

Responding Effectively to Crisis in the Campus Community



“The closest thing we have to a sanctuary in our secular society is the university campus... So the defiling of this sanctuary is a sacrilegious act...”

-George Distel, PhD

This proposed program has been developed by the Pacific Violence Prevention Institute and has been designed to equip Lutheran Campus Pastors/Ministers with the tools that they will need to respond positively and effectively if a crisis occurs on their campus.

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Responding Effectively to Crisis in the Campus Community

As campus and community leaders Lutheran Campus Ministers/Campus Pastors (CM/CP) are sometimes called upon to assist the community in times of need. In the event of an Act of Violence, Natural Disaster, Medical Emergency, or Local/State/National Emergency, the CM/CP can play an important role in helping to provide stability to the community.

CM/CPs come from diverse educational and experiential backgrounds. Due to this diversity, the skill set of every CM/CP is unique. For instance, some are ordained and some are lay. Some have been in the ministry their whole adult lives, while others may be on their second or third career. This diversity means that every CM/CP has different gifts and strengths—skills that if used appropriately can be an asset to the community during a crisis situation. Conversely, every CM/CP has areas of weakness in his/her ministry where growth is needed. Becoming more aware of these areas of weakness will allow a CM/CP to prevent that area of weakness from becoming a liability in a crisis situation.

The Pacific Violence Prevention Institute, an organization whose sole mission is to create safer and more effective communities by preventing and responding to acts of violence, has developed this program to allow participants to evaluate the experience and skills that CM/CPs already possess, and use those skills to become a positive asset to the community in a time of crisis.

PROPOSED WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Workshop Goal

The goal of this workshop is to provide CM/CPs with the tools to identify and utilize their individual gifts to develop a comprehensive plan that will help them respond effectively to a crisis on campus. Most CM/CPs are not professional crisis responders; however, every CM/CP has the skills to positively influence the community in time of crisis. Because the skill set of each CM/CP is unique, each CM/CP's response to a crisis will also be unique. CM/CP participating in this workshop will leave this program able to design and implement a crisis response plan for their ministry.

This program is divided into three sections: Prevention and Preparation, Immediate and Emergent Response, and Long Term Response. Through a number of individual and small group activities, participants will come to understand the different types of crises that may arise, and how they might best use their skills to positively influence the crisis situation.

I. Preparation (to be completed prior to workshop)

Prior to the workshop participants will be required to complete a self-assessment inventory. This inventory will help participants to identify their personal and institutional

strengths and weaknesses and how they can use those strengths to benefit the community during a crisis situation, and how they can be more aware of their weaknesses so that they do not hinder their crisis response.

II. Introduction (1 Hour)

What are we preparing for? – Violent Acts (excl. sexual assault as this involves much more confidentiality and usually a completely different set of guidelines by the university), Sexual Assault, Natural Disaster, Mass Destruction/Mass Casualty

Crisis:

1. *A stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, esp. for better or for worse, is determined; turning point.*
2. *A condition of instability or danger, as in social, economic, political, or international affairs, leading to a decisive change.*
3. *A dramatic emotional or circumstantial upheaval in a person's life.*
4. *Medicine/Medical.*
 - a. *The point in the course of a serious disease at which a decisive change occurs, leading either to recovery or to death.*
 - b. *The change itself*

Emergencies that arise on campus can be as diverse as the student population. In order to be able to respond to any eventuality, CM/CPs must be aware of all of the possibilities that exist.

Direct Crises vs. Indirect Crises

In many cases a national event, or an indirect crisis, can cause as much stress, anxiety, and fear as a local one, or a direct crisis. While the emotional support needed for each may be similar, your response may differ between the two. For example, if there is a bomb threat at one of the residence halls on campus, some of your students may have a very urgent need for food and shelter, and they may seek you out for support. If the situation is local there may be an imminent danger, and the need to protect the physical safety of your students should be your first priority. This is a direct crisis. If, however, the event is national (i.e. Columbine, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, VA Tech), it is unlikely that you will need to provide for the physical safety of your students, and your focus can shift to providing for their emotional needs. This is an indirect crisis.

Several years ago a university where we act as consultants experienced two critical events within a short time period, one indirect and one direct. The first event, the murder of Matthew Shepard, a college student in Wyoming in 1998 was a national event, however the brutality of this hate crime caused a huge outcry on this campus. Many students felt that if it could happen in Wyoming it could happen on their campus as well. Students felt helpless, wishing that there were something to be done. Lutheran Campus Ministry, at the request of and in collaboration with the university administration, helped to organize a

candlelight vigil on campus as well as discussion forums at the center and around campus, so that students had the avenue to show their support in a positive way. While this event did not immediately affect the physical safety of students at this university, it was indeed a crisis that needed an effective response because students' emotional needs needed to be met.

A few months later the same university experienced a direct crisis. It was reported that a stranger on a street adjacent to campus had sexually assaulted a student. The alleged assailant was not immediately found, prompting campus safety officials release warning statements to students. These statements caused fear and anger throughout the community, and many students did not feel safe to walk to and from class. In this situation there was an immediate need to provide for the safety of students. This was done by organizing "walking groups" to make sure that no one would walk home alone, and students with cars gave out their phone numbers so that if someone had to be on campus late at night they could call for a safe ride home. These were some of the steps that provided for the students' immediate safety. In addition, to the needs for physical safety, the emotional needs of the students also needed to be met. Because we have all experienced violence in one form or another, acts of violence such as these tend to bring up old feelings related to our own experiences. In some cases, people who have been seriously traumatized by violence may have Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, which in most cases is undiagnosed, and this type of event may trigger flashbacks or other posttraumatic responses. It is important to take steps to re-establish the safety of campus and of the community.

Types of Crises

The following categories of crises are possible at a college campus. This is not a complete list, and other events are possible, however, by preparing for these events, you should be prepared for a wide variety of crises that may arise.

Act of Violence (Excluding Sexual Assault)

Violence takes many forms. It can be verbal or physical. It can be interpersonal or it can be on a larger scale. Acts of violence occur on campus on a daily basis, yet most acts of violence don't make the headlines. However, from time to time an act of violence such a hate crime, assault, or murder may create a crisis situation on campus. Sometimes the act of violence is acute (i.e. bomb threat, gunman on campus, etc.) and students are in immediate danger and their needs for physical safety must be met. In most cases the act of violence has been resolved and students are no longer in immediate physical danger, so their emotional needs must be met.

Regardless of their severity, all acts of violence damage the individuals directly involved, in turn damaging the community. However, more high-profile acts of violence violate the sanctity of the academic setting, destroy the students' feelings of security, and can damage the fabric of the community as a whole.

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault has many components that do not exist with other forms of violence. Statistically, sexual assault likely occurs on every campus on a weekly basis. Most of these assaults are committed by an acquaintance and in many cases are not reported. Each campus has its own policies and procedures dealing with how to respond to acts of sexual assault. In most cases, in order to protect the privacy of the victim and the alleged perpetrator, details about the incident are not released.

Death of a Student

The death of a student, either through accidental or natural causes will often require a response from the CM/CPs either at the request of the university or the family.

Natural Disaster, Fire, Explosion, etc.

Wherever there are large populations of people living closely together there is a greater likelihood that much care will be needed in the event of a natural disaster. Earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, and severe winter weather are all examples that can greatly impact the lives of the people on the campuses that are served. Fires, explosions, gas leaks and infrastructure collapses can be devastating to the lives of students and faculty alike.

In March of 1998 a tornado struck the campus of Gustavus Adolphus University causing a huge amount of damage, closing many residence halls and classrooms. Due to a lack of housing the only option for some students was to camp. In a situation such as this a CM/CPs can use its resources to aid students in obtaining basic needs that the University is unable to provide due to natural disaster.

Medical Emergency

As a large group of individuals living in and working in close proximity to one another, an outbreak of contagious disease is always possible. Outbreaks of measles and meningitis are becoming more common events on campus, and in addition to being highly disruptive to classes and events, can cause widespread anxiety, stress, and panic in the community.

III. Prevention and Preparation (3 Hours)

Responding effectively to a crisis situation requires that the groundwork for the response is laid long before the event. A plan that is hastily thrown together after a crisis begins is unlikely to have a positive impact on the situation. The PVPI will guide participants through the process of developing an effective prevention and preparedness plan.

a. Making contacts on campus

In consultations with numerous university officials, we have found that an effective crisis response plan begins with developing relationships, and therefore trust, with other

professionals on campus who are likely to be involved in responding to a crisis. If a CM/CP does not have a relationship with campus officials it is unlikely that the pastor's expertise will be utilized in the event of an emergency. However, if a CM/CP does have a solid relationship with members of the campus community and they are familiar with the pastor's skill set, it is highly likely that they will be trusted and called upon. The PVPI will help participants determine those departments on campus where they should develop networking strategies.

b. Making contacts in community

A CM/CP's contacts in the community can also be outstanding resources to the campus ministry and to the campus. In most cases support will be needed from those outside of the campus community if he/she is going to be able to continue respond effectively. In addition, there may be members of the community that would be valuable to the response that the CM/CP is aware of but campus officials are not. In this case the CM/CP can act as conduit between the campus and the community for appropriate resources.

c. Self-Assessment Inventory – Who am I? What are my gifts? What are my qualifications? What are my weaknesses?

Before a CM/CP can develop a plan to respond to a crisis on campus he/she must take an honest and open inventory of his/her skills and weaknesses. Doing this prior to a crisis will allow the deal effectively with issues that arise within his/her skill set, and to refer those needs that fall outside of his/her skill set. The PVPI will lead participants through exercises that will allow them take inventory of their strengths and weaknesses, and learn how to utilize their strengths and mitigate their weaknesses when a crisis arises.

d. Confidentiality

Each setting will have established codes dealing with ethics and confidentiality issues. Many CM/CPs deal with confidentiality issues on a daily basis. However, great care must be taken to ascertain that the CM/CPs is acting within the parameters of all institutional guidelines involved in the crisis.

IV. Immediate and Emergent Responses (3 Hours)

Once participants have completed all of this prep work, they will be prepared to develop a plan to respond to a crisis. In order to develop a comprehensive plan to respond to most crises, participants will first answer the following questions as the basis for their personal plans:

a. How will I establish IMMEDIATE physical safety for my students and myself?

Your first goal in any emergent situation should be to establish safety for yourself and your students. This is particularly true during a direct crisis. If you are in a place or situation that is unsafe, work to move to a location where you will be able take a breath and figure out what your next step will be.

b. How will I assess the type of incident that has taken place? Act of violence? Sexual assault (one-time or serial)? Hate crime? Natural Disaster? Medical Emergency? Mass Destruction (infrastructure) or Mass Casualty (people)?

Once safety is established it is time to assess the incident. Gather information through media sources, from students who have witnessed the event or from your contacts on campus. Based on the information that is gathered, the CP/CMs will be able to start to develop a timetable and plan for a response.

c. How will I assess LONG-TERM safety?

Is a perpetrator still at-large? Is it safe for students to leave their homes and come to your center, or would it be better for them to stay home for the time being? Is your center structurally sound? Have qualified professionals been contacted to ascertain safety issues?

d. What are the needs of my students and the rest of the community? How can I respond to those needs?

These needs will vary depending upon the nature of the crisis. However, here is a list of physical and emotional needs that generally need to be met. You will have the skills to provide some of these services, and you will likely need to use your campus and community contacts to refer your students to other professionals.

V. Long Term Response and Prevention (1 Hour)

The end of a crisis does not conclude the end of the work of the CM/CP. The lingering emotional effects after the emergency has ended can last a lifetime. As a CM/CP what can you do to help the community process the event that has taken place? The following discussions and activities will allow participants to develop a plan to continue to meet the needs of their students and community.

a. Assessment of Immediate Response

In order to take action after a crisis it will be necessary to evaluate the action that you have already taken. You should address the following questions:

1. How effective was your response? What went well? What could have gone better?
2. What needs of your students and the community have not yet been met?
3. Can your skill set help meet those needs?
4. What campus and community contacts will you use to help you assess the efficacy of your immediate response?

b. Plan of Action

After you have assessed the efficacy of your emergent response, you will need to create a plan of action for the future. Your plan should address the following questions:

1. How will I continue to provide for the needs of my students and community?
2. How long will I need to provide those needs?
3. How will you continue to evaluate the needs of students and the community?
 - Individual or group discussions with students?

- Campus contacts?
 - Surveys?
4. What events/activities can you plan or services can you provide that will help meet the needs of students and the community?

c. Prevention

After a crisis, most campuses and communities will work to prevent a crisis in the future, or to respond more effectively to a crisis that cannot be averted. A CM/CP can be a valuable asset to this process if they have the proper contacts on campus or in the community. Your plan involving

VI. Closing

During this workshop CP/CM will be learning to prepare for events that hopefully will never occur. However, the preparations being made will have a positive effect on many other aspects of the ministry. For example, even if there is never a crisis, CM/CP can use the contacts that they have made on campus and in the community to provide resources to their students in non-critical situations. This section will allow CM/CP to explore how the plans that they will develop can help strengthen other aspects of their ministries.