



## ***Member Care Update***

**Ethnê-MC Facilitation Team**

To contact us: [membercare@ethne.net](mailto:membercare@ethne.net)

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### ***Ethnê-MC Update Issue 10: November 2009***

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November's Member Care Update by Eng Hoe challenged us think about how we react to disasters and the importance of training local Christian and community leaders to be first responders. This month, Doug Harrison, who has served in Central Asia and is a past contributor to this update, provides his thoughts and concerns on this subject. We would love to hear your responses. What are you doing to prepare your community to be ready when the crisis comes? Are there ways you are helping Christians in your circle of influence be prepared to be Christ's hands and feet, his love and care? Please email me, Linda Swanson, at [lindaswanson@linkcare.org](mailto:lindaswanson@linkcare.org) with your thoughts. I would also appreciate learning what topics you'd like to write or read about. Thank you!

#### **GO AND DO THE SAME**

By Doug Harrison

This morning, my wife and I sit looking at the television set as the morning news presents a serious story about severe flooding in one region of the United States. News reporters are peppering officials with pointed questions about what the government will "do about it" and what kind of relief the government will provide the victims of this serious disaster. The official is trying his best to convince his audience "help is on the way."

Certainly, a significant obstacle to government's timely response is their resources are hundreds – if not thousands – of miles away. That distance is compounded by the fact that the government generally has limited capacity to assess what kind of aid is needed. Sadly, it is not uncommon in the weeks following a disaster for news stories to report on the tardiness and misplacement of government relief efforts.

But, there is a supernatural solution to much of this dilemma. It is a solution that costs almost nothing and mitigates the challenge of distribution and availability of resources. And that solution is found in the hospitality and mercy of God's people.

Local churches can be the solution to the challenge of distribution and availability of resources. The church is distributed. The church is pervasive and always "on call." The church has the most potent solution, and that is the love and efficacy of Jesus Christ, our Lord. There really is no other entity on earth with the capacity for mobilization like the church.

God has given a mandate to His people to be ready to sacrificially love others in the midst of trouble.

Romans 12:13 *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

1 Timothy 5:6 *But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.*

Hebrews 13:2 *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*

He specifically charges those of us who follow Jesus with the responsibility to be alert and attentive to those in need. For sure, hospitality and mercy are potent spiritual disciplines that require wisdom and direction for effective service. We sense a growing momentum for Christians to be engaged and equipped to effectively serve others in times of catastrophic need.

The contemporary term for people who are prepared and equipped to serve the victims of a disaster or tragedy is “first-responder.” Here in the United States, we think of first-responders as the professional people trained as police, fire or search-and-rescue personnel. Government leadership has recognized the limited impact that fire and police agencies can have in situations that are wide-spread, or involve more victims than can reasonably be handled by the existing number of professional emergency responders. Refugees from war and disasters fall easily into this category.

There is a growing and serious movement towards engaging citizens who are not “professional first-responders” to be trained and ready to serve should the need arise. In the US, an initiative has been underway for the last twenty years to mobilize a civilian response force to complement the traditional, professional first-responders. The initiative goes by the name of Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).

From the CERT website:

“Following a major disaster, first-responders who provide fire and medical services will not be able to meet the demand for these services. Factors as number of victims, communication failures, and road blockages will prevent people from accessing emergency services they have come to expect.... People will have to rely on each other for help in order to meet their immediate life saving and life sustaining needs.

One also expects that under these kinds of conditions, family members, fellow employees, and neighbors will spontaneously try to help each other. This was the case following the Mexico City earthquake where untrained, spontaneous volunteers saved 800 people.

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program helps train people to be better prepared to respond to emergency situations in their communities. When emergencies happen, CERT members can give critical support to first-responders, provide immediate assistance to victims, and organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site.” (<http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/>)

Consider this compelling question: What would it be like if God’s people filled the ranks of those ready to act as first-responders in times of trouble? Who better to act in response to tragedy than those who fundamentally trust in the Creator of the Universe? We certainly don’t have all the answers but we can be the hands and feet of Jesus when the dark times of trouble come upon us or our community.

Remember, our witness is not only to those people who are victims of the disaster, but to the government and professional first-responders who will likely be on the scene.

I realize that there are limits to what can be done in certain situations; certain problems need specific materiel for mitigation, like earthmoving equipment, helicopters and trucks. And in some parts of the

world, the Christian church may have little or no physical capital to bring to a crisis situation. But, there is a specific kind of “capital” or care that Christians around the world should be uniquely prepared to give and it doesn’t cost anything! No special equipment, no fire trucks, no helicopters are necessary in the immediate and tactical delivery of spiritual, emotional and psychological first aid.

Emotional and psychological first aid is so important that the CERT program even has special training set aside for it. CERT has a training element called “Disaster Psychology: The psychological impact of a disaster on rescuers and victims, and how to provide psychological first aid.” It is gripping to consider Christians acting as humble servant-leaders in this challenging area of psychological first aid. In any emergency, it will likely be easier to find people who will “fill the sand bags” than volunteer to minister to the hurts of the soul.

Emotional and psychological first aid can involve things like critical incident debriefings and other “words of encouragement.” Psychological first aid givers can go beyond alleviating the continuing pain of the tragedy, as these citizen caregivers can begin to defuse the damaged and gently prepare the victims to deal with the challenges before them.

Questions:

1. Eng Hoe challenged us last month to consider how we could provide this kind of care in crisis situations. What would it take to foster a grassroots strategy for Christian citizens to commit to aiding the challenges around emergency preparedness and community resilience?
2. Besides CERT, there are probably other models we could use to grow in this area of member care. What models could you tell us about so we can continue learning and growing in this area?
3. Within the member care community, can we empower others to apply themselves as first-responders with the curriculum and training that we are already doing?
4. What additional material would we need to create to make our fellowships one of the first places the local community would look to find aid and comfort in times of tragic need?

Contextualizing:

1. This is written from a mostly US perspective, but mostly to illustrate a US initiated model of peer helping (CERT). Does anyone know of a similar model or a model in your area that works in the same or similar arena? The websites below, have some links to international efforts. Perhaps you know more.
2. In the US, there is another level of assistance, in addition to CERT and that is the Medical Reserve Corps (Brent Lindquist is a member and trainer with the MRC). Pastors and other professionals can be part of this. All of these are “certified” by background checks, training checks, and only qualify the person to present an ID card at a trauma. It is up to the situation command to determine if you can help at a specific event. I realize this sounds like a lot of administration, but in the wake of terrorism, it is necessary for the protection and safety and security of the victims/survivors. How would you protect these people in your context where there may be no first responders ever, or the threat may be high for opposing parties to return and create more terror and violence?

3. Cultural differences need to be accounted for. For example, in the US, we may not make a big deal about who helps who, but you may need to think very carefully about who helps who and how that help is done. One big example is having women available to help women. What might be other examples in your context?
4. Doing versus serving...It is easy to go to do something to someone, feeling you are doing it FOR them and their welfare. It might not be perceived/received that way. You will need to think of a plan for engaging local resource people, power people (like elders, etc.) so that they can feel a sense of dignity in helping themselves and their community.
5. Please give us other examples we can add to this list online.

## To Explore Further:

**Scriptural resources** for thinking through mercy helping:

### **Proverbs 3:25a**

Do not be afraid of sudden terror..."

### **Psalms 46:1-3**

God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; Though its waters roar *and* foam, Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.

### **Leviticus 19:34**

You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

### **Luke 6:36**

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

### **Proverbs 11:17a**

The merciful man does himself good...

### **Proverbs 14:31**

He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker,  
But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.

### **Luke 10:36**

"Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" <sup>37</sup>And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "*Go and do the same.*"

## Internet Resources:

[Community Emergency Response Teams \(CERT\)](#)

[CERT History and Mission](#)

[CERT Training Materials](#)

[Psychological First Aid Field Operations Guide, The United States Dept of Veteran Affairs](#)

[Psychological First Aid Competencies for Public Health Workers, Johns Hopkins University Public Health Preparedness Programs.](#) (As of September of 2009 these training materials are available to you free of charge.)

LATE BREAKING NEWS

[H1N1 Virus](#) – US Center for Disease Control website, go here for latest on symptoms, treatment, etc