

Spiritual and Religious Care Tips for Chaplains during COVID-19

Territorial Program Department

March 26, 2020

Preamble

Spiritual and Religious Care is important to assist individuals in identifying, affirming, and using their own spiritual and religious beliefs, human values and faith to support, sustain and inform them in times of crisis, need or recovery.

Spiritual and Religious Care doesn't stop during this time of pandemic and crisis as people may be anxious, fearful and lonely. More than ever, spiritual and religious care is a critical need in the various sectors we serve. Continuing this aspect of ministry during social distancing will require different strategies, while at the same time being mindful of The Salvation Army values:

- **Hope:** We give hope through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- **Service:** We reach out to support others without discrimination.
- **Dignity:** We respect and value each other, recognizing everyone's worth.
- **Stewardship:** We responsibly manage the resources entrusted to us.



Self-Preparation Tips for Chaplains

Start with Prayer for Yourself and for Others

As people of faith, we recognize the healing aspect of God and those around us seeking healing as well. Prayer keeps us grounded and helps us find our centre with God.

- Pray for yourself—for wisdom, guidance, and for a calm spirit
 - When there is panic and fear, it is important to have a calm demeanour and be an example for others to follow.
- Pray for those to whom you minister—they are looking to you as a source of knowledge, comfort, calm and hope.

Keep Calm

Convey the message found in Psalm 46:1-3:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”

- Encourage routine and maintain spiritual care practices (e.g. religious texts, rituals, prayer, music, meditation, etc.).
- Listen to music. Music can be an effective and powerful tool to calm and convey a message of hope (e.g. Can calming music be playing in the background when calls are being made?).
- Encourage deep breathing as a calming practice (breathe in through the nose to the count of three; breathe out through the mouth to the count of three).
- Another calming exercise for anxiety is: 5-4-3-2-1 (can be repeated if necessary).
 - **5:** Acknowledge FIVE things you see around you. It could be a pen, a spot on the ceiling, anything in your surroundings.
 - **4:** Acknowledge FOUR things you can touch around you.
 - **3:** Acknowledge THREE things you can hear.
 - **2:** Acknowledge TWO things you can smell.
 - **1:** Acknowledge ONE thing you can taste



- Adopt a verse or mantra to focus on when thoughts become anxious (e.g. “God is my refuge and strength”).

Selfcare

- Set a regular routine.
- Take time to refill yourself by attending to your own spiritual needs. Personal devotions and prayer are even more important now.
- Take necessary breaks.
- Maintain healthy lifestyle. Stay well hydrated, maintain a healthy diet and exercise. Walking is a good calming activity.
- Recognize your own emotions and work through them, as needed.
- Seek guidance and support from others, as needed.
- Remember that The Salvation Army’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available.

Compassionate Connecting

Chaplaincy is a ministry of presence and compassionate connection, offering hope, support and value of the person:

- Check on people in whatever way possible (e.g. phone calls, video messenger, text messages, email).
 - Note: When checking in do not start with prayer before you get to know the person. They may think you are proselytizing (trying to convert them). As you talk with them and discover by the conversation that they have a belief/faith and/or if they ask, by all means pray with them.
- Regularly post encouraging Scripture verses, prayers, inspirational thoughts (e.g. via social media platforms).
- Coordinate a prayer “group” via text messages, video messenger, emails, etc.
 - Choose the prayer focus and agree upon a time to pray about it “together.”



Tips for Residential Settings

First and foremost, be aware of the local public health guidelines regarding group size restrictions and social distancing.

- Chapel services
 - Hold them in a different space or offer them at additional times, if possible, keeping in mind the need to maintain distance (i.e. 6 feet/2 metres apart).
 - Use music when possible to convey a message of hope (e.g. Can calming music be playing in the background and/or throughout the building?).
 - Use technologies and social media platforms where possible, including The Salvation Army's subscription to Right Now Media:
<https://salvationist.ca/spiritual-life/other-resources/rightnow-media>
- Personal Visits
 - Personal visits are discouraged but if they are absolutely necessary, consider every option available to maintain health and safety—wash hands before and after the visit, minimize touch, wear layers that can be removed as needed when leaving the space.
 - Keep a safe distance between people by standing in a doorway or on the opposite side of the room (at least 2 metres/6 feet apart).
 - To maintain health and safety, touch is not encouraged--no hugs, handholding or touch of the arm, etc.
 - Use full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if visits require closer proximity.

Tips for Non-Residential Settings

Show care and connection in practical ways:

- Offer tissue packets labelled with a Scripture verse and/or a word of encouragement and/or contact information.
- Include a short devotional thought, prayer, Scripture verse or words to a hymn in a food hamper or care package.



- Cautionary note: if using the above options (tissues and devotional), items need to be sanitized and could be pre-packaged in a small sandwich bag that should also be sanitized on the outside.
- Post a verse or thought on the door and/or at the place where it can be readily and safely seen when people come to pick up food, etc.
- Help with referrals to practical resources (e.g. food bank, clothing, etc.).
- Ask volunteers/corps members to help prepare care items, make phone calls, send emails, etc.

Note: The Emergency Disaster Services-- [Emergency Response Handbook](#) (available at Supplies and Purchasing) is a resource with many suggestions to help someone dealing with different situations including isolation and depression.

The importance of Spiritual and Religious Care is summed up in this quote from Commissioners Floyd and Tracey Tidd (March 15, 2020):

“While following the directives provided by health professionals, we must remain a people who give hope today. We have a hope that does not disappoint and a privilege of being bearers of the hope of Christ to our neighbours and communities.”

