

Pastoral Response to Terrorism
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The acrid smoke hung in the air burning my nostrils, my lungs, and the back of my throat making my voice husky long after the twelve-hour shift at Ground Zero, in the temporary morgue outside the American Express Building. The tears in my eyes were not just from the burning smoke and not just from seeing the twisted beams of steel, the broken windows, the remaining side of the building jutting out of “The Pile”, but from seeing the tormented, weary, and stricken faces of the rescue workers -firefighters, emergency paramedical technicians, police, medical examiners, Army reservists, sanitation workers, Red Cross and Salvation Army volunteers. The smell, other than the smoke, was no worse than any other time when refrigeration is shut down and meat and vegetables are spoiling, or when the main toilet facilities are port-a-johns. Or when death is around.

The noise was made by vehicle back up signals, construction vehicle engines, welders’ tools, and generators, but not voices. Aside from some occasional radio chatter, voices were amazingly quiet, as if the place were already a memorial site. It was pure devastation and destruction beyond words. When I inhaled I brought into my lungs, into my blood stream not just the ashes from the buildings, but I brought in the ashes of the beings that had died. It was profoundly spiritual. My pastoral response at that time was to pray without ceasing for the deceased, for their families, and for those of us who were there to help. The ability to bring, to embody, and to facilitate healing is the most significant pastoral response to

terrorism. The how and what, the roles and the learnings are the focus of this paper: Terrorism and the Pastoral Response.

I have been the Chaplain for the Leominster Fire Department since 1996 and I am also a founding member of the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains. I have had numerous experiences with trauma and crisis events. I never expected that on September 16th thru September 23rd I would be deployed to serve with the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains in New York in response to terrorist attacks. Yet with eleven other Fire Department Chaplains we were invited there by the New York Fire Department through the IAFF (International Association of Fire Fighters). The presence of Chaplain was so important to them that when Father Mychal Judge, Chaplain to the N.Y. Fire Department died, he was assigned the first death certificate of the nearly 2500 deaths. Many of the emergency personnel had a shared belief that Fr. Mychal had died first so that he could greet the others to make their transition from life to death a smoother one. A spiritual presence was seen as crucial and paramount to helping the emergency workers proceed with their daunting task. We all had had extensive experience, training, and length of service with our fire departments and we were from various faiths, yet nothing had adequately prepared us for responding to terrorism and the event that had happened on this scale in our country. It is crucial for a pastoral response to include a new awareness of global citizenship and to comprehend that until 9/11 we had been protected, naïve and arrogant. I will address this later when I reflect about the prophetic being a part of the pastoral response.

After a short, in time, but long, in intensity, van ride we arrived at the sight of the terrorist attack. We were expected to bring a pastoral response to the scene and be Chaplains at this most horrendous of events. Our task was to be a compassionate presence. We were not to be representatives of our particular faith tradition but to

minister to all as needed. It soon became very clear that I did not know what to do, though I would learn and be able to resurrect some skills from parish experience, clinical pastoral education, and previous life experiences. The one thing that I did know for certain was for me to *be* there more than *do* there. So I focused on how I could perfect the art of being present as a representative of the divine in the midst of unbelievable tragedy and chaos. The memories and stories that I heard following the attacks on New York's Twin Towers, the Pentagon in Washington, and the crash of an airline in Pennsylvania, have since made my heart and soul grow bigger than I ever thought was possible. Those attacks also rocked me at an innermost place of my being and shook almost every preconceived belief I had of the nature of humanity, the nature of God, the nature of suffering, the nature of evil.

I am immensely grateful that I was able to be there right from the start of the terrorist attacks, beginning with Boston's Logan Airport on September 13 and 15th, and twice in New York at Ground Zero in September and October. I am also grateful that with the Leominster Area Interfaith Clergy Association we were able to offer support, strength and sustenance to the community of Leominster in the days, months and years following this tragedy.

When the first plane hit the trade center I was at the church. We do not have a television and I was unaware of the horror that was unfolding before the stunned eyes of millions. When the second plane hit, a parishioner called to tell me that two planes had crashed into the World Trade Center, and that it appeared not to be an accident but a purposeful act. I got a portable television, that was going to be sold at the church yard sale, and hooked a wire coat hanger to it as an antenna. We got a snowy picture, heard some words and then the first Tower collapsed. My heart stopped dead, as I remembered that fire fighters, one of whom is related to a

Leominster fire fighter, would probably be in the buildings. I told the office coordinator she could go home if she wanted to be with her family, or to stay if she wanted to be with others, and that I was going to the Fire Station. The sense of doom in the fire station was palpable, with all televisions were tuned to the tragedy which was unfolding before our hopeless eyes. By now we knew that the brother of our fire fighter had not been on duty. However when he heard of the event, he kissed his wife and children, then told her to call his family to tell us he was safe so far, and then he drove into the city to report for duty. He like so many other fire fighters worked tirelessly in those first hours digging through and moving debris, searching, and risking their lives to rescue anyone. After spending some time at the fire station, I went back to the church to call the Chief of the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains to see if we were needed in Boston. I had been trained in Spiritual Care Aviation Incident Response and was qualified to respond to plane disasters. He told me to report the next day September 12th at the hotel airport to meet families. For a large part of September 11th, I stayed on or near the phone answering calls and checking on those I knew who would need a pastoral call. About 12:30 I headed across the street to contact the UCC minister, then to go to the Mayor's office to talk about holding a citywide vigil that evening. We were welcomed with gratitude, given staff time and other resources, and the use of the City Hall auditorium. We called the local clergy, who until this time had not been a unified clergy association, to tell them we were gathering at 6:00 to bring a pastoral presence into the midst of the pain, tragedy and chaos of the day. Each religious leader was invited to bring a prayer from their own religious tradition. The office coordinator made flyers. I then walked around downtown to invite persons to the vigil, and to make connection with people at their work places, those who might welcome a minister stopping by to support them at the time of such a heart wrenching and unprecedented tragedy.

The next morning I headed to Logan Airport, the normally busy highway was clear, and the eerie silence of having no planes flying overhead in the perfectly blue sky was disarming. After checking in at the airport hotel, showing proper identification, and getting authorization to be there, I began to circulate and talk with families, with friends, with staff, with those who had or knew someone who flown out on the two planes from Logan Airport. The Hotel generously offered hospitality: meeting rooms, sleeping quarters; food and drink to the families and the authorized volunteers who came in to offer whatever solace could be given. Crisis therapists, Red Cross volunteers, Chaplains, psychologists, social workers shuttled back and forth to the airport staff sections and to meet with family members. This was September 12th no commercial planes were landing or taking off. The families who lived close to Boston drove in to try to gain information and to seek answers from the authorities. Little was known other than all passengers and crewmembers were assumed dead. The CIA and National Transportation Safety Board did not know if bodies had been retrieved or identified nor how or when bodies would be released for burial services. The unknown was hard for families and friends to deal with. They had numerous questions: When and how could they be in touch with funeral homes to arrange for memorial services? Would there be bodies, how would the bodies get home? Who was in New York praying for their loved ones? Could they fly to New York and see where their loved one had died? Would they need to fly to New York and identify them? What could they tell their children about the unspeakable act of terrorism that had killed their loved one and thousands of people? (The death toll on September 12th was still unknown with estimates stating as many as 10,000 dead.) Then there was the underlying but not yet named terror of who was really responsible and what would/should/could be done? I tried to be a spiritual and pastoral presence, helping people to find their spiritual strength and center in the midst of the chaos.

Mediating during this time of ambiguity and uncertainty was a pastoral response that required all my skills of facilitation, intercession and careful negotiations.

Because I was the only Unitarian Universalist and considered non-Christian, whenever the deceased's religion was discovered to be Islamic or Jewish, I was summoned to go and talk with their loved ones. Grief wears no specific religious face, the responses are as different as each individual, even though the rituals and rites may be unfamiliar, grief and loss is universal. I did nothing different with the Islamic family survivors than I did with the Roman Catholic family. We sat in silent and word prayer, and created a safe space to share memories, I tried to give them as much information as I had, and I offered to be there for them in thought and in person into the future. It was a surreal experience. The training I had had was helpful, but the experience was far beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I cried all the way home. The contacts I had with the various agencies at the airport and with the families and friends reinforces that pastoral response must include being allies with interfaith groups and learning how to communicate and become inter-agency liaisons.

In the meantime, I heard from the Chief Chaplain that we might be deployed to New York as part of the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains. I began to prepare my sermon for the Sunday scrapping the sermon I had planned in August. I also tried to figure out how to keep the church open during the week for anyone who wanted to come in to seek solace. One day we kept the church open offering soup and bread, and a quiet place to be. That evening, as did thousands of other churches, we held a candle light vigil. We huddled together and supported one another.

On Saturday, September 15th I went back to the hotel and Logan airport. That was a momentous day. The first planes since the attacks were being allowed to land,

and passengers were being cleared to fly out of Logan. The story of the first plane landing causes me to tear up, which is a suitable pastoral response. It is important to remember that we also are part of the terrorized, the traumatized, and the victims. This plane contained the family of the pilot of American Airlines Flight #11, and also pilots and airline crew who had been stranded since the 12th. When the plane touched down the staff of the airport was on the runway cheering and crying. I watched from a window with tears running down my cheeks. Passengers and staff were visibly affected as these planes landed. Yet they showed inner strength, tenacity and resilience. Shortly after the first plane landed, passengers began to make their way through the gates homeward bound after four days of being stranded. I met with airline crew, who tearfully greeted incoming flights that contained friends and co-workers, who had remained away from the Boston base until the skies were deemed safe. We would gather in the staff section of the airport and watch as a flight landed and then run to greet the arrivals. It was always a bittersweet greeting, acknowledging the safe arrival of a co-worker, while at the same time recognizing the profound sadness at the loss of life of their friends and co-workers. Being the Chaplain at the airport provided me with the ability to interact with persons in a deeply spiritual way, which showed me that courage, dedication, respect, resiliency and compassion is possible even in the midst of horror.

On Sunday September 16th, I forewarned the congregation that I might be asked to go to New York to assist as part of the Massachusetts Corps of Fire Chaplains. During the Sunday service I told the congregation that I would go to New York if deployed, and that they needed to take care of my spouse and one another while I was away. Empowering others to care for one another through a faith-based support system was my pastoral response in the first week of that terrorist attack.

Initially, we thought we were going to be making home notifications to the families of missing Fire Fighters, but when we arrived in New York City at 1:00 am our assignment changed. We were needed to provide 24/7 coverage at the temporary morgue to assure that all recoveries were treated with respect, dignity and prayer, by 2:00am we were covering the morgue.

In order to decide what might be appropriate pastoral responses, I decided it would be crucial for me to get a grasp of the subject of terrorism. I found the best explanation of it in an unlikely source, a novel by Dan Brown, who is the author of the acclaimed best seller, *The Da Vinci Code*. In his first novel, *Angels and Demons*, Brown wrote, “Terrorism has a singular goal. ... Quite simply, the goal of terrorism is to create terror and fear. Fear undermines faith in the establishment. It weakens the enemy from within. ... Causing unrest in the masses. ... Terrorism is not an expression of rage. Terrorism is a political weapon. Remove a government’s façade of infallibility and you remove its peoples’ faith.”¹ A by-product of terrorism is death and destruction but the ultimate definition of terrorism that I have developed is that it is an act or series of acts, which bring about feelings of intense vulnerability and utter chaos, both personally and communally.

Prior to 9/11 I had not really thought about what terrorism was. I had known of other terrorist acts in other parts of the world. I was in Boston that fateful January day during the abortion clinic attacks, but until reading, *Terror in the Name of God*, by Jessica Stern, I had not really put that event in the same category as a terrorist attack. I had also talked to rescue personnel and followed the Murrah Building bombing in Oklahoma, but the concept of terrorism as a new reality of living was not in my consciousness. It is now. I am not crippled by a fear of

¹ Brown, Dan. *Angels and Demons*, New York, Pocket Star Books, 2000. 174

another terrorist attack nor am I weakened by the reality of terrorism, but I have lost a certain innocence, and American arrogance, as have many of the citizens of North America. Thus, part of the pastoral response to terrorism must take into account how to deal with not just the past attacks but possible future threats.

On, September 16, 2001, I began my sermon titled, 'Speaking to the Storm' with this question: "How do we even begin to put the horrific events of this past week into some sort of perspective and even dare to think about a return to normalcy? There are no places, or categories, or any of our former life experiences to compare or contrast or to call upon for understanding, comprehension and clarity."² I continue to use the metaphor and imagery from the story of Jesus and the storm, as my theological/pastoral touchstone.

It is a bible story that I believe then and now can assist in times of spiritual, psychic, psychological, social, national and/or world-wide crises, as any terrorist attack can be considered. It is the story of Jesus, a carpenter, who was asleep in the bow of the boat. He was with a crew of fishermen, sailors, and those familiar with the ways of the water when suddenly a fierce and terrible storm blew up and across the water. The crew woke him up, fearing they were going to sink. The trained and seasoned sailors awakened a carpenter to help them. It is said that he woke up, rebuked the storm, and the storm ceased. On 9/11/ 2001, I decided that my pastoral stance was to rebuke the storm, name the storm, finding a place of unflappable calmness and in the face of the peril stand with others beside me. I decided that my theological stance would be to remain in relationship with the world; I would call on everyone and anyone I needed to help me, and to help the nation that I call home, in weathering the storm. I decided that I would pursue a spiritual way that would lead me to the center of my being and that I would

² Sermon September 16, 2001 *Speaking to the Storm*. Rev. Susan Suchocki Brown

attempt to act out of that place of serene stillness to reduce as much of the chaos as I could. And I found that when I connected to this imagery, I was not afraid while at Logan Airport or at Ground Zero, nor have I been since then. This mind set, which really was a soul state, put me in touch with my great vulnerability, while at the same time putting me in touch with a tremendous humble powerfulness. I could grasp the enormity and the absurdity of the situation in each pastoral interaction I had. Even to seeing the absurdity and the humor when I spotted Dracula moving through the morgue at Ground Zero. It probably wasn't really Dracula, but looking up at 3:00am and seeing a man moving through the midst wearing a long, black, high neck clerical cope, I saw not a clergy person but the specter of Dracula. And, it did not even faze me or the other Chaplain I was with as we watched this specter drift by.

The sailors and the fishermen in the biblical story needed a new way to deal with the storm. They were in the midst of an unknown and, to them, horrendous experience and they called upon another one, not even experienced or trained in the same way they were to help them survive. We, as Unitarian Universalist must continue to call on many resources to help find a new approach and a new understanding of who we are in the world. Our pastoral response must assist our communities and those we interact with to find these resources. We must learn to network with other faith communities, with mental health caregivers. And we need to build community contacts so that when tragedy strikes our liberal religious voice will be heard.

Part of the mastery of an event lies in being able to define and to name the storm. As human beings we gain mastery by making meaning out of chaos. Terrorism introduces chaos into the system. Because terrorist attacks are relatively new to our country, we have not yet found a way to manage the chaos to allow the appropriate

return of control and reduce the resulting vulnerability. We must alleviate the initial shock, anxiety and psychic numbing. Then gradually we can find a way to make some meaningful sense of the event. If we do not develop or arrive at a renewed sense of purpose we are rudderless, rootless, often ruthless, and prone to exercising extremely poor judgment. Robert J. Lifton, in his book writes that many rescue workers were pushing President George W. Bush to “go get them.”³ Well, I was there too, and I talked to hundreds of rescue personnel, and though they wanted justice, the many I spoke to did not have the militant “go get them” attitude that Bush heard and has been pursuing since. Most often the justice they wanted included stabilizing the chaos and devastation, subduing the perpetrators and making sure that we never have to endure a situation like this again.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, writing in *From the Ashes: A Spiritual Response to the Attack on America*, defined the request, I heard from those at Ground Zero, as restorative justice. “Forgiveness is not to condone or minimize the awfulness of an atrocity or wrong. It is to recognize its ghastliness, but to choose to acknowledge the essential humanity of the perpetrators... It is an act of much hope and not despair. ... It is a justice that does not seek primarily to punish... to hit out... but looks to heal a breach, to restore a social equilibrium that the atrocity or misdeed has disturbed.”⁴

Underneath the more visible trauma lurk an intense sadness and a sense of overwhelming loss and grief. A loss of innocence not only for our children, but also for ourselves. From now on we know the world will be different. While at Logan airport, I spoke to a United Airways employee; she told me that she once

³ Lifton, Robert J., *Superpower Syndrome*. 151

⁴ *From the Ashes: A Spiritual Response to the Attack on America*, Collected by the Editors of Beliefnet, Rodale Press, 2001. “No Future Without Forgiveness” by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. 8&9

was sure she knew what the enemy looked like but that this was no longer true. This not knowing has the capacity to make us not trust others, to not care about anyone but our closest and dearest family members and friends; this could lead us to be further disconnected, isolated, and distant. However, to stay within a state of not trusting would increase the tragedy tenfold and would be a victory for the terrorists. A pastoral response might be for us to model building relationships with those sometimes considered “the other”.

All persons have a story about what happened to them when the Twin Towers fell, the Pentagon was attacked, and the plane crashed in Pennsylvania. We need to be witnesses to those stories. We need to hear them as a way to help others begin to make meaning out of the events. Yet there are two cautions. If people share that they are having intrusive memories, as though they are re-living the event again and again, or if they are practicing avoidance techniques, then pastoral intervention and referral may be in order.

The storm of terrorism might look like fear: fear of war, fear of retaliation or fear of “the other” which is what many persons who look to be of Middle Eastern descent faced and are still facing and fearing. During the first weeks and months following September 11th, many clergy began to forge relationships with those in the Islamic communities. Not only were we hungry for information and knowledge, which is a natural response when faced with a new situation and pending danger, but also we did not want to fall victim to rhetoric that was positioning itself for retaliation. We also wanted to offer sanctuary and solidarity to those from the Islamic culture and from religions, which might feel threatened, isolated and unsafe. One of the local Islamic religious leaders told me that after his group had stopped to pray for the deceased and for the responders, he encouraged his faith community to donate blood and money, to be Muslims who

show that Allah is Love not Hate; and to act as the proud Americans they are, living in a land they respect and would work to make sacred once again. A pastoral response to terrorism is to reach out to the other and make the effort to bridge our differences and to connect to people. It falls upon us, the clergy to preach and talk about the value of interdependence and connections.

Overall, humans hold an assumptive world- view that the world is fair and just. Terrorism calls this assumptive world-view into question. As clergy and pastors, it is incumbent on us to be able to help others articulate their world-view values and assumptions, and then to help them bring meaning to even the most ambiguous and complicated events. Fear of war and anxiety about if and who we will be at war with can create an ongoing sense of crisis and misunderstanding; that we do not understand others or that they might not understand us. The possibility is that unexamined fears might lead to unjust actions. The Patriot Act, the war on Iraq, the Anthrax scares, the Homeland Security warning system have all contributed to an ongoing sense of vulnerability that breeds fear and discord. At the root of some fears could be a fear of another terrorist attack, or a deep and abiding fear for the future. The pastoral response is to encourage others to talk about their fears.

“Psychological trauma refers to the impact of an extreme stressor critical incident on an individual’s psychological and biological functioning.... Traumatic events may arise when an individual is confronted with actual or threatened death or serious injury or some other threat to one’s physical integrity. It also may occur by witnessing these events occurring to others... Those who are traumatized will develop characteristic symptoms that may include intrusive recollections of the event, avoidance of the traumatic situation with a numbing of general responsiveness, and increased physiological arousal.”⁵ Fear and discord often

⁵ Flannery, Raymond. ‘Psychological Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Review.’ *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health*. 78

manifest themselves in physical symptoms: restlessness, sleeplessness, eating disruptions, being hyper-vigilant to noise or other sensory stimuli, or having an aroused startle response. “Traumatic events are extraordinary”, wrote Judith Herman, not because they rarely occur, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary adaptations to life. ... traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror and evoke the responses of catastrophe.”⁶ Helplessness, increased agitation, restlessness, and fear of annihilation, withdrawal and numbness are normal and natural reactions to experience during and immediately following any tragic event. As I walked the area known as Ground Zero listening to the stories, I observed all of the symptoms noted above. It was a normal response to an abnormal situation. However, if these and other symptoms were to continue, or if they caused continual disruption in the daily patterns of living, pastoral intervention would be necessary. Know when to intervene, when you are working with someone who has ongoing symptoms. Some of these may be the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which will require specialized treatment. A working definition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is, when persistent or reoccurring symptoms associated with a critical incident response last beyond three months or if symptoms manifest for the first time at least six months after the onset of the traumatic incident.⁷

After 9/11 fear and anxiety hit people hard and for a while everyone seemed more on edge and vigilant. The entire nation was experiencing Acute Stress Disorder with symptoms of anxiety, fear, sleeplessness, depression, and increased anger, all of which were perfectly normal symptoms. However if they continued to interfere with life functioning, then something more serious was going on and it would be

⁶ *Herman, Judith. Trauma and Recovery New York. Basic Books, 1972, 33*

⁷ *Flannery, 79*

incumbent, as part of our pastoral response to know when to refer people to outside resources.

Following a traumatic event and especially following the terrorist attacks was the desire to be in contact with family and loved ones this was crucial. Caring attachments is one of the ways to begin to heal and recover from trauma. Yet because we are living in a far more mobile world, some have loved ones who live on the other side of the continent. Some parents and children were and are still fearful that they might never see each other again. Some people do not have healthy family relationships, and during the attacks the painful reality of these troubled relationships surfaced. While at Ground Zero one of the frequent questions I would ask emergency workers was, “When was the last time you talked to a member of your family, who was that, what did you talk about, and when are you going to talk to them again?” Being a conduit to keep communications open or to mend fences between persons is a pastoral response. It requires taking on the role of mediator, confessor and facilitator.

I often discovered that the emergency workers were experiencing survival guilt or what Robert Lifton calls “death guilt”. “Death guilt has to do with others dying and not oneself, or with remaining alive when one had been close to death (and was supposed to die). It has to do with what I call *failed enactment*: one’s inability at the moment of the disaster to act in the way one would have expected of oneself (saving people... or even to have experienced the expectable and appropriate emotions (strong compassion for victims, rage toward perpetrators.)⁸ I heard numerous sad stories of fire fighters who had swapped work shifts with another and the other had died. These situations were particularly difficult to deal with and they raise a host of issues. Sometimes there are no answers, and knowing that can

⁸ Lifton, Robert Jay. *Super Power Syndrome*. New York, Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2003. 140

save us from feeling personally responsible to fix situations. This emotional response is quite prevalent among rescue personnel, even without acts of terrorism. It has created on-going issues both negative and positive, with those who were the first responders. One positive response was to learn more, to gain knowledge as a way to gain mastery and a way to understand situations more completely. I know many responders, and I, too, got involved in ongoing training. Another response to death survival is the desire to care for humanity. Initially this was evident as volunteers, some recruited and others not, poured into help. Following 9/11 many persons volunteered to make the world safer and to find a way to be more generous and forgiving. The spirit of altruism, resilience, courage and fortitude thrived, as people proved that catastrophes are survived even though they are not forgotten.

One of the volunteers that I met at Ground Zero took upon himself the task of rehabilitating the bathrooms in the American Express building. He came home from Vietnam emotionally battered and bruised. He lives in the western part of Massachusetts and when the towers fell, he took it upon himself to enter Ground Zero as he says, “to help and to either kill me or cure me of my Vietnam experience and grief.” He found personal needs’ supplies, candles, roses, clean towels, an electrical generator and pails of water to clean the stalls and toilets. This was an absolute gift of providing cleanliness and pleasantness in the worst of situations. I met him one evening when I was headed to the port-a-johns and someone directed me to the newly ready bathrooms. His name was Sean. We talked for a long while, and we prayed.

In September of 2004, I decided to try to find him to see if volunteering there had helped him recover from his Vietnam War experiences. I also wanted to thank him for his gift of generosity, his talents at making something beautiful out of disorder and for caring enough to risk life and limb to stay without authorization,

at Ground Zero for eleven days. Unfortunately he had not recovered and, in fact, he was in terrible shape. Intrusive memories, total disruption of his life patterns, and physical symptoms had just about crippled him. He is bitter, angry, depressed and the survivor guilt has made him into vengeful, humorless, spiritually ill man. I tell you his story to demonstrate how survivor guilt may also manifest itself in negative ways by causing one to develop a vengeful, retaliatory mind set; couple this with the power to act on these feelings and a dangerous situation will be created. Beyond the obvious care, nurturing, and compassion we would show to a person who has been damaged by the fall out of a terrorist attack, the pastoral response we might use to deal with “death guilt” is our prophetic voice. Many ministers on the Sunday immediately following 9/11 found that speaking out against war, against labeling the stranger or other as enemy, and speaking with a prophetic voice was the pastoral response that felt most sincere to them. Since 9/11 most of us have used our prophetic voice to speak about justice, peace, equality, and global and national politics.

If we have clarified our own theological beliefs, confronted the propensity for good and evil within all of us, and can follow our own ethical values and guidelines, we can offer healing and the transformative experience of love and compassion. We can be positive influences if the pastoral response includes modeling ethical behavior for those unsure of how to act when the emotions may have a tendency to overrule the rational. We must, however, practice what we preach. We must examine our own capacity to inflict harm on others; and we must locate our place in the global universe as part of it, not the center of it. I am convinced if we don't come to understand this about our country, and ourselves we cannot offer a pastoral presence from a place of integrity and groundedness.

The fear that their sons and daughters or they themselves would be sent into war zones has proved to be a valid fear. The tragedy of the terrorist attacks is not just the loss of life at the sites, but the pervasive and ongoing crisis that has occurred since. War is one of those tragedies. We might not agree with being at war and, probably few of us do, however we need to be pastors to those in the military and to their families. A pastoral response is to be a sojourner with the families and those who were and are being sent to war. Keep in contact with them through email, letters and calls and with their families to decrease the sense of isolation and loneliness. Prior to the declaration of war in January 2002, the Leominster interfaith clergy met on a rotating basis at various churches. We would gather and pray, each in our own tradition, for a peaceful resolution to avoid going to war with Afghanistan, while hoping that Osama bin Laden would be caught and contained.

In a ritual of candle lighting at the churches we listed the names of those who are serving in the military and are in harm's way. This list continues to grow and to be used periodically. The use of ritual proved to be a soothing thing during those intense political times. When war on Iraq was declared, a thin line had to be walked between those opposed to the war and those in favor of it. I continue to take an anti-war but not anti-military stance. During any public speaking, as the Fire Department Chaplain, or as a religious leader, I have always supported those serving, while also speaking out against war. This upcoming election will test all our pastoral skills of supporting and strengthening those serving, while also confronting and challenging those who keep putting our citizens at risk, especially the disproportionate number of persons of color and the poor.

Our pastoral task involves using all the skills and traits we have at our disposal to mitigate the fear, to be bearers of hope and to be the best possible representatives

of humanity. This involves simple actions like being more attentive to others, and their verbal and nonverbal clues that occur when we listen to and interact with them. Some people have tried to make meaning out of the terrorist event by asking: ‘Why did this happen, how could the airlines not know, how could the authorities not know this terrorist act was being planned, how could terrorist get on a plane, how could God allow this to happen?’ These are some of the questions that people were asking; and they are still turning to their religious leaders for answers. Listen and listen carefully for the expressions of anger, as fear is often times the motivating emotion behind anger.

Don’t be put off by the various emotions that surface. Find your place of inner sanctity and listen from that place. The hardest thing for me to deal with is when the storm looks like anger, both my own anger and the anger from others. This anger may be directed at the systems we assume will be in place to protect us. Anger is an appropriate and a natural response to being attacked. Anger is a way to break out of the psychic numbing that occurs during a trauma and it provides a way to respond. Following the impact of any disaster, a flight or fight modality is apt to emerge this, fight or flight mode has now become a predominant part of our culture.

“Psychological trauma”, defined by Raymond Flannery, Jr. “is the state of severe fright that we experience when we are confronted with a sudden, unexpected, potentially life-threatening event over which we have no control, and to which we are unable to respond effectively no matter how hard we try.”⁹ Victims and witnesses are stunned, frightened, and then angry more often than not. Expect anger, but don’t live out each angry feeling as if it were justified or appropriate. The body responds with a fight or flight response and a host of other biological

⁹ Flannery, Jr., Raymond. *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: The Victim’s Guide to Healing and Recovery*. New York, Crossroad Press. 2001. 7

factors that come immediately into play: increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, rapid depletion of blood sugar, rapid breathing, lack of attention, interference with concentration and memory; these are all part of the immediate response to a traumatic event. Each of these responses is a basic survival response as the body goes into a defensive, protective mode. These normal biological factors begin to be reduced as soon as the immediate threat is lessened; however this is not always the case and sometimes readjustments are not possible. Part of the pastoral response must provide for the fact that some crisis symptoms may not be easily abated. A component of the pastoral response must provide for the ongoing spiritual and psychological tools that the victims and witnesses need to regain what Beverly Raphael refers to as “personal mastery”.

Innocent lives were lost and continue to be lost, and countless thousands are suffering. Terrorism is not an event that can be made better in one week, month or even year. Terrorism affects the very core of a society and the pervasive effects will be felt for generations. I believe that the god of my understanding wails and weeps along beside me; and that I should demonstrate compassion and a divine presence and knowledge that human goodness and love are stronger than evil. In time we will overcome the tragedy of 9/11; a new normal will be built, hopefully it will temper our American arrogance with wisdom and respect for the dignity of all persons.

At the beginning of any tragedy, especially one of the magnitude of a terrorist attack, denial, numbing, and minimization of the effects are often the first responses; but don't confuse denial, numbing and minimization with not caring. It is important to remember that people are at different places in the processing of this intensely tragic time and that people are at different places of understanding and willingness to deal with the event also. Mutual respect for the inherent worth

and dignity of each person should become a mantra as you engage in the inevitable conversations.

The storm's name is also despair and grief, overwhelming and incomplete, long lasting and life altering. The ability to pray at the morgue and on the Pile for the victims, the way that hundreds and thousands attended memorial services throughout the country and the services at Ground Zero in the weeks and the years since the event has brought some lessening of the grief to the survivors. "As survivors are listened to, the opportunity opens up for them to grieve as their many losses are *re*-remembered in the telling of stories and memories long split-off in seeming oblivion. This process involves more than the recounting, recalling, or retelling that can occur repeatedly with no accompanying grief, because *re*-remembering involves feeling the pain of suffering and loss. This grieving, or the active experiencing of the breadth of those reactions touched off by *re*-remembering, carries with it the potential to transform suffering into hope for reconnection and wholeness."¹⁰ It is during times of grief that our pastoral response calls us to become sacramental religious leaders. It is then that we take on the priestly role as we offer solace, words of wisdom, the presence of hope and a process to remember the dead.

Terrorism attempts to cripple a large group, to render it fearful, chaotic, and immobilized. A pastoral response is to assist others to return to routines, even if they are changed or modified routines. I felt a sense of victory and purpose when the first plane landed in Boston on September 15th. I experienced hope because the planes landing symbolized an attempt to return to some of the normal routines of living. And, even though the events of 9/11 has changed our world-view,

¹⁰ Means, J. Jeffrey. *Trauma and Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul*. Minn: Fortress Press.2000, 148

sometimes in positive ways and sometimes in negative ones, life does have routine patterns of living, doing and being which are helpful to connect to.

Care of self is paramount in being able to offer effective pastoral responses.

“...The true leader cannot stand outside of the healing experience as a disinterested observer, but must be ready to have his or her own wounds activated and reactivated, but contained and not projected.”¹¹ In order to contain our own wounds it is important to have strong and healthy support systems, to foster, develop and maintain a sense of humor, to develop and live a healthy life style, to know when to seek outside help and to learn to balance the experiences of powerlessness and control with vulnerability and dominance.

The goals of responding to a traumatic event are to stabilize the victims and survivors; mitigate the signs and symptoms so they will not linger and cause on-going problems; get the victims and survivors to be able to function at least minimally; and, most importantly, to offer and seek ongoing and continuous care, if needed. In summary, the pastoral response is: to intervene, when appropriate, be present always, offer hope for the future, be witnesses to others, be open to change and transformation by the experience(s). The pastoral response during times of terrorism requires that we learn how to help others manage fears and anxiety and that we help to restore order through making meaning of such events.

During the storm Jesus offered a new way. He knew little about the water or storms on the water; he was a carpenter not a fisherman, yet he stood firm and rebuked the storm providing courage to others around him so that they could do that which they were trained and called to do. Courage is doing what needs to be done, even in the midst of not knowing, this is a time of not knowing.

¹¹ Means. 211

We may have survived the terrorist attacks of 9/11, but the world is not the same. Our country is not the same and we are not the same; we have had to restructure our reality. The challenges of ministering in a post 9/11 world are still not fully known. We must continue to take care of one another and assist and guide each other through the long and pain- filled tragedy of terrorism and its aftermath.