

Why BERT?

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO PUBLIC TRAGEDY

Shortly after 9:00 AM EST on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, the American public was slapped into the reality of 21st Century global terrorism. Millions of Americans and others around the world sat stunned in front of television sets not believing what they were seeing, not comprehending the magnitude of the tragic event. As the hours passed, the trauma in New York City, Arlington, VA, and in rural Pennsylvania turned into a national public tragedy.

How did the public respond? There has been and continues to be a great deal of research on the topic of public emotional response to this and other public tragedies. Although the definitive study has yet to be completed, there seems to be enough case studies to reveal similar patterns of behavior to public tragedy. The obvious emotional responses include:

- DENIAL
- SHOCK
- ANGER
- HELPLESSNESS
- FEAR
- DEPRESSION
- DISPAIR
- PARALYSIS

In this tragedy the public itself became the victim.

These are normal, natural reactions and most individuals are able to move out of the response stage and into the recovery stage.

When this happens the individual is no longer a *victim*, but becomes a *survivor*.

WHAT CAN I DO?

What can I do? This was the question millions of Americans asked themselves as the initial emotional responses gave way to the recovery aspect of the trauma. It's at this point when the victim turns into the survivor.

For many the answer was to pray, call loved ones and friends, donate blood, or to display their American flags. For others, more direct involvement was needed. Clergy, as a group, already have a personal need to give of themselves. It was natural, therefore, that many clergy turned their churches, temples and synagogues into collection or evacuation centers. Still others, from all across the nation, converged on the incident sites. In New York City alone, there were over 900 out-of-town clergy who registered with the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) and hundreds of others who didn't. Unfortunately very few of these caring individuals had any training in catastrophic or crisis intervention counseling. Fewer still had any training in Emergency Management. Consequently, the majority of these responders were sent away because they were more of a hindrance than an asset.

For this reason BERT (Bereavement Emergency Response Team) has been created to provide Emergency Management and Catastrophic Crisis Intervention training for members of the clergy, professional counselors, and credentialed laymen who have a sincere desire to serve the public during times of disaster.

In response to the President's call for the nation to create community-based, volunteer-lead response teams to respond to the threats of

terrorism as well as other man-made and natural disasters, the Bereavement Emergency Response Team (BERT) has been created to meet the need for disaster-trained chaplains.

The founding members of BERT, who are professional hospice administrators, realized that one of their greatest assets were its own corps of professionally trained chaplains and bereavement counselors. As a body, hospice chaplains have more professional training and hands-on experience in bereavement counseling than any other segment of the religious community. Consequently BERT, working with professionally trained and experienced hospice chaplains, solicits, trains, coordinates and mobilizes local clergy as both *spiritual first-responders*, and as *follow-on catastrophic crisis counselors*.

The BERT program is open to clergy of all faiths, and to professional and credentialed lay-counselors with an interest in and commitment to serving their community in times of emergency. The basic BERT training program takes the volunteer through the basic elements of standard emergency management (EM) procedures, then demonstrates how the clergy can take their own pastoral skills and transform them into a broader-based chaplaincy mission with specialization in catastrophic crisis counseling. BERT members will be trained to perform two major functions, first as spiritual first responders who may be deployed at the outset of a disaster to work with victims, families and other emergency responders during the first 72 hours of an incident. And second, as follow-on catastrophic crisis counselors who take over from the initial BERT responders and begin the process of "spiritual recovery."

The BERT Mission

DURING RESPONSE AND RESCUE OPERATIONS

- Provide a team of *Spiritual First Responders* during the first 72 hours of Relief-Rescue Operations.
- Provide Spiritual/trauma/crisis counseling to:
 - ◆ Victims
 - ◆ Family members
 - ◆ Rescue personnel and first responders
- Conduct *trauma triage*—emotional, psychological, and spiritual assessment.
- Provide bereavement counseling, support and services to families of victims and to the rescue workers.
- Arrange and conduct funeral and memorial services as required.
- Assist Light and Heavy Duty Rescue Squads in initial rescue operations.
- Assist in the implementation of emergency evacuation or shelter plans for healthcare facilities.
- Assist in or organize and manage temporary evacuation shelters.

DURING THE INITIAL RECOVERY OPERATIONS

- Initial *spiritual recovery* operations as needed.
 - ◆ Working with families
 - ◆ Working with individuals
 - ◆ Working with congregations
 - ◆ Working with the community
- Serve as a "dispatcher" for relief efforts by outside religious groups.

- Assist individuals and families with locating loved ones, or relocating themselves.
- Hand-off severe cases of emotional shock and/or depression to long-term therapeutic counselors.
- Conduct on-going bereavement counseling and leadership in bereavement support groups.
- Provide "pulpit supply" for congregations without a pastor
- Conduct funeral and memorial services as needed.
- Assist local clergy in reestablishing "clergy councils" for the community.
- Conduct a spiritual/emotional survey and gather information for After Action Report.

BERT is recognized program of the Ministry to Military Inc.

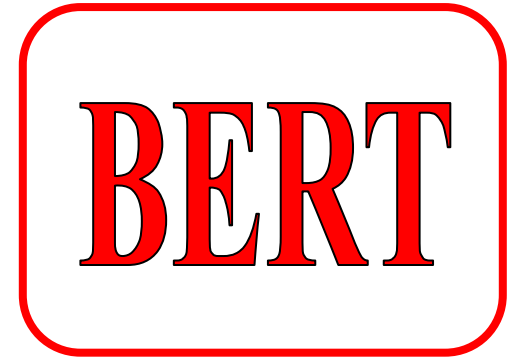
BERT is a member of the Crisis Counseling Consortium of Georgia and affiliated with GEMA, The Georgia Emergency Management Agency.

Continuing Education Units are available through the University of West Georgia.

BERT is a Citizen Corps Council Project

*For more information concerning **BERT** or to schedule training sessions contact:*

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The Bereavement Emergency Response Team Program

