

A GUIDE FOR COMMUNICATING WITH A CONGREGATION AFTER COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

Reasons for Communicating Well:

- Good communication is a key to healing.
- Communication serves to calm hearers who are feeling chaotic and disoriented by naming what happened, providing education as needed, and offering practical next steps toward healing.

Best Practices for Communicating Well:

- Accessible Missives
 - » Simple to read statements on home website pages
 - » Concise and consistent emails or phone messages
 - » A series of in-person congregational meetings
 - » Concise press releases
- Ideally in a time of peace, identify a crisis team for the congregation who will be responsible for convening and leading response following a collective trauma. But better late than never.
- During and after a collective trauma, the crisis team assesses whether congregants are out of harm's way and whether any authorities need to be contacted to address personal health, facility damage, or criminal or legal matters.
- This team assesses staff and congregation impact and needs. They ascertain the staff's present abilities to address current needs among the congregation and community. The crisis team attends to staff needs and encourages healthy self-care practices. The crisis team considers regional and neighborly colleague assistance in cases of absent or disabled staff members.

- As soon as possible following a collective trauma, the crisis team for a congregation prepares a factual statement about what occurred, who is responsible for responding among the congregation (both staff and lay leaders, if applicable), and how to obtain further reliable information about next steps.
 - » This statement ought to be posted clearly on the congregation's website, as well as be provided in an all-congregation email, provided to local media venues upon request, and printed and posted in hard-copy in a public location in the main facility of the congregation.
 - » A statement like this helps to calm congregants and community members and serves to reorient.
- Clearly post online, through social media, and in hard-copy best methods for volunteering or donating, along with clear guidelines about what is most helpful.
- Avoid delayed responses to media requests. Instead, include factual and consistent statements about what occurred, the congregation's position in response, and how to learn about next steps in response.
- In the days following a collective traumatic event, coordinate congregational informational meetings. Best informational meetings often include a minister and a local subject expert such as a police officer, an emergency manager, or a social worker. They provide factual information, opportunity for congregants to ask questions, and opportunity to answer questions with clear facts. When information is unknown, state that fact clearly, when information may become available, and how information may be obtained in the future.
- Throughout the first days, weeks, and then months of response and healing, seek to be trustworthy, safe and reliable leaders.



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