

Disaster Chaplain Code of Ethics and Guiding Principles

Nebraska Disaster Chaplain Network of Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska

1. DISASTER CHAPLAINS DO NOT PROSELYTIZE. While serving as a Disaster Chaplain, you are part of an overall response team for behavioral health. The others who compose this team are from the fields of behavioral health and public health. This team coordinates with entities which are also responding to the disaster. While you are working on this team, your objective is to provide spiritual care and emotional support to those who have been affected by the disaster. You are not representing your congregation or attempting to influence people to join your faith tradition.

2. MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY. Those to whom you provide spiritual care will expect that what they share with the disaster chaplain will remain confidential. Confession – as a penitent to a confessor – carries a sacred obligation that it will not be revealed. Child, elder and or domestic violence as well as circumstances where an individual is in danger to self or others (i.e. suicide) must be reported, but the most ethical means of doing this is to inform the individual that you must share the information with appropriate authorities. All other confidential information will remain unrevealed, except as it is helpful for the individual's concerns to be known by others who are providing Psychological First Aid, Emotional Support and Spiritual Care. You may be asked to report aggregate information that is not connected with specific individuals (e.g. general demographics and concerns of those who are seen).

3. YOU ARE A VOLUNTEER. Chaplains volunteer their services as a ministry on behalf of God and their fellow humans. They will accept no financial gift for such services, nor perform any duties with the view of personal material gain. Should Chaplains be approached with contributions – financial or otherwise – they should direct the contributors to send their contributions to local congregations, Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska, NEDRN, or other disaster response agencies.

4. RECOGNIZE YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIMITS. Disaster Chaplains recognize that their skills are for the provision of Spiritual First Aid and Emotional Support, and that their scope of practice is limited to this responsibility. They should take care not to extend themselves beyond the provision of this service and should feel free to consult with those who possess other skills and freely make referrals when it is in the best interest of the persons whom they are seeking to help. If there are tasks which you are not comfortable providing, do not hesitate to make your limitations known. If you are overwhelmed by the task you are willing and able to do, do not hesitate to ask for a break.

5. KNOW YOUR BOUNDARIES. Do not talk to the media. Do not wander around the disaster site. Do not take pictures. Do not disturb possible evidence. Take breaks. Work with a partner. Do not self-activate.

6. REMAIN FLEXIBLE. Every disaster is different and calls for a unique response. Therefore, the response takes a different shape in each situation. There are multiple agencies and organizations which involve themselves in responding to disasters. It is imperative that we are flexible in our response and that we graciously work cooperatively with the wide range of response mechanisms.

7. DEMONSTRATE SENSITIVITY TO ALL FAITH TRADITIONS. While individually maintaining our own faith tradition, we seek to be sensitive to the wide range of faith traditions which are a part of our community and society. We will not seek to be what we are not, but will respect the faith of the individuals we serve.

8. AVOID SPECULATION. Disaster Chaplains will not involve themselves in speculation about either what or who is to blame, nor about what may have happened. Neither are chaplains to “second-guess” other chaplains, those in authority in the chain of command, or officials responding to the disaster. If there are concerns about circumstances, these are to be taken to the Regional Disaster Chaplain Coordinator in charge of the chaplain response for the specific disaster.

9. BE AWARE OF ALL AFFECTED. No one involved in either the disaster itself, or the disaster response is unaffected. Be aware of those around you – disaster responders, community members, families and friends of the victims, and disaster chaplains – to see opportunities for providing spiritual care.

10. FOLLOW THE INCIDENT COMMAND STRUCTURE. Disaster Chaplains will only be activated when The Emergency Management Agency calls for a behavioral health response. Disaster Chaplains always work under the direction of and cooperatively with Behavioral Health and Public Health. We will follow all protocols outlined in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) training – and Disaster Chaplains will be encouraged to participate in such training so that they are able to function appropriately on the scene.