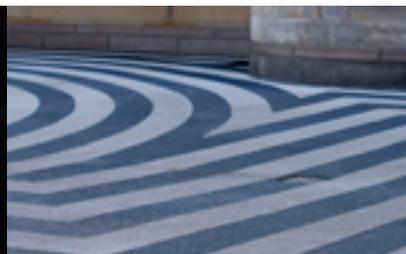




ICTG RESOURCE GUIDE

Collective Trauma Preparedness and Response



2019

Spiritual Directors

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INTRODUCTION

Our communities need spiritual directors who skillfully respond and attend to far-reaching emotional and spiritual wounds caused by trauma. According to the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health, *almost half of the children in the United States today will suffer one, two, or more traumatic experiences before they are 18 years old.* And, according to the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Alliance, a multi-disciplinary group of professional and advocacy organizations, *an estimated 70 percent of adults in the United States today have experienced a traumatic event at least once in their lives and up to 20 percent of these people go on to develop PTSD.* But these personal accounts are not the only sources of traumatic experience among communities today. Sometimes, communities also endure disasters, or collective trauma, or, even, multiple events of widespread devastation. These more extensive incidents may involve damage or deaths caused by a tornado, fire, mass shooting, rampant sexual abuse, or suicide. Collective trauma challenges survivors' senses of community and group identity. Increasing awareness of widely spread experiences of both personal and collective trauma makes it critical that spiritual directors hone their response abilities and long term care practices.

Even as therapy centers and various faith communities provide epicenters for healing, research shows how the effects of trauma still ravage local communities everyday. Traumatic losses dismantle previously conceived views of community and tear at core senses of identity, belonging, and faith, which are necessary components of healing. In these cases, community and faith based organizations struggle to find



their footing and resume momentum long after the uncharted paths of debris and heartache first appear.

Further complicating healing processes today, incessant stimulation through social media and increasing cycles of urgency and busyness distract and numb people from being able to sense their pain and respond adequately. Rare or no opportunities to practice restorative relational skills, like patience, calming, fair conflict resolution, and constructiveness, inhibit leaders and community members from developing abilities to thrive amid 21st century realities of devastation. Despite best efforts, when traumatic stressful pressures become overwhelming, leaders can practice dangerous patterns of conflict avoidance, their families fall apart, they experience burnout, or, worse, they even commit crimes. Too many communities around our country are familiar with these troubling results, leading people at times to lack trust in religious groups' abilities to meet these needs well.

Attending to stark emotional and spiritual wounds remaining after severe loss requires both skilled and intentional care. Spiritual direction can provide great opportunity for individuals to practice calming, community, and communication personally. Across diverse fields of study, researchers repeatedly observe these three core components for thriving after trauma. These relational practices reliably mitigate threat, decrease stress, and increase trust and safety. Similar studies and observations show these three components occur both naturally, as people and groups instinctively practice innate abilities to heal, and occur as survivors intentionally practice them and increase capacities for healing. That is great news! News that suggests it is never too late to start healing. Both voluntary and involuntary, over and over again, these components prove key to thriving.

Spiritual directors also provide a valuable service in companionship along with a faith based organization as a whole to discern the soul of a congregation or faith based nonprofit – its collective story, spiritual practice, and senses of holiness – in the aftermath of trauma. As a reader, likely you are a spiritual director who is seeking to prepare well for traumas that may occur, you experienced a trauma and, in the aftermath, now are discerning next steps, or your directees or faith based organization have experienced traumas and you are companionship with them as they discern next steps. Spiritual directors know the value of being witnesses to the testimony of people seeking spiritual health. This witness is especially needed in the aftermath of trauma. At ICTG we believe you are one of the greatest assets to your community.

We believe in this place and time, here and now, you can be a caring servant leader among your community as you walk the Valley of the Shadow of Death together. Your willingness to show up and be present along this undefined pathway makes a difference for you and your community. The fact you have picked up this book and read this far shows you already possess instincts for healing and thriving beyond trauma.

To help you expand your personal and professional skills for effectiveness in responding to traumas, we culled current research to provide you with practical guides to use repeatedly and in varying circumstances to discern abilities and maximize creative responsiveness. As you learn more about how stressors impact you, how to build effective care networks for yourself and your directees, and how to build and rebuild spiritual formation ministries after trauma, you practice greater capacities for resiliency. Stone by stone, these practices form the wells of calming, community, and communication for you and your directees to

draw on in times of crisis. This guide helps to ensure you have what is needed to withstand (or, better put, stand with) the pressures of trauma in your local faith community.

You likely will find this guide is most helpful for spiritual directors practicing within monotheistic faiths. Written primarily by Protestant Christians, with advisement from Jewish and Catholic advisors, this guide holds to the hallmark three-person relationship characterized by spiritual direction methods within these specific faith practices.

Most significantly, the spiritual direction ministry of these faith practices requires a respect for the dignity of our fellow travelers. Part of respecting directees is adhering to ethical standards in how we relate to them and handle ourselves as professionals. Ethical behavior must come from personal conviction – it cannot simply be mandated. Thoughtful and ongoing reflection on one’s own beliefs, abilities, and limitations will enable you to engage in direction relationships to which you are prepared and willing to commit, as well as to discern the spirit of the community within which you are serving as a whole. One of the most important ethical commitments a spiritual director can make is to one’s own spiritual health. A continuing life of prayer and relationship with God is the greatest gift a director can give to those receiving their ministry. This goes hand-in-hand with protecting one’s own physical and psychological health and with developing supportive relationships.

Professional growth is also a never-ending process. On a continual basis, directors should consider where and how they can receive more training and engage in supervision. Finding a network of spiritual directors



in your area with whom you can share professionally is a great benefit to your ministry. Whether or not you receive compensation for your work, clear communication with directees about boundaries, practices, expectations, and confidentiality helps to acknowledge the imbalance of power in the direction room and create a relationship in which both Director and Directee feel comfortable. All helping professions are being held to higher standards in the interest of protecting the consumers and the unique three-person ministry of spiritual direction is included.

Most of all, through this Resource Guide may you be reminded and encouraged that you are not alone. There are ways forward through the foggy of sorrow. There is no magic spell here to catapult you to feeling better and there is no way to fully make the loss disappear. Rather, by caring for yourself and caring for the people around you, together you form true and reliable resiliency. There is no short cut. In the following pages, you will find tools for developing personal and professional practices to increase your capacities for long-term personal and vocational health based on the three core components for healing. They come from field experts like yourself who are willing to share what they have learned when they were in your shoes, preparing for or responding to disasters. May these tools be a source of encouragement and inspiration to you in the days ahead.