



Community Concerns

Helping America Recover From Tragedy

By John L. McCullough

(NAPSA)—Disasters always produce trauma. It's natural for people to seek comfort and hope from their churches and other places of worship following an event like a hurricane, tornado or flood.



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The unprecedented attacks of September 11 and their aftermath have left Americans from coast to coast feeling angry, frightened and confused. Many clergy and other spiritual caregivers feel unprepared for this new challenge. They aren't so sure how to answer questions like "Why did God allow this to happen?" "Will we be safe again?" "Will life ever return to the way it was before?"

"It's been enormously traumatic," says spiritual caregiver David Parsons, an intern at St. John-St. Matthew Emanuel Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, just across the harbor from the World Trade Center in Manhattan. One member died as the Twin Towers collapsed and many others lost friends and colleagues. The wind blew ash, papers and even bits of clothing over to Brooklyn. Several young congregants, in school near the disaster site, witnessed the carnage. "There were all sorts of connections," Parsons says. "We still don't know how this will play out."

To help spiritual caregivers such as Parsons, Church World Service (CWS) organized six inter-faith trauma response workshops in fall 2001. Parsons attended the Dec. 7 workshop, which emphasized that recovery is a very serious and long-term process. "It was helpful," Parsons said, "to explore, in a systematic way, how congregations can act in moments of trauma. Crucial is learning how to

pray with people, and how prayer needs to be reflective of the needs of the congregation. We really need to believe that God is with us at this moment."

In February 2002, CWS launched a new training series to equip religious leaders in congregations affected by trauma. It's called STAR—the Seminars on Trauma Awareness and Recovery. STAR is based at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., and is a collaboration between CWS and the university's Conflict Transformation Program (CTP). Each month for two years, STAR is providing five-day courses for clergy and caregivers from metropolitan New York and around the country. The curriculum focuses on trauma and healing and includes an introduction to broader dynamics of justice, security and peace building—all important for trauma recovery.

CWS and the Conflict Transformation Program form a strong, complementary partnership. CWS represents a faith base of 36 denominations throughout the United States and has extensive community-level experience responding to crisis. CTP faculty have worked in the field of trauma and healing for more than 15 years in places including Northern Ireland, Rwanda/Burundi, Liberia, Somalia, the Balkans and in Oklahoma City, following the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building.

As we find our way through the aftermath of September 11, the STAR program is one way CWS is helping the U.S. faith community assist all of us on the road to recovery.

John L. McCullough is CWS Executive Director. To learn more about CWS work, call 1-800-297-1516 or visit the CWS Web site at www.churchworldservice.org.