

Tools for Financial and Trauma Recovery in Your faith Community

I first became a Volunteer in Mission while serving as the Campus Minister of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Missouri – Rolla in 1974. We had a very active service project ministry that sponsored student-led engineering projects for people in need. Hundreds of students and faculty participated each year. When I became a local church pastor I continued to be involved with many service projects, especially in response to natural disasters. United Methodists in Missouri have always gone the second mile in mission to serve those in need. This has never been more true than now with this world-wide COVID -19 pandemic and so many natural disasters in our country and around the world.

Then I experienced a great personal loss in 1984 when my wife died suddenly. I knew I could not deal with my loss alone. I was invited to attend a community support group for parents of small children who lost a spouse. I was also able to grow through my grief with the support and compassionate help of my congregation. I then started leading a faith-based support group for people who lost a spouse. Since then I have always led support groups for those who were dealing with trauma, loss, and personal crisis. During many years of ministry I witnessed first hand how local churches could offer support groups that make a difference as I served Schweitzer, Manchester, Centenary in Cape Girardeau, and Church of the Resurrection. These were compassionate caring faith communities.

When I retired I felt it was time to write a disaster resource designed to help the faith community reach those in need. I partnered with Matt Schoenfeld to design a book. We wanted to do three things. First, I knew that people need help with informed trauma care today. Second, Matt knew how to help people recovery financially after a disaster. And together we wanted a study guide to help individuals

and encourage participation in a support group.

Matt's area of expertise and experience was in financial teaching and coaching. I had partnered with Matt in 2008 when we developed a financial coaching program for the local church. Matt writes three chapters to help survivors take a financial assessment that is realistic and positive. Detailed tools are offered to help individuals and families develop and follow a spending plan. Creating a financial recovery plan is a multi-year strategy. Setting achievable goals and then taking simple steps gives hope for financial freedom. This book, *Growing Through Disaster – Tools for Financial and Trauma Recovery in Your Faith Community* offers concrete ways for trauma and financial recovery that can be reinforced through faith-based small group dynamics.

After 2017 Hurricane Harvey, Irma, and Maria, public officials are reporting that natural disasters are becoming a public health “new normal” expectation. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration reported that 2018 was the fourth warmest year on record and that twenty out of the warmest years on record have been in the last twenty-two years. According to the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Center, 2018 brought 14 severe weather events with a devastating cost of life and \$89.4 billion cost. The Center for Research of Epidemiology of Disaster reported that nearly 1.8 million people in the United States and 23 million around the world were impacted by disaster in 2018. With all the bad news there is some good news. There is a trend in recent years of lower death tolls due the improved standards of disaster management. However, there are exceptions like the 24 deaths in March of 2019 when tornados caught communities in the south unprepared.

The leading question for this book is, “How can caring communities improve our disaster response, management, and faith-based care?” The University of Southern California's Center for Religion and Civic Culture reported that some 506,000 volunteers from faith-based communities and organizations responded to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It was during a recovery project for the people in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi that I first felt the urgency to do more.

In 2006 and 2007 I realized that a relief, recovery, and restore resource was needed to help the local

victims and their church. Years after the disaster there may be unresolved trauma still taking an ongoing personal and spiritual toll.

Faith communities are called to be relevant, responsive, and to constantly improve our training and care with people in need. While the church has done and will do much more in our future disaster recovery mission programs, how we resource the volunteers and victims is vital. This book is written with both the disaster volunteer and victims in mind. Some may say that the local church does not have the ability that it once did to bring help, healing, and hope. However, in the last fifty years of pastoral ministry I have witnessed a growing involvement, dedication and investment of our volunteers in mission. When people are suffering, God's people will respond. This book is an encouraging testimony of thousands of volunteers in mission who have and will continue to make a difference. Over many years I have seen how victims and volunteers experienced life changing hope and purpose in serving God.

There are a variety of spiritual practices for relief volunteers to improve their capacity and effectiveness in disaster relief. Key questions that volunteers can ask are identified. Working closely with local leaders is stressed. Good communication is vital. Volunteers do not want to add to the disaster problems which are already immeasurable. A better understanding of biblically-based trauma healing to bring greater resilience is described in detail. This chapter is informed by an interview of a local church pastor who served in Gulfport, Mississippi when his church and nearly all of his members homes were destroyed. I first met with this pastor and his spouse during Katrina. I greatly admired their pastoral care leadership. Their dynamic church was reaching their hurting community in impactful and healing ways. A more than a decade later, this pastor who survived Katrina and thrived in community care, offers inspiration and realistic insights for our consideration.

The book identifies five essential tasks for trauma healing and recovery to take place. Recovery is very hard work for victims of a disaster. It can take years of ongoing care and patience. From a pastoral point of view, the local faith community provides the social ties that are vital for hope. Disaster isolates. The church can immediately offer worship, even if it is on the church parking lot or a rented facility.

Worship, prayer, friendship bring all people together. The church, when ready, can offer Recovery Groups to victims so that they can better cope and become more resilient. Nearly twenty recovery tools and spiritual practices are identified and illustrated. These practical recovery tools will provide encouragement and many options of spiritual practices and disciplines.

It is vitally important to address the long-term phase of disaster restoration and rebuilding is needed. Essential personal and spiritual resources are identified. Biblically-based teachings on hope and the characteristics of God's love are essential. I believe we can grow through disaster!