
- Include prayers for victims and survivors of the disaster as well as those who responded— EMTs, firefighters, police, harbor patrol, disaster-response volunteers, pastors and caregivers, and armed-services personnel; our elected leaders; and others.
- Collect a special offering for the disaster response program of Catholic Charities.
- Give an expression of thanks to local fire, police and emergency personnel (who have all been on alert this year). Suggestions: Deliver homemade cookies, hold a thank-you dinner that is also a fundraiser for needed equipment, invite them to come in uniform and recognize them, and pray for their work during worship.
- Learn about disasters as a parish and work on individual and congregational preparedness. (Contact your Catholic Charities disaster program).
- Distribute copies of books on pastoral care -- i.e., *Making Sense Out of Sorrow* by Foster McCurley and Alan Weitzman (Trinity Press International); *Act of God/Active God: Recovering from Natural Disasters* by Gary Harbaugh, (Fortress Press). Use the books for study as a group.
- Encourage people to be aware of and tend to their nutrition, sleep, and spiritual needs at this time.
- Remember those with special needs: children, shut-ins (whose only companions may be the TV, which will trigger memories over and over) and armed services personnel.

CHAPTER IV: HOW CAN WE HELP

Volunteering

In Chapter II, Section One, “Profiling your Parish”, you identified a volunteer coordinator and surveyed the parish community for volunteers based on individual gifts and expertise. Now, it is time to enlist and train them.

- Establish an annual “Sign-up Sunday” for disaster volunteerism. This should be integrated with the annual Stewardship appeal.
- Send one copy of completed volunteer forms to the Matthew 25 Program (1220 Aycock Street, Houma, LA 70360) for inclusion in the diocesan volunteer database. (Sample form provided in the forms section at the back of the manual – Form 6-B).
- Screen volunteers and match them with the right task. This is not only important to the tasks at hand when an emergency strikes, but also limits the parish’s liability. You do not want to match a parishioner with a heart condition to move heavy debris in the scorching sun.
- Host a training session for your volunteers with an emphasis on family and parish preparedness. Invite American Red Cross staff to cover first aid and CPR procedures.

Activating the Volunteers

- The volunteer coordinator will call volunteers to action once an assessment has been made of the needs.
- **Family** – Volunteers and their families must first be prepared to respond to their own needs, before they assist others. (**All volunteers must have their family disaster plan in place**).
- **Parish** – Volunteers will respond to the parish and its geographic area after the family has been addressed.
- **Deanery or outside parish** – Some disasters overwhelm a small parish but are not big enough to necessitate a diocesan-wide response. One of the goals of the diocesan disaster plan is to pair parishes so they can help each other during these difficult times.
- **Diocesan** – Some disasters may require a diocesan-wide effort. Certain volunteers may be specialized in certain talents that are required at a parish outside of the deanery. *Will volunteers be willing to provide assistance to a parish in another part of the diocese?*
- **Community** – Some disasters may affect the entire community. The diocese may ask parishes to “loan” their volunteers out to community agencies to facilitate a faster recovery during a disaster. *Will your parish volunteers be willing to reach out and assist?*
- **Long-term** – Some disasters require long-term recovery efforts, sometimes as long as three to five years. Volunteers who specialize in construction work are critically needed for long-term efforts. *Would the volunteers be willing to provide long-term assistance?*

Tracking and Recognizing Volunteers

The news of our generous response to a community rebuilding after a disaster is always an occasion to celebrate. In order for us to appropriately report our efforts to the diocese and the media, a few additional steps are necessary.

- Volunteers should be provided with Mt. 25 t-shirts or name badges that clearly identify them as a volunteer from the Catholic community.
- Volunteers should report on a regular basis the number of hours worked and services provided.
- Volunteers should be thanked publicly by their pastor, volunteer coordinator, and parish disaster committee.

CHAPTER IV: HOW CAN WE HELP

Caution: During intense disaster relief work, it is not uncommon for volunteers to burn out. Rotate volunteers and offer set break times to reduce stress. Consider setting up a retreat zone and prayer center to recharge volunteers throughout their shifts.

Donating Goods

Each parish should determine the role it will take in collecting goods in support of relief efforts. Volunteer teams can provide assistance in this area before a disaster strikes by doing the following:

- Conduct surveys of the vulnerable populations and their needs;
- Conduct food and baby item drives; and
- Involve the parish in collecting and preparing “Gifts of the Heart” disaster relief kits. These kits can be prepared at the beginning of hurricane season and stored at the parish or school. At the end of the hurricane season, unused kits can be donated to a local charity.

Assembling kits before a disaster for distribution to the community during a disaster is a great activity that the entire parish can get involved in. Below are some examples of the “Gifts of the Heart” kits (also found in the forms section at the back of the manual – Form 6-D) that can be assembled and stored until a disaster strikes.

“GIFTS OF THE HEART” KITS

Clean-up Kits:

plastic bucket	mop	basic cleaning solutions
broom	sponges	50 gallon trash bags
scrub brush	one gallon bleach	gloves (1 pair leather, 1 pair rubber)
insect repellent	air freshener	laundry detergent

Comfort Kits:

1 bar soap	1 deodorant	1 hand towel	1 comb	1 toothbrush
1 wash cloth	1 bottle shampoo	1 box tissue	1 brush	1 tube toothpaste

Baby Care Kits:

1 pack of diapers	2 baby wash cloths	2 gowns	baby wipes
2 baby shirts	2 receiving blankets	formula	1 baby bottle

Communities can rotate the kits each year by assembling new kits and donating the old ones to appropriate shelters. This is a good way of combining disaster preparedness efforts with good old fashioned donation drives which benefit the community two-fold.

Within the deanery, one parish could concentrate on developing kits for babies, another for older children and another for the elderly. In this way, each parish develops their specialty area of support and can be called upon in time of crisis for help in this matter.

About Clothing Donations

The Salvation Army is the agency responsible for collecting, cleaning, and distributing clothes to people in need. This relief organization is best equipped with volunteers and large storage space to accept clothing donations. We advise a parish not to undertake this activity but rather refer your parishioners to the Salvation Army, Goodwill a local thrift store.

CHAPTER IV: HOW CAN WE HELP

Food Drives

Within the parish, a food pantry may exist. Utilize it and its space to collect nonperishable items that will assist individuals and families recover from a disaster. Check with your local Catholic Charities office to see if you can help them stock their food pantry.

Donating Money

In the event that a disaster is major, the Bishop of the diocese may call for a second collection from all parishes and missions on or near the weekend nearest the event. All funds collected will either be sent to Catholic Charities USA for assistance where most needed in the impacted area of the state or will be given to Catholic Charities to assist in the short-, intermediate-, and long-term recovery efforts. Catholic Charities will actively engage parishes and existing parish ministries to deliver the needed assistance and supportive services.

In addition, parishes may want to commit a portion of their annual operating budget for disaster response. Those funds may be transmitted to Catholic Charities and will be held in reserve until a need arrives or the parish may retain those funds itself. Individuals and church organizations may want to “pass the hat” to support relief efforts. Catholic Charities will gladly accept such donations, promptly thank donors, and use said funds in its disaster recovery program.

THIS PAGE LEFT BLANK
INTENTIONALLY