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Relief & Development

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# Ministering to Adults After a Disaster

US DISASTER PROGRAM | RESOURCES FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION



## Acknowledgements

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Much of the wisdom that informs this resource flows from the fine articles in the book *Disaster Spiritual Care: Practical Clergy Responses to Community, Regional and National Tragedy*, edited by Rabbi Stephen Roberts and Rev. Willard Ashley. (Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008.) This book is highly recommended for delving deeper in offering pastoral response after a disaster.

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## Introduction

If your congregation has just experienced a disaster – within the community, in the world, or even within the congregation itself – your church will likely serve as a place of listening and grieving, and of fostering resilience as well. In times of disaster a vibrant faith community offers:

- **A calm presence.**
- **Avenues for sharing experiences and expressing grief, pain and frustrations.**
- **Emotional, spiritual and sometimes concrete support for those recovering from the crisis.**
- **Outreach that meets needs in the wider community, especially those of the most vulnerable.**
- **Opportunities to experience God's love and compassion.**

In the days immediately following a disaster, news is still unfolding, lives are disrupted and loss is fresh. Here the church can be an important source of “spiritual first aid” that provides stability, assesses people’s needs, offers comfort and care, and refers people to community services and supports.<sup>1</sup>

Episcopal Relief & Development’s resource, *Ministering to Adults after a Disaster*, provides a variety of program ideas to help congregational leadership address the needs of those who turn to the church for assistance in the aftermath of a disaster. It can be used in conjunction with Episcopal Relief & Development’s resources on ministering to children, youth and teens after a disaster, which can be downloaded for free from the Resource Library on Episcopal Relief & Development’s website, [www.episcopalrelief.org/resourcelibrary](http://www.episcopalrelief.org/resourcelibrary).

<sup>1</sup> “Spiritual First Aid,” by Rev. Julie Taylor. *Disaster Spiritual Care, Practical Clergy Responses to Community, Regional and National Tragedy*. Stephen Roberts and Willard Ashley, eds. Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008.



## The Emotional Needs of Adults after a Disaster

Experts in disaster response say that adults in crisis have particular emotional and spiritual needs to which faith communities can be well equipped to respond. These needs include:

- **Talking about their experience.** Churches can do a great service by hosting opportunities for this kind of sharing. “Telling the story is part of fitting the disaster experience into the wider story of that person’s life, which is the only way to move on to a healthy future after trauma,” writes The Rev. Kevin Massey.<sup>1</sup> Suggestions for hosting a storytelling session are included on page 8.
- **Practicing positive coping skills.** Church-sponsored gatherings can be a means to check in on how people are coping. They also provide an opportunity to reassure people that their reactions are common and understandable and to provide information on coping well. Helpful handouts to make available at church include:
  - \* **“Tips for Survivors of a Traumatic Event: What to Expect in Your Personal, Family, Work, and Financial Life”.** This three-page publication is The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US Department of Health and Human Services) can be downloaded for free by visiting <http://store.samhsa.gov/>. Search for **publication NMH02-0139**.
  - \* **Diagram of the Emotional Lifecycle of a Disaster**, on page 21.
- **Receiving factual information from an authoritative source.** People often turn to clergy or church leadership for authoritative information about the disaster and for updates on how fellow parishioners have fared. It’s important to be informed with solid, verifiable information and to not promote rumors or hearsay. A church-sponsored gathering, such as a community meal, can be a good opportunity to invite experts from the community to provide disaster updates and connections to resources.
- **Receiving basic spiritual first aid.** Providing this kind of care includes being a calming, listening presence; validating people’s experiences and reactions; promoting positive coping skills, and referring people to outside resources as necessary. Keep an inventory of people in the parish who have these important listening and evaluative skills. These might include spiritual directors, clergy, trained pastoral ministers, or mental health providers. Invite them to facilitate or sit in on group sharing, to attend church coffee hours and community meals, and to be available for one-on-one conversations if needed.

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Massey, “Impact and Heroic Phases – Small Disaster”, *Disaster Spiritual Care, Practical Responses to Community Regional and National Tragedy*, eds. Stephen Roberts and Willard Ashley (Woodstock, NY: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008.)



For members of Episcopal churches, liturgies such as Eucharist and Morning and Evening Prayer are familiar and meaningful. Hold these in the regular worship space if it is safe and useable, even if the lights and heat are not working. Following a disaster, people often have a great need for the familiar, especially for the places where they found solace in the past.

(See additional tips for “Offering Worship When all is Not Normal” on page 6. )

## Offering Worship When All is Not Normal

*When the Episcopal Church of the Ascension was damaged by the Sierra Madre Earthquake in 1991, the rector, The Very Rev. Canon Michael Bamberger, made several adjustments to continue offering services until the church was repaired. Below are his reflections and suggestions on how to shape and maintain liturgy after a disaster.*

### COMMUNICATE THAT WORSHIP WILL HAPPEN

If it's possible, reinstate regular Sunday worship as soon you can, even if it's in an alternate location. **Announce that worship will happen and when and where it will be.** Use every media avenue – websites, email, social media, phone trees, signs and posters, and if possible, a press release to local TV and radio. If evacuation orders are in place, it is advisable to consult with local law enforcement authorities about access issues.

### RESPECT VULNERABILITY AND PLAN FOR SAFE WORSHIP

Folks may have been traumatized even if they had no property damage. They may be grieving for any number of reasons. **Be sure that the space you choose for worship is safe.** This may mean having building inspectors assess the structural integrity of the space where which worship will be held. And be attentive to the need for emotional “safe space.”

### CELEBRATE AND MOURN

Worship after a disaster celebrates survival and resiliency and holds up those who helped. But it also acknowledges loss, uncertainty, and fear. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, people often find comfort in worship that seems familiar. **It is always appropriate to pray aloud for local community leaders and for other worshipping communities that are similarly affected.** A Public Service for Healing from the Book of Occasional Services, as well as materials from Enriching Our Worship, can be easily adapted to speak to the needs of the congregation.

At the same time, it is critical that Church leaders proclaim the Resurrection. Without being Pollyanna-ish, believe that recovery will be achieved. And when that seems impossible, remember the phrase from the 12 Step Movement – **“Fake it ‘til you make it.”**

### BE READY FOR NEWCOMERS

In the wake of a disaster, people often seek out community. They may be looking for answers to “why this happened.” They may have a newly discovered need to “belong somewhere.” **Whatever the reasons that may draw visitors and newcomers, a disaster can be an opportunity to welcome and embrace new members.** In addition to planning for more people in the pews, be ready to provide extra fellowship, as well, in the form of coffee hours and



church potlucks. People need to gather, be nourished, and share their stories and hear the stories of others in times of crisis.

### UNDERSTAND THE “EMOTIONAL LIFE CYCLE OF A DISASTER”

Some disasters are short-lived, and some take a long time for a “new normal” to emerge. Church leaders must attempt to be attuned to the emotional and spiritual condition of congregants, the congregation as a whole, and the community at large. The first heroic days of disaster response often give way to a long slide of disillusionment for those who must deal with displacement, lost income and ongoing uncertainty. (See the *Emotional Lifecycle of a Disaster handout on page 21.*)

It is appropriate to address people’s frustration and exhaustion. Anticipating when longings will be at odds with reality is helpful. For example, having to hold Christmas worship in another venue because the familiar space has not been restored may re-open a sense of grief.

It is also critical to remember that life events continue to happen after a disaster. People will be born, folks will want to be married, and funerals will need to be held. One congregation, undergoing extensive repairs, put up a banner on the surrounding scaffolding proclaiming “Marriage Under Construction” for weddings.

**Only when the time is truly right, celebrate recovery.** That might happen when there is consensus that the “new normal” has emerged.



## Hosting Storytelling Sessions

**TIME** 60-90 minutes

People affected by disasters often find that telling their stories is helpful in both coping and recovering from trauma. Churches can be familiar, safe and comforting places to share these experiences. Such sessions can be offered often in the aftermath of a disaster.

The dynamics of a storytelling session will change depending on how many people attend. Because it can take some time for people to share, it's best to divide attendees into groups of about four or five people.

While the experience does not need to be highly facilitated, it might be helpful to include in each group a pastorally-skilled leader, who can gently keep the conversation on track and make sure that people who want to share have the opportunity to, while those who only wish to listen are not forced to share. Such a leader should also be attentive to those who might need additional pastoral care outside of the sharing session.

After the session, provide time for a brief reception to allow people to informally continue their conversation, make connections with one another and arrange follow-up with pastoral care providers if needed.

### MATERIALS AND SET UP

- Handouts on Positive Coping Strategies and The Lifecycle of a Disaster ([see page 5 for suggestions](#)).
- Small group seating that allows some distance between groups so groups can easily hear their own members speak.

### WELCOME (FULL GROUP)

As you welcome your group to this time together, emphasize these points:

- This is a safe place to share our fears, our sorrows, our anger, and even questions we might have about our faith. Church is a place where we bring our whole selves – doubts and all. Anger at God and crises of faith are normal reactions after disasters.
- We ask you to listen attentively to each other, without offering suggestions or solutions. This is not a time to “fix” each other. It is a time to honor the thoughts and feelings arising as a result of this disaster.
- As with all small group discussions, we ask that all personal information stay within the group, not to be shared with others. We want this time together to be a safe place to share and listen.

### OPENING PRAYER (FULL GROUP)

Use the prayer at the right to open your session.



**Leader:** The Lord be with you!

**Participants:** And also with you!

**Leader:** Lord, be with us whenever we face times of sadness or loss. Help us to know your love and to share this love with others. Be our guide, even when we see only darkness, and show us how to be the Body of Christ in a hurting world.

In Christ's Name, Amen.



## SHARING STORIES (SMALL GROUPS)

Break into groups of about four or five people, with a leader.

### Suggestions for small-group leaders:

- Begin with a one-word check in, asking each person to express one word or phrase describing how they feel today. Assure participants that there is not a “right” or “wrong” way to feel, and they are also free to “pass.” Acknowledge each answer with a nod or gesture showing that the person has been heard and repeat each word or phrase expressed.
- Invite participations to share a story of where they were when the disaster struck and what they experienced. Ask them to tell their story in about five to eight minutes. (If you need to cut someone off, offer to speak with that person after the group session is over so that you might give others a chance to speak.)
- If there is time, once everyone who wants to has shared, a follow-up question might be, “what strategies are you using to cope with the effects of the disaster?”
- Do not force or “call on” participants. Only invite stories from those who wish to participate.
- Practice active listening. Make eye contact as you listen, and nod or use other gestures to indicate that you have heard what each person has said.
- Thank each person for speaking. Don’t try to “fix” problem or address theological concerns. This is a time for story-telling only. (If theological concerns arise, you might note these as topics for faith formation sessions at a later date.)
- Provide handouts on positive coping skills and the lifecycle of a disaster. Inform participants of additional resources, programs and liturgies available at the parish.

## CLOSING PRAYER (FULL GROUP)

Use the closing prayer at the right to close the session.

Afterward, invite participants to stay for an informal reception to continue the conversation if they wish.



Be with us, dear Lord, through all sorrow, loss, and difficulties we face. Help us to face difficult times with courage.

Help us to know that you are with us, even when we see only darkness.

Help us to know your love and to share this love with others.

In Christ’s name, Amen.

## Topics for Additional Programming

### COMMUNITY MEALS

Whether in the form of a pot-luck or a buffet dinner prepared by volunteers, church suppers are a great way for people affected by a disaster to receive some respite. They allow members to check in each other and receive updates on how neighbors are faring. And they can be a subtle way to connect community members to additional resources and services.

### INFORMATION SHARING SESSIONS

Obtaining factual information is vital for those affected by a disaster to make decisions, cope well and begin the recovery process. Invite police officers, firemen, municipal officials and community outreach workers, who have access to useful information, to speak at a community meal, an adult forum or special workshop.

### SUPPORT GROUPS FOR PEOPLE IN SIMILAR SITUATIONS

If a number of your participants are in similar situations – such as parents wondering how to talk about the disaster with children, caregivers of elderly parents, those whose jobs have been lost or those who have lost their homes – consider having special informational sessions or break-outs to address these specific needs.

Participants with specific needs may find comfort in talking with others with similar challenges. They may also share information and resources with each other. As recovery from the disaster continues, these groups may want to continue meeting for continued support and sharing.

### SPIRITUAL TOOLS FOR COPING WITH A DISASTER

In coping with a recent disaster, adults may need a time of quiet to put stress aside for at least a few minutes each day. You might offer sessions introducing the following time-honored techniques of spending quiet time.

- **Contemplative Prayer:** Prayer forms such as Centering Prayer or breath prayer are ancient Christian spiritual disciplines, rediscovered in recent years as a means of finding peace and serenity during difficult times. Invite someone skilled in meditative prayer to offer a workshop on simple techniques that people can practice at home.
- **Bible Study:** Quiet, reflective reading of scripture can be a calming practice. A workshop on Bible study techniques such as Lectio Divina can provide people new to Scripture reading with a format for attentive reflection. **Four Bible studies, which can be used individually or in small groups can be found starting on page 11.**
- **Spiritual Reading:** If you have a parish lending library, pull out books that offer inspiration and information on weathering crisis, coping positively, and exploring the theological questions that arise from crisis. **A bibliography of recommended books for adults can be found on page 19.**



## Turning to Scripture after a Disaster: Four Bible Studies

The Word of God is at the heart of the prayer of the church; it is woven through our liturgies and flows through our *Book of Common Prayer*. The Scriptures can be especially meaningful after a disaster, because they often originated with the prayer and reflection of people who turned to God to help them understand and weather difficult times.

**The four Scripture studies that follow address some of the needs that many adults experience after a disaster:** expressing grief after loss, practicing self-care, coping well and welcoming a “new normal.” The sessions can be used as an Adult Forum series or employed by groups that already meet for prayer or discussion. They can also be utilized in quiet prayer and reflection at home.

The topics are:

- **Expressing Grief: A Psalm of Lament (Psalm 6)**
- **Practicing Self-Care: Plucking Grain on the Sabbath (Matthew 11:28-12:8)**
- **Coping Well: Walking with Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1: 1-11a; 14-18)**
- **Welcoming the New Normal: Breakfast with Jesus (John 21:1-14)**

### NOTE TO FACILITATORS

If you are facilitating a small group session, you might want to include the following in your set-up:

- A small central table with familiar spiritual symbols such as a lighted candle, cross, and Bible.
- Copies of the study guide for all participants.
- Additional handouts on coping after a disaster, or information about other resources and programs that are being offered locally. Include contact information for pastoral care providers and other resource providers in your congregation.



## Expressing Grief: A Psalm of Lament

### OPENING PRAYER

Dear Lord, be with all who seek comfort and support this day. Help us to find your guiding words and presence in those around us. Help us to find listening ears and kind words as we seek to bring our thoughts and prayers to you.

In Christ's Name, Amen.

### SCRIPTURE: PSALM 6

Note: This scripture can be read silently, aloud, or in parts. It can also be read several times, as with *Lectio Divina*. Other Psalms of Lament include Psalm 3 and Psalm 13. These can be read as well for comparison or additional discussion.

### COMMENTARY

Sometimes our grief is too large for words. Speech begins to fail us. And prayer? How do we pray for things we cannot name? Our scriptures were written by people under similar duress, and they expressed their ache in the poetry of the Psalms. After Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, Psalms were used to mourn this life-altering event. Many other books of the Old Testament were written by Israelites living in exile, trying to deal with being uprooted, and trying to cope after the loss of home, family members, and self-determination.

When we pray the Psalms we pray with centuries of spiritual ancestors who grabbed hold of God and wrestled during times of unimaginable strife. Their words become ours, helping us to wrestle with God when nothing makes sense.

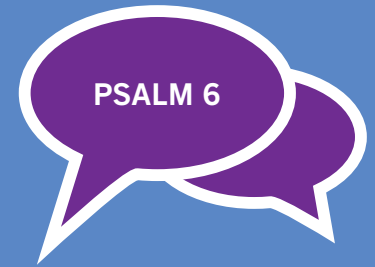
### QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION, REFLECTION OR JOURNALING

- Read the scripture again, quietly to yourself. Which parts resonate with your own experience?
- What are you grieving the loss of? In the wake of recent events, what feelings are you struggling to understand?
- How would you describe your feelings about God right now?
- Where have you experienced God's absence and/or presence in relation to the disaster?
- What ways would you like to echo and add to the Psalm?

### CLOSING PRAYER

God of all consolation, grant to those who sorrow the spirit of faith and courage, that they may have the strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience; not sorrowing without hope, but trusting in your goodness; through him who is the resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

(New Zealand Prayer Book p. 833)



O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath.

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.

My soul also is struck with terror, while you, O LORD—how long?

Turn, O LORD, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.

For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?

I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.

My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes.

Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.

The LORD has heard my supplication; the LORD accepts my prayer.

All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror; they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.  
(NRSV)

## Practicing Self-Care: Plucking Grain on the Sabbath

### OPENING PRAYER

Dear Lord, be with all who seek comfort and support this day. Help us to find your guiding words and presence in those around us. Help us to find listening ears and kind words as we seek to bring our thoughts and prayers to you.

In Christ's Name, Amen

### SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 11:28-12:8

Note: This scripture can be read silently or aloud. It can also be read several times, as with *Lectio Divina*.

### COMMENTARY

After a disaster it's easy to be overwhelmed by the urgent needs around us. As Christians we are taught to help people in need and serve others. In our passage, Jesus acknowledges the disciples' need for rest and nourishment.

The sabbath was instituted to remind people that their worth and dignity was not based on their achievements. Jesus breaks the sabbath law, while simultaneously upholding it. He knows the disciples are human and have needs like hunger, which need to be met if the disciples are to follow Jesus on the long road ahead. This story may ring true for you if you are prone to skip meals, forgo sleep, and ignore your other needs in the name of an urgent cause like disaster relief.

Rest and pacing are needed if we are to sustain energy through the rebuilding process. It's not your job to repair your community singlehandedly. In our achievement-driven culture it is easy to feel guilty when we are not constantly helping after a disaster. But even Jesus needed to rest. Jesus often retreated from the suffering crowd to rest and pray in silence. If Jesus needed rest and nourishment, we do too. If we take care of our own needs, the work of long-term recovery will be sustained.

Sometimes actions which appear Christ-like, like working nonstop without rest, are counterproductive and damaging. If the disciples cared about looking or feeling holy they could have remained hungry, but Jesus knew that how we treat our bodies matters. We are not machines. We can build communities and work groups where we encourage each other to take time to rest, eat, and grieve.

Continued on next page



(At that time Jesus said:) 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' At that time Jesus went through the cornfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.' He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice", you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath. (NRSV)

## Practicing Self-Care, continued

### QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION, REFLECTION OR JOURNALING

- Read the scripture again, quietly to yourself. Which parts resonate with your own experience?
- What were your patterns of self-care before the disaster?
- How have you made time to rest since the disaster?
- What is one way you can find rejuvenation this week? How could others support you in your self-care?
- What does a community that encourages self-care look like to you?

### CLOSING PRAYER

God of all consolation, grant to those who sorrow the spirit of faith and courage, that they may have the strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience; not sorrowing without hope, but trusting in your goodness; through him who is the resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

(New Zealand Prayer Book p. 833)



## Coping Well: Walking with Ruth and Naomi

### OPENING PRAYER

Dear Lord, be with all who seek comfort and support this day. Help us to find your guiding words and presence in those around us. Help us to find listening ears and kind words as we seek to bring our thoughts and prayers to you.

In Christ's Name, Amen.

### SCRIPTURE: RUTH 1:1-11A; 14-18

Note: This scripture can be read silently or aloud. It can also be read several times, as with *Lectio Divina*.

### COMMENTARY

This passage describes Naomi and Ruth's dire situations: vulnerable, displaced, and struggling to survive. Naomi's family moves to Moab to escape famine. The death of their husbands lead Naomi and Ruth to return to Bethlehem. Both moves are motivated by grief, as well as the basic need for survival. Each woman copes with her suffering in a different way. Ruth copes by clinging to her mother-in-law and pledging her life to Naomi. Orpah copes by returning to her family. Naomi copes by returning to her people. Later in the story she will change her name, and express her displeasure with God.

Being frustrated by our loss of control, depression, grief, and stress is normal; even Ruth's well-known pledge to follow Naomi wherever she goes contains a note of desperation. How we choose to cope with crisis affects our wellbeing and the wellbeing of our family, friends, and community.

According to pastoral care providers, instances of domestic violence, addiction and depression can increase after a disaster. It can be difficult to cope with the everyday stresses of life after a disaster has destroyed all semblance of normal.

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### QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION, REFLECTION OR JOURNALING



In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah.

They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

*(Continued on next page)*

- How has the disaster affected your sense of home?
- How has the disaster affected your primary relationships with family, friends, neighbors or coworkers?
- What is helping you hold on? What is helping you cope with the current disaster?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

God of all consolation, grant to those who sorrow the spirit of faith and courage, that they may have the strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience; not sorrowing without hope, but trusting in your goodness; through him who is the resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

(New Zealand Prayer Book p. 833)

*(Ruth, continued)*

But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.”

But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die -- there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. (NRSV)



## Welcoming the New Normal: Breakfast with Jesus

### OPENING PRAYER

Dear Lord, be with all who seek comfort and support this day. Help us to find your guiding words and presence in those around us. Help us to find listening ears and kind words as we seek to bring our thoughts and prayers to you.

In Christ's Name, Amen

### SCRIPTURE: JOHN 21:1-14

Note: This scripture can be read silently or aloud. It can also be read several times, as with *Lectio Divina*.

### COMMENTARY

For the followers of Jesus, his crucifixion was a life-shattering disaster that threatened their very lives. Jesus' execution reminds them of the Roman Empire's constant threat. In the passage before today's reading, the friends of Jesus are hiding out in a locked room. The disciples have lost their friend and leader; they are afraid Rome will kill them too. When Jesus appears to them, he invites the disciples to leave the fear-filled room and live again.

In the long lifecycle of a disaster, the end point is often called the "new normal." Things will never be exactly as they were before the disaster, but there is now a new stability and new patterns are becoming familiar.

In the passage we just read, Simon Peter is trying to create a "new normal" in the wake of Jesus' death. Peter tells his friends he is going fishing and they choose to join him. Fishing was the livelihood of many disciples before they followed Jesus. In returning to their old profession they are trying to get their lives back after the disaster. But the task is not easy. They are not the same people they were before they met Jesus. All night the fishing nets come up empty.

The resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples. And though he doesn't identify himself, they know Him. He aids the disciples in a familiar and miraculous catch of fish. Life can't return to how it was before Jesus died. Life lived in the assurance of Jesus' resurrection, empowered by the presence of his Holy Spirit, will become the norm for his followers. And it will always be new.

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After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.'

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## Welcoming the New Normal, continued

### QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION, REFLECTION OR JOURNALING

Like the disciples, many of us have experienced change since this disaster. We've been stretched and confronted with parts of ourselves we didn't know existed. What have you noticed about yourself since the disaster?

- The new normal will look different for each of us. What parts of your new life are welcome? What parts of your new life are challenging?
- As you enter the new normal what are you finding in your nets? What has been added to your life?
- The disciples encounter the resurrected Christ in an unexpected way. How have you encountered Jesus since the disaster?

### CLOSING PRAYER

God of all consolation, grant to those who sorrow the spirit of faith and courage, that they may have the strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience; not sorrowing without hope, but trusting in your goodness. Through him who is the resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ our Savior,

Amen.

*(A New Zealand Prayer Book p. 833)*

*(John 21:1-14, continue)*

So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.'

Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. (NRSV)

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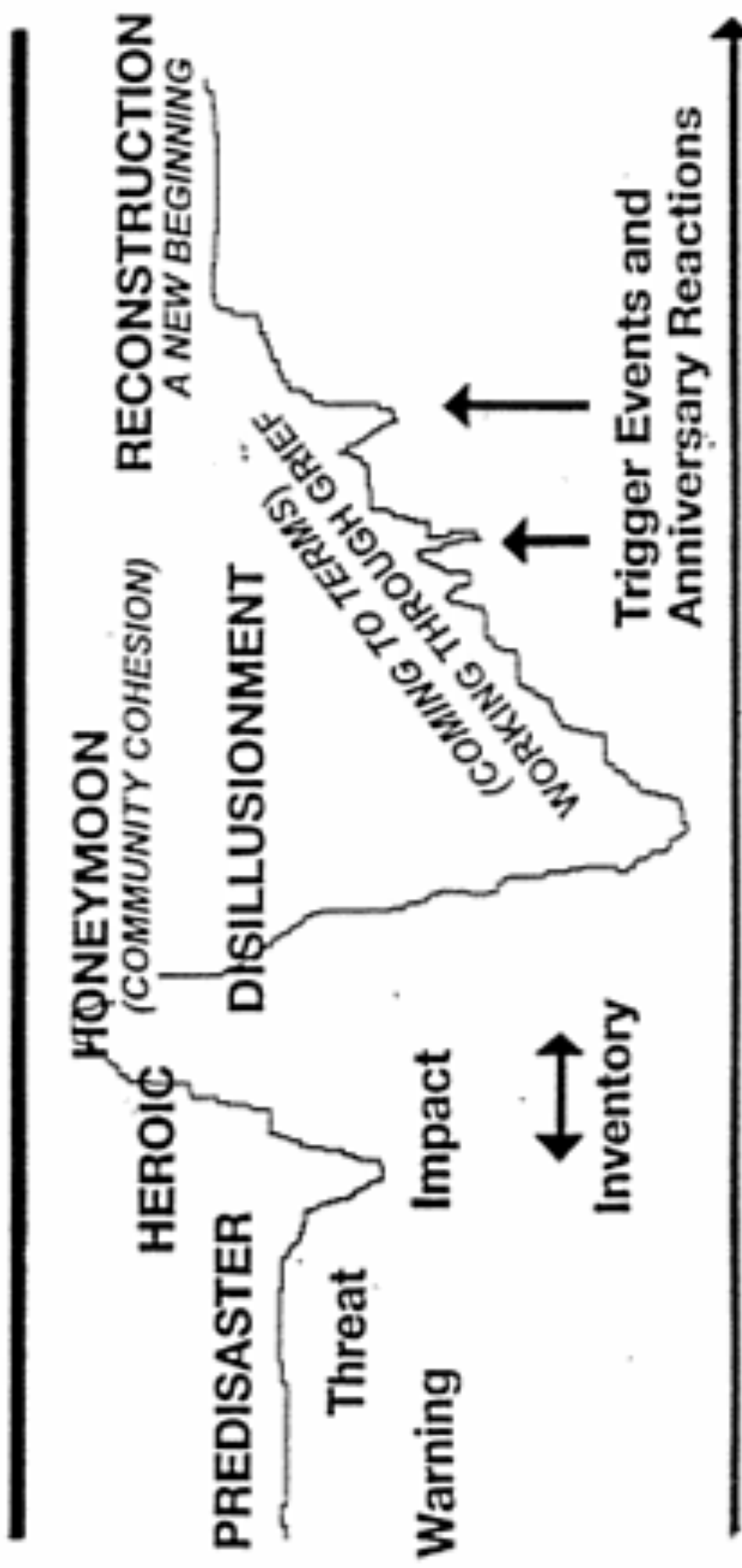
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# Emotional Lifecycle of a Disaster



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