Crisis Ministry

By: Rev. Carl Yusavitz, Director of Pastoral Services

The recent catastrophic hurricane and tropical storm that hit Texas got me thinking of what it must be like to be a pastor or chaplain there. I often remind my CPE interns that ministry happens on a continuum between encounter (as in, deep affective presence, when you’re not “doing” a lot) and helping a person through a crisis (when you are doing a lot).

Penn Foundation manages an Emergency Services program at Grand View Hospital, and our providers there remind us that a crisis is an event of limited duration that seriously disrupts a person’s coping and problem-solving capabilities. In other words, a crisis is a normal response to an abnormal situation.

If you are a pastor or chaplain who has ever accompanied a person through a crisis, you are aware that a crisis:

- is unforeseen
- experienced as overwhelming
- is potentially volatile in nature
- is perceived as a threat to one’s integrity
- creates a sense of vulnerability
- causes loss and stress

Our pastoral goal in crisis ministry is to help the individual in crisis eventually restore balance and safety in his/her life. The pastoral theologian, Howard Stone, offers these 10 questions to ask yourself during someone else’s crisis. I offer here a paraphrase:
1. Can I be a “safe harbor” from this person’s “storm?” In other words, can I be a dependable, non-judgmental companion to this person, as they begin to move through this crisis?

2. Can I be with people who are hurt and in pain without identifying with them too much?

3. Can I set down my “reality” and try and see the world through the eyes of this hurting person?

4. Does this person “get” my desire to really understand them? More importantly, do I have willingness to be taught by them how to be with them?

5. Am I able to pull back and know I need “time outs” from this difficult ministry? Am I able to sense when my own emotional or spiritual “bucket” is low and needs to be filled?

6. Do I accept my separateness from this person? Am I able to maintain healthy boundaries this relationship?

7. Can I respect my own need for help and support while focusing on the needs of others?

8. Am I able to free myself from the need to “fix” this person?

9. Can I see this person as someone who is “becoming” rather than as a static person bound and defined by this crisis?

10. Am I able to confront (i.e., be direct) with hurting people, if that is necessary?
Four Ministerial Assumptions About Crisis

Ministry often means setting aside our assumptions about the people we care for as we try to meet them “as they are,” not as we “assume” they should be. However, there are four assumptions that can be helpful in our ministry to people in crisis. They are:

- Remember that most people in crisis were normally functioning people before the crisis occurred. We sometimes see people at their worst in a crisis. The danger is over-helping.
- Recovering from a crisis does not mean merely returning to the way things were before the crisis. Depending on the crisis, they may never be the same. In fact, people often become stronger!
- The long-term goal of your ministry is to help the person find a deeper sense of meaning in their lives, gratitude for their survival, and a yearning for the future. This is more the “fruit” of your labors, not a stage along the way. This takes time.
- Get the experience and training you need before you try and help others move through a crisis. Don’t be surprised if your own unresolved grief (about crises in your life) emerges.

Goals of Crisis Ministry

- Preventing the stress of the chaotic situation from escalating into something more catastrophic (called “de-escalation”)
- Maintaining a structure and order of normal routines in order for the person to return to some predictability and control over their lives
- Doing whatever you can to help the person return to pre-crisis level of functioning (or to a new “normal”)
- Facilitating the grief process in a manner that decreases the potential for long-term deficits on functioning
- Making appropriate interventions focused on the pastoral needs of the “survivors” of the crisis (those left behind to “pick up the pieces”)

The Basic Pastoral Skills Course syllabus includes:

- The Dynamics of Pastoral Relationships and Pastoral Conversation
- Pastoral Presence and Pastoral Listening Skills
- The Do’s and Don’ts of a Hospital Visit
- The Spirituality of Aging and Retirement Home Visitation
- The Impact of Grief and Loss on a Pastoral Relationship
- The Use of Prayer and Scripture during a Pastoral Visit

Registration is necessary, and we need at least six participants to form a class. Contact Carl for more details or to register - cyusavitz@pennfoundation.org or 215-453-5170.
Pastoral Seminar and Brunch
Friday, October 27, 2017 | 9:00 - 11:00 am
Souderton Mennonite Homes | 207 W. Summit Street, Souderton

Living Branches invites all pastors for food, fellowship, and conversation with Marianne Mellinger, D.Min, PhD about “Spirituality and Aging.”

Marianne just retired from her position as Coordinator of Spirituality and Aging at the RBJ Schlegel-University of Waterloo’s Research Institute for Aging.

To RSVP, contact Margaret Zook at 215.698.4438, ext. 44231 or margaret.zook@livingbranches.org.

Beyond Codependency: Insights into Effective Relationships and Addiction Recovery Through the Lens of Attachment Theory and Science
Saturday, October 28, 2017 | 9:00 am - 12:00 pm
Penn Foundation - Loux Healthcare Center | 807 Lawn Avenue, Sellersville

Join us for this informative workshop that will help you understand how codependency and attachment theory can affect family relationships.

This workshop will be presented by Dr. Michael McFee and Daniel A. White, LPC, CADC, both of whom have over 20 years of clinical experience in a variety of behavioral health settings.

For more information, contact Karen Kern at 215.453.5171 or kkern@pennfoundation.org.