



***“Response to Crisis: Christians in Social Work Responding to Major Disasters”***

Thank you for taking part in this home study text-based course. The purpose of this course is to help practitioners focus on the reconstruction of the lives of people impacted by disasters. The following articles look at subsystems working with disaster victims, helping recovery workers, and describing the potential that social work professionals and students have to offer in the midst of disasters.

The following text-based course contains five separate readings pertaining to the position of social workers in working with individuals in disaster situations. The articles are as follows:

*Organizational Involvement in Disasters: A Case Study of the Salvation Army* by David Dahlberg, *Working with Victims of Disasters: Lessons from WTC* by Fred Coisman, *The Oklahoma Bombin: Working with Recovery Workers* by Harmon Meldrim, *Social Work Education Collaboration in Disasters: Lessons Learned from the Murrah Federal Building and World Trade Center Disasters* by Stephen C. Anderson, Lawrence Ressler, and Jon Wallace, and *Helping Those Victimized by the Terror of War: Reflections on the Dismantling of Cluster Bombs in Loa Village* by Titus Peachey. Contact information for each author can be provided upon request. At the conclusion of each article, you can find a complete reference section to support the readings.

After completing this course, participants will be able to:

1. Provide an historical overview of the Salvation Army's participation in disaster relief, as well as the principles by which it operates.
2. Explain the cooperative stance between the Salvation Army and higher education students in providing disaster relief to victims of 9/11, and the experiences of both volunteers and those receiving help.
3. Review the development of collaboration between two schools of social work and the Salvation Army in the Murrah Federal Building and World Trade Center disasters, and the provided services and workers' experiences.
4. Explain the ongoing traumatization of the Laotian population as a result of unexploded ordinance from U.S. bombing more than 30 years ago, and consider the present theological ramifications of previous U.S. action in Laos.

Upon completing the reading section of this course, please take the 15 question post-test located on the website provided to you when you purchased this course. After achieving a score of at least 80% and completing a training evaluation, you will receive your CE certificate verifying that you have earned 2 continuing education contact hours approved by the Association of Social Work Boards.

We hope this course will help you in your work with, or understanding of, the importance of intervention in disaster relief within the social work context. Thank you again for your interest in this course, and for your interest in this critical area of social work.

# **ORGANIZATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN DISASTERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE SALVATION ARMY**

**David Dalberg**

*This article summarizes the history of The Salvation Army's involvement in disasters. The role it played in the World Trade Center Disaster and other disasters is described. Organizational principles that guide the involvement and lessons learned during the 102 years of involvement in disasters are provided.*

**September 11, 2001**

WITHIN THE FIRST HOUR FOLLOWING THE TERRORIST ATTACKS on the United States of America on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, Salvation Army officers, staff, and volunteers from locally affected areas and from across the United States and Canada were on duty responding to a wide-range of physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Salvation Army volunteers, under the direction of local Salvation Army leadership, faithfully ministered to first responders, firefighters, law enforcement personnel, construction workers, victims, and families directly affected by the attacks. Whether in Western Pennsylvania, the Pentagon, the greater New York/New Jersey area, or in communities large and small across America and Canada, the Army was quietly at work.

As the news broke that a hijacked plane crashed in Western Pennsylvania, the Army immediately deployed its first response teams to the scene of the crash. Counselors and chaplains provided emotional and spiritual support to those who faced the grim task of dealing with the crash site. While the recovery activities were taking place in Western Pennsylvania, counseling

and chaplaincy teams were immediately deployed to Los Angeles International Airport and to the San Francisco International Airport to support stunned and grieving families where the four planes were to have landed. Even as planes were being grounded across the United States and Canada, Salvation Army personnel immediately responded to airports to provide material, emotional, and spiritual support. In Canada, where some 50,000 passengers were stranded at airports and border crossings, a passenger seeing the familiar Salvation Army uniform stated, “We’ll be OK, The Salvation Army is here.” At many locations across the country The Salvation Army set up emergency housing sites, often times at Army camps and at local corps and community centers.

While on-site services continued hour after hour, day after day, The Salvation Army activated its 1-800-SAL-ARMY number staffed 24 hours a day by Army personnel from across the United States. The volunteer phone staff responded to many personal inquiries, provided a listening ear, and manned a national prayer line that received prayer requests. Thousands of people not directly affected by the terrorist attacks just needed to talk to somebody who would be willing to listen, to hear their fears and concerns, who would be there for them.

As a permanent emergency first responder to the New York City Fire Department, as is the case in many major urban cities, the Army deployed 21 emergency canteen mobile units throughout lower Manhattan. During the first hours and days there was much confusion and disbelief that took place, but in the midst of it all everywhere you went you would find The Salvation Army quietly serving, responding to the needs of the body as well as the mind and heart.

Early on in the World Trade Center operation it was determined that in order for the Army to respond to the magnitude of the event it would need to implement a food management

service capable of handling the tremendous volume of food preparation and maintaining all of the food safety concerns around food preparation and handling. The Army employed the services of Whitsons Food Service, which was already under contract to provide food service to several Salvation Army residential services in the greater New York area. This action proved to be the right decision for the Army which provided over 300,000 meals throughout their World Trade Center operations in the first 72 hours. In addition to the services being provided around the 16 block restricted area which surrounded ground zero, the Army simultaneously deployed response teams with experienced counseling and chaplaincy staff to the Medical Examiner's Office operations located at 30th street and First Avenue. Even as more than ten refrigerated semi trailers lined the narrow street, Salvation Army officers would be available to talk and pray with medical examiner personnel as they sought to identify bodies and tried to make some sense out of what had occurred. An emergency canteen with on-site food preparation capability was set up to provide shortorder food service to the ME's staff.

From their mobile canteen operations the Army established a major food service dining area just north of ground zero that became more the just a place to get something to eat. It became a place of refuge, a place to talk to someone, a place where you could get away from the harsh realities faced during their twelve hour shifts in the pit. If a firefighter came in with a specific request for an item that wasn't available at the hydration site, by that afternoon the item was in stock at that location. In addition, The Salvation Army provided assistance by means of supplies and personnel to the Ceremonial Units of New York Fire Department, Police Department, and the Port Authority Police Department as they recovered and removed bodies from ground zero.

From those first hours of service until eight months later on May 30, 2002, The Salvation Army worked and served non-stop 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the ways described above and more. On August 26, 2002 the Army's operations at the landfill concluded with the closing of the site at which time the Army also concluded its formal recovery support operations. The quick and multi-faceted response reflects a long historic involvement that the Salvation Army has had in disaster response. The purpose of this article is to review that history and to identify organizational principles that have been developed to guide involvement of the Salvation Army in disaster. The article concludes with a list of lessons learned about organizational response to disasters.

### **National Disaster History**

The Salvation Army in the United States formally began its first national disaster response on September 8, 1900 when a hurricane devastated Galveston, Texas, killing over 8,000 people and virtually destroying the city. As Salvation Army reinforcements arrived in Galveston to support the Army's local command, they were greeted by Mayor Jones and General Scurry, who was in command of the US Military response. It was reported that the Army's reinforcements were warmly received and commended for the outstanding response and services which had already been provided by the local Salvation Army unit. For the first time in America, the Salvation Army sought to mobilize personnel and resources from around the country to provide spiritual counsel and practical assistance.

The Army quickly established tent cities, food kitchens, and depots responding to practical needs. Even more important than addressing the overwhelming physical needs of a destroyed city was the Army's response to emotional and spiritual needs, often to individuals who had lost their entire family. Local Army officers and many of their soldiers experience

similar loss; however, their response was not impeded by their own loss and they continued to serve at the highest level.

In the midst of the great demands made on Army personnel, it was also their privilege to serve Clara Barton and her Red Cross party when they were forced to wait overnight at Texas City. Miss Barton praised the Army for its wonderful work. On April 18, 1906 one of the greatest natural disasters since the Galveston hurricane was experienced in San Francisco, where in just a moment of time an earthquake brought total destruction to that city and created incredible human pain and devastation. For terror-filled weeks following the earthquake, The Salvation Army attended to the needs of thousands of families and individuals providing food, clothing, and shelter for the homeless. In all that the Army did during those tragic days, it sought to instill hope and courage in the hearts of those who had lost everything. These experiences were a prelude to the time when Evangeline Booth dispatched Salvation Army forces to the muddy trenches in France on August 12, 1917 to minister to America's men and boys who had been sent to fight in World War I. During a meeting between Evangeline Booth and General John Pershing, which led to the authorization of The Salvation Army's participation in World War I, General Pershing thanked The Salvation Army for its kindness to him when he lost his family in a house fire in San Francisco.

As a result of the Army's work during World War I, the donut and cup of coffee became the hallmark of Salvation Army service in subsequent years. However, the services and one-to-one ministry of Salvation Army personnel serving in World War I went far beyond coffee and donuts. A sense of community, home, and above all, an expression of God's love and personal interest were brought directly to the hearts of America's fighting forces during those very trying

times. The Salvation Army emerged from World War I with the praise of the entire country for their selfless service in freedom's darkest hour. President Wilson awarded Evangeline Booth the Distinguished Service medal. Twenty-five years later when World War II began, The Salvation Army utilized its earlier model of service to help establish the USO. A long lasting appreciation, which has spanned many generations, resulted from The Salvation Army's front-line ministry during one of humankind's greatest tragedies and was highlighted at the 50th Anniversary of "D-Day" when The Salvation Army was invited to play a significant role in the remembrance of that event. Even though this memory is fading as time passes, the resulting effects of this Christ-filled, practical response has had a profound effect on The Salvation Army in the United States over the past 50 plus years.

From the trenches of World War I to today's front lines of rain-drenched sandbag ridges, neighborhoods ripped apart by tornadoes, the devastation created by hurricane winds and rains, the incredible destructive power of earthquakes, the indescribable sorrow and loss experienced by families of air crash victims, and in many minds the worst of all disasters, man's intentional acts of terrorism, The Salvation Army is among the first responders to the scene and often the very last to leave.

In the years following the Army's response to the Galveston Hurricane, Salvation Army officers, staff, and volunteers were able to find innovative ways to effectively mobilize their service in communities large and small across the United States. Within minutes of notification of a local disaster, Salvation Army officers, along with their staff and volunteers, creatively converted a widerange of Salvation Army vehicles into emergency response vehicles. One such experience occurred in January of 1914, when Captain Floyd Kelly was appointed to command the Army's work in Atlantic City, New Jersey. During his first year in Atlantic City, Captain



Kelly noted that several fires had taken place in his community. After identifying a need among the firefighters and first responders for beverages and nourishment, the Captain secured some basic equipment including beverage thermoses and coffee pots. Captain Kelly then proceeded to convert his Overland touring car into a mobile canteen. For the next five years, Captain Kelly and his staff responded to fires throughout the Atlantic City area meeting the basic needs of firefighters, law enforcement personnel, and victims.

In 1920 Captain Kelly was appointed to Boston, Massachusetts for the purpose of establishing the Army's disaster work in the greater Boston area. For the first two years of his new appointment Captain Kelly used a Buick touring car to provide emergency response services. During that time a proto-type of the Army's first fully equipped mobile canteen was being developed. On April 3, 1922 The Salvation Army's first fully functional canteen was dedicated to Lord. The inauguration of the Army canteen greatly increased the organization's ability to effectively and efficiently respond in a very timely manner to local disasters, large and small, positively effecting service areas across the United States. (The War Cry from April 12, 1972) Since that time The Salvation Army Emergency Canteen has become the Army's symbol of service during the time of disaster, equal to that of the Dough Girls serving coffee and donuts during World War I. Still, there is much more to the Army's disaster services than a canteen serving coffee and donuts.

### **Organizational Background**

In order to understand The Salvation Army's capacity to respond as a primary provider of physical, emotional, and spiritual services as a faith-based voluntary organization active in disasters, it is important to understand something about its structure and organizational strengths. The Salvation Army is an International Organization and is a branch of the Christian Church

serving in 103 countries around the world. The Army is divided into regions or what The Salvation Army identifies as territories. The world-wide operations of the Army are divided into geographic territories. Each territory serves as corporate headquarters for all Salvation Army operations within the defined area. Each territory is divided into several divisions which function as administrative centers supporting all local Army operations within its divisional boundaries.

There are four territories in the United States with a national headquarters located in Alexandria, VA. Each of the four territories holds full corporate authority for their region with national headquarters providing representation and consultative support on national issues. Each of the forty divisions across the United States provides direct support to all of their local Salvation Army operations, including disaster services. Each division has a disaster services director or administrative officer who is specifically assigned that responsibility. In addition, each territory and national headquarters has a disaster services coordinator. As it relates specifically to disaster services as described in the Army's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), The Salvation Army has a legal, moral, and spiritual mandate that it has neither the authority nor the right to surrender. The Salvation Army has both the right and duty to respond to a disaster, and prompt action is clearly expected and supported by the public. The Salvation Army's authority was formalized in the United States when the organization was incorporated in 1899 as a religious and charitable nonprofit organization. In addition to its incorporation, The Salvation Army's legal authority to provide disaster services was reaffirmed in federal law in Section 5152 of the Stafford Act.

Even with its MOU with FEMA, The Salvation Army's response to those affected by disasters is not dependent upon a Presidential or other governmental disaster declaration. In addition, to assure the Army's ongoing capacity to effectively serve and minister during times of

disaster, all Salvation Army disaster service policies in the United States are established by its policymaking board, the Commissioners' Conference, comprised of top Salvation Army territorial and national leaders. The Salvation Army is committed to draw upon available resources; mobilize personnel and equipment; provide leadership; and participate in partnerships with governmental agencies, disaster relief agencies, community organizations, and churches with the purpose of providing comfort, care, and resources to assist families and individuals through their loss and in their recovery. The Salvation Army's activities during times of disasters may include:

- Arrange mass care services in the following areas: the use and supervision of Salvation Army facilities for emergency shelter purposes; supervision of emergency shelters in non-Salvation Army facilities; fixed feeding sites at Salvation Army and non-Army facilities; and mobile feeding kitchens providing the capacity to prepare and serve hot, nutritious meals at disaster sites and in neighborhoods to victims, emergency and law-enforcement personnel, and comfort stations.
- Coordinate of state shelter/mass care functions when requested.
- Establish and operate Emergency Disaster Receiving and Distribution Centers to receive, manage, and distribute designated in-kind material donations given to The Salvation Army for the purposes of disaster relief and recovery.
- Participate as the designated agency to develop and operate undesignated in-kind State donations program based on established contracts with individual states.
- Provide Home Recovery Teams to assist families with the re-establishment of their homes by assisting with the removal of debris, cleaning, and restoration efforts.

- Provide a wide-range of Emergency Social Services to disaster survivors by certified social workers and trained volunteers to include: emergency financial grants, food, clothing, medications, and advocacy services.
- Establish extended receiving and distribution centers for the distribution of donated building supplies.
- Establish support programs including childcare centers, educational and after school programs, recreation, leisure activities, counseling for individuals and families, and other support programs. These programs allow adults to focus on rebuilding efforts with the assurance that children are receiving quality care in a safe environment.
- Provide case-management services where disaster recovery and reconstruction efforts are viewed in terms of months and years. The purpose of case-management services is to assist families and individuals with practical, emotional, and spiritual support in a prolonged recovery event. Such services will assist the family in accessing governmental, public, and private resources to assist in their recovery.
- Make available trained, licensed, Salvation Army officers (clergy) throughout all phases of response, recovery, and reconstruction to provide professional emotional and spiritual counseling to survivors and to disaster response and recovery personnel.

Even with this background information one may ask the question, “What is there about The Salvation Army that clearly sets it apart as it responds to the needs of those who are so deeply effected by the destruction and pain created by a disaster?” Through my research, experience, and observation I have identified what I choose to call organizational principles which will help us gain insight and understanding to this question.

## **Organizational Principles**

Upon examining many reports and records which describe The Army's history of service during times of disaster over the past 100 years, there are seven principles which clearly contribute to the organization's strength and have enabled the Army to move to a place as one of the leading national voluntary organizations active in disasters in the United States.

### **Principle One: Operationally Field Rich**

It is helpful to understand that while The Salvation Army experienced its most rapid growth as it founded new work in countries throughout the world, one of the premises for its organizational growth was to establish permanent local centers of operation in communities large and small. The Army's work in America strongly reflects the basis for this premise of community-based or "field-rich operations."

An overview of the Army in the United States reveals that within the four U.S. territories there are 9,161 Salvation Army Centers of Operations. These include local corps, outposts and services centers, rehabilitations centers, thrift stores, community centers, boys and girls clubs, senior citizen centers, group homes, temporary housing, permanent residences, medical facilities, camps, headquarters facilities, and service units. In approximately half of these locations, food preparation facilities are available. These facilities may range from kitchens with the limited capability of making sandwiches to major food service preparation facilities capable of producing dietary-based hot, nutritional meals in mass quantities. During times of disasters such facilities, coupled with local Army personnel, can help to efficiently adapt to food production needs associated with a local disaster in a very expeditious manner.

Across the United States the Army has over 500 strategically located emergency disaster mobile canteens ready to be deployed. These units represent a variety of functions, ranging from

units which are capable of holding, transporting, and serving hot meals to full-field kitchens which have the capability to prepare hot meals, based on a variety of field menus, serving three meals a day up to seven days without being restocked. Such units tow a supply trailer, in many cases with refrigeration and freezer capacity. In some disaster-prone locales, such as Florida, Texas, and the Carolinas, divisions have developed extensive disaster response fleets which include field kitchens capable of producing over 10,000 meals a day, fully equipped mobile command headquarters, shower units, and field operations equipment, transported in semi trailers which have the capability of establishing a fully contained field operations center including housing and feeding for several hundred. The Central Territory has recently added to its fleet a donated semi tractor-trailer which expands to a width of 24 feet allowing for the provision of a major communications/multiservice field operations center.

At 119 locations across the United States, primarily in urban areas, you will find Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Centers providing operationally generated, financially supported facilities which provide resident-based work and psychological, therapeutic, and spiritual service models addressing recovery issues related to addictions. In the United States, one of the most recognized symbols of Salvation Army service is the SA truck picking up donated goods. Conservatively speaking, there are approximately 11,900 SA trucks operated by the Adult Rehabilitation Centers which, during the initial response period in a given regional area, can be immediately deployed to assist with the Army's disaster response.

### **Principle Two: Locally Managed**

The Salvation Army views all disasters as local disasters. The organization's operational model in response to all disasters is that they are always managed by the local Salvation Army. If a disaster is beyond the local Army's capacity to manage, based on the magnitude of the disaster

or its extended time frame, the Army will deploy personnel and equipment from within the effected area's division. In turn, if and when the effected division's resources are taxed, then the territory in which the effected area is located activates resources from other divisions within the territory. If in fact the deployed territorial resources are over-loaded, then the effected territory, through the office of the National Disaster Services Department at the Army's National Headquarters, can call upon other territories to provide additional personal and equipment. Even at this point of activation and deployment, unlike some other national voluntary organizations active in disasters, the Army continues to operate under the operational premise that the disaster is still managed by the local Army. Even though incident command leadership, support staff, and volunteers may be deployed from other parts of the country, it is still the local/divisional Army officials who always remain in-charge of the operation.

### **Principle Three: Single Largest Human Service Provider in the World**

Someone might question why the fact that The Salvation Army is the single largest provider of human service in the world would have anything to do with its disaster service capabilities. There are two factors to be considered regarding this principle. The first is that the Army's faith-based human service provision model provides a direct infra-structure from which its disaster services can draw. Within the United States alone the Army employs over 40,000 staff, many of whom are professionally trained in specialized fields of human care. In most instances, and certainly where protracted events occur or where the nature of the event demands specialized services, the Army has well-trained forces ready and willing to respond.

The second factor where the Army's human service provider system has played a very significant role is less obvious, but of equal value to the first, is that of training and resource development. When emergency disaster response and recovery models are closely examined we

find that issues of basic survival needs are addressed. Survivors of disasters immediately face a widerange of survival issues such as housing, food, transportation. These are issues, for the most part, that many disaster survivors have never faced before to this degree.

The fact is, day in and day out, across the United States in major urban settings, smaller rural communities, and even in rural areas were the Army does not have a facility-based operation, Army services are rendered in response to personal and family crisis that are not unlike those immediate needs experienced by disaster survivors. Even though these parallel functions are not identifiable to those outside of the Army, and frankly, not always to those from within, these on-going service activities provide continual training and service readiness opportunities for the organization that are unparalleled by any other voluntary organization active in disasters.

#### **Principle Four: Incident Command Model**

The Salvation Army's quasi-military structure has served the organization well over its past 100 years of disaster service. The Army's administrative levels of management and decisionmaking, its structure of service delivery, and its local authorization of officer leadership, have given the organization a "natural" system for responding to disasters. This system has given the Army first-hand opportunities to develop, implement, and practice service capabilities which have been directly translated into rendering care to disaster survivors in most effective and practical means.

Since the development and growing practice of the incident command model by fire departments, law enforcement jurisdictions, federal, state, and local governments, and a growing number of organizations involved in disasters, it has become even more critical for those



involved in disaster work, including voluntary organizations, to develop and implement the incident command model within their own organizations.

The concept is a command and control model which clearly identifies an organization's leadership and decision-making processes. This is true whether you are dealing with a federal, state, or local governmental agency, or a voluntary organization. Not only does the incident command system place all agencies and organizations on the same page, it also creates a natural environment wherein detailed coordination and communications between agencies and organizations can take place. The incident command system is quite simple, but most effective. It identifies the point of authority in the incident commander with an organizational structure that includes functions for operations, logistics, planning, administration, and finance. Under each of these functions there is an additional division of responsibility and labor.

#### **Principle Five: Ability to Fill Gaps**

In examining Salvation Army disaster policy you will not find a policy that addresses an intentional plan to fill service gaps in responding to disasters. A broader look at the organization's social ministry, whether feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, providing crisis intervention, or providing addictions treatment and recovery services, will reveal a similar situation—no operational gap-filling policy. Organizationally speaking, the Army's capability and drive to respond to those who fall into gaps of service has become part of the organizational fabric or the very nature of The Salvation Army. The Army is often described by governmental and philanthropic groups as a "safety net."

#### **Principle Six: Ability to Make Long-Term Commitment**

Over the past 100 years The Salvation Army has earned the reputation of being one of the first responders to a disaster and among the last to leave. As earlier discussed, the Army's quick

response capabilities are directly related to its operationally field richness, local management, and its human care system which is well established in communities large and small across the United States. Similarly, as a community seeks to recover and return to more normal living following the devastation of a disaster, The Salvation Army returns to its daily tasks, responsibilities, and ministry within the effected community. In turn, as the extended needs associated with a disaster in a given community continue over longterm, on most occasions the Army simply incorporates intermediate and long-term disaster services into its already established human care system in the given community.

### **Principle Seven: Faith-based Driven**

Reviewing the Salvation Army's early historical development and leading up to today, one glaring issue remains quite constant, especially in the United States. People generally have great trust and confidence in the Army, but really know little about what the Army does, and even more importantly, what the Army is. The typical response to the question, "What is The Salvation Army," is the red kettle at Christmas time, or the truck that picks up donated goods.

Since its humble beginning in the east end of London, England many people view The Salvation Army as an organization which is a major force for good in the world. Even though today the Army is the single largest human service provider in the world, serving in over 103 countries, there is much more to the Army than its social ministry aspects. It appears that many people are not aware of the Army's spiritual orientation, not to mention the fact that the Army is an active international protestant denomination. The fact is, the Army is a branch of the Christian Church, actively practicing its faith through its formal ecclesiastical tenets and doctrines of faith.

Even though there has been and continues to be a healthy organizational tension related to the emphasis placed on the Army's denominational efforts versus its human services ministries, the general public has very little awareness of any differentiations between the two. In the United States alone there are over 5,452 officers, licensed ordained ministers who serve full-time in Salvation Army ministry. It is from this contingency of ecclesiastical leadership that the Army draws upon for its formal chaplaincy and spiritual support roles when responding to disaster events. However, as essential as chaplaincy and direct spiritual support services are during times of disaster, The Salvation Army views its entire disaster work as a holistic ministry. "What does the Army really do during disasters?" Beyond the obvious feeding, shelter, material assistance, and helping survivors restore their homes, the real key to the Army's ministry during disasters is not what it does, by why and how it does it. The Army is motivated by its love for God and its desire to share His love with those who are deeply hurting and grieving. Every action taken at a disaster site, whether great or small, is considered to be a Sacrament of Service in His Name and through His Spirit empowering ministry of The Salvation Army.

### **Lessons Learned**

There are many lessons that were learned as a result of the events of September 11, 2001. Five specific lessons follow which are critical for The Salvation Army.

#### **Sustainability**

Throughout its 102 years of disaster service in the United States The Salvation Army has responded to disasters large and small. However, never before in its history of disaster service has the Army been called upon to render such a major sustained effort as it did in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Day after day, week after week, month after month Salvation Army officers, staff, and volunteers from across the United States and Canada filled incident

command leadership positions, counseling and chaplaincy roles, and key operational positions which augmented and supported the local volunteer base. By the conclusion of the recovery operation at the end of August, 2002, over 7,358 officers, staff, and volunteers participated in this operation. This required an organizational commitment and discipline that functioned well beyond the response during the early days of the operation when it seemed like the entire world wanted to respond first hand to the scenes of destruction. The Army preformed well beyond its own organizational limits and known capacities.

### **Partnerships**

The Salvation Army, like many other voluntary organizations active in disasters, has a number of Memorandum of Understanding agreements with governmental agencies, voluntary organizations active in disasters, and corporations. However, September 11th brought the Army to a place where we had never been before. The Army could no longer maintain its associations and partnership as a paper agreement or casual arrangement. The Southern Baptist Disaster Relief joined The Salvation Army in the middle of October at the request of the Army. The Southern Baptists were asked to deploy food service teams to the Army's operations at ground zero and later the landfill site to support the Army's food service operations. From their first day until the end of August, the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief operations stood side by side, shoulder to shoulder with Salvation Army and Whitsons Food Service to provide a seamless operation.

The reality is The Salvation Army would not have been able to fulfill its operational commitments without its Southern Baptist partner. The fact that the two organizations shared a like-mission was extremely important to its successful partnership. Once again Wal Mart responded with a major financial donation, material supplies, but most importantly, immediately

sent senior management team members to assist the Army with the development and on-going management of its major warehouse operations. In particular, Wal Mart staff help establish a key disaster warehouse/distribution center at JFK Airport. The gift of Wal Mart's personnel and expertise was incredibly important to the success on the Army's disaster warehouse operations. There were many other partners which greatly contributed to the success of the Army's operations, too numerous to report. These are just two examples of these significant partnerships.

### **Problem Solving**

A protracted event of such magnitude as September 11th is laden with problems. The incident command system operates to minimize problems and to address them as they occur. However, one particular problem confronted the Army in October, 2001. A few very frustrated, angry, and desperate restaurant owners from the lower Manhattan area whose businesses were being so deeply impacted due to September 11th accused the Army of taking their business away due to the organization's major disaster food service operations.

Rather than argue its rationale for serving, or worse yet, dismissing the cry of the area restaurant owners, the Army, with the assistance of Whitsons Food Service, entered discussions with the restaurant owners. The result of the discussions was the creation of the New York City Restaurant Revitalization Program. Menus and detailed schedules were established and, based on each of the restaurants specialties, meals were prepared daily and transported to the Army's operation at the Biosphere (domed feeding tent) at ground zero. The Restaurant Revitalization Program provided 12,000 meals a day. The Army paid each of the participating restaurants weekly for their services rendered. The program continued from early December until the services concluded at ground zero.

What could have been a growing problem and ultimately could have caused some restaurants to close their business turned out to be a life-saver to many struggling restaurants in the lower Manhattan area. On March 13, 2002 the New York City Restaurant Revitalization Program representatives joined with Salvation Army officials to express the thanks of more than 100 area restaurants for the support of The Salvation Army in some of their darkest hours.

### **Critical Incident Stress Management**

One of the greatest lessons which is still being learned is the need to take care of those who serve within a disaster relief operation. The Army at times is so busy taking care of others that it sometimes forgets to take care of itself. Never before in Salvation Army disaster services has there been an event that has created a need for organizational and individual care. The Army has made a major commitment to provide support services through the Critical Incident Stress Management system. The Army has a national Memorandum of Understanding with the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation to assist in supporting these needs. In addition, The Salvation Army is the recent recipient of a major training grant from the Lilly Endowment to assist the organization in strengthening its national disaster training efforts. A great deal of this training focus is in the area of Critical Incident Stress Management.

### **Keep Faithful to Your Mission**

The final lesson learned is quite simple, but the most important lesson learned of all. Keep faithful to the mission of The Salvation Army. In all of the Army's disaster work, may it be faithful in representing and honoring God through the "sacrament of service." The following communication sent to the Army best states this reality.

I am a law enforcement officer with the Greenville Police Department in South Carolina and, because of my training with the National Organization of Victim Assistance

(NOVA), I spent last week (March 23-31) working at Ground Zero in New York. The work was difficult and very sad, but the uplifting moments came at the hands of the many Salvation Army workers assigned there. I have never before been so privileged as to be among so many dedicated, kind and caring people as those representing the Salvation Army, and many times I found myself watching them move among the devastation and embedded sorrow with such peace and commitment, I would be wishing that I had what they had. I know everyone having contact with the Salvation Army at Ground Zero must feel as I do, for when a rumor surfaced that the dome would be closing and everyone would be leaving, the recovery teams, the police and fire personnel, and the workers were extremely hurt and worried. The dome had become their home away from home, a refuge amid the ruins, and the Salvation Army workers their family and support. It was a very happy time when that rumor was confirmed as a rumor and everyone realized that the Salvation Army would be around for a longer time. I am proud to have met so many kind and gentle people as I did during my week at the site that once was the World Trade Center. Everyone representing the Salvation Army did so with love and compassion and each person will forever be an important part of my life. I am deeply appreciative of the Salvation Army and the incredible service it provides.

## **Conclusion**

The word of God found fulfillment 24 hours a day, seven days a week at Ground Zero. The 25th chapter of Matthew was lived out through the lives of those who served. "I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick (sad and grieving) and you stopped to visit

(and you brought comfort), I was in prison (captured by fear created by the sights, sounds, and smells I've experienced) and you came to me" (The Message translation).



# **WORKING WITH VICTIMS OF DISASTERS:**

## **LESSONS FROM WTC**

**Fred Coisman**

*This article describes disaster assistance provided to the victims of the World Trade Center by Roberts Wesleyan College social work faculty and students in conjunction with the Salvation Army. Insights about both the victims receiving help and the volunteers providing help are offered. A summary of the lessons learned in working with victims of disasters is provided.*

### **Case 1:**

MR. AND MRS. WU STOOD AT THE RECEPTION DESK OF THE Salvation Army (SA) services area at Pier 94. They had stood in line with 600 others for three hours. It was a sunny but windy November day—cold enough to see your breath. Salvation Army workers had given them blankets, hot tea and snacks while they waited to pass through the metal detector. They had been to five governmental and voluntary agencies before this last “station.” The Wu’s English was limited enough that a FEMA translator helped with the interview. Until September 11, Mrs. Wu had worked as a seamstress four blocks from the WTC. The shop was closed indefinitely due to contamination. Mr. Wu was a waiter in China Town. The restaurant was open, but there were few customers, so no income. Mr. Wu was eligible for unemployment but Mr. Wu was eligible for voluntary agency help only. The Army helped with rent, phone, electricity, and food for the next month, at least. The worker asked the Wus if she could pray with them. They consented, and the session ended in prayer and hugs.

### **Case 2:**

Arno Telenov had his own limo service at WTC, but was away from the site on September 11. His limo and equipment leases continued but there was very little business in NYC. Arno was not eligible for unemployment. Arno had not been helped by the other agencies at Pier 94 when he arrived at the Salvation Army reception desk. A senior level volunteer escorted Mr. Telenov to the Red Cross booth and advocated for him with the volunteer supervisor. Arno returned to SA after receiving partial assistance from the Red Cross. He was given further financial assistance for the remainder of the month.

**Case 3:**

Brian and Kristen came to the Family Entrance of the Pier 94 Assistance Center. There was no line, no waiting. They registered at the reception desk and were escorted to the Salvation Army booth. They had shared a midtown apartment with their brother Sean who was working at the WTC on September 11. Sean was missing and presumed dead. The trio had been mutually dependent financially and emotionally. Brian and Kristen were seeking grief counseling and financial assistance. Intellectually, they knew that their brother could not have survived; but, nearly two months later, they were still denying Sean's death. The volunteer encouraged them to talk about Sean, their lives together, and how they missed him. The previously filed financial forms led to help with rent and utilities. The worker prayed with them and they took some literature.

The names in the above cases have been changed but the circumstances are representative of over 100,000 people who came through the Salvation Army area in services centers established by FEMA and NYC following September 11.

**The Victims**

The September 11 attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) created an immense disaster. WTC became “two billion pounds of steel and glass and concrete—compressed into a mound nine stories high.” (Stein, 2001). The media focused on buildings, initially, and then quickly upon “direct victims,”—the nearly 3000 who were killed and their surviving loved ones. Given the value of human life, that focus was certainly appropriate. However, little media attention has been given to “indirect victims” who lost homes, property, jobs, and income. An estimated 425,000 NYC area residents are indirect victims. In the midst of an already struggling economy, an estimated 100,000 New Yorkers lost jobs as a result of the terrorists’ attack (Tesoriero, 2001). Others had jobs in businesses that people no longer patronized. Like Mr. Wu and Mr. Telanov, many were ineligible for unemployment but without income.

It was for these direct and indirect victims that FEMA and NYC established the Family Assistance Center—initially near WTC, then at Pier 94, and finally near City Hall. Over 20 governmental and volunteer agencies at these sites attempted to evaluate and to meet the financial, emotional, and spiritual needs of victims. At peak volume, approximately 600 people per day were seen at the Center. Such data give one a sense of the breadth of the disaster but miss the depth of impact in individual lives. All victims seen at the Center were in some stage of grieving. Some, like Brian and Kristen, were in a stage of disbelief. Though nearly two months had passed, they still imagined that Sean was in a hospital recovering, or perhaps out of the WTC that day and unable to contact them, or still alive in an air pocket under the rubble. Others were in shock, dazed and numb. At the Center, they stood silently in lines gazing into the distance, and speaking only when asked questions. This was in great contrast to those who were angry, ostensibly at the slowness of the lines and agencies, but more probably at the attackers who took their homes and incomes. Still others, like the Wus and Mr. Telanov, were discouraged,

demoralized, and depressed. They expected that things would return to normal more quickly. They had paid their bills in September—some in October—expecting that their income would resume but it had not. And there were no vacant jobs in New York City, where the cost of living requires at least two incomes for most households.

### **The Volunteers**

Immediately after the disaster occurred, Roberts Wesleyan College (RWC) and The Salvation Army began to explore ways that social work faculty and students could be of assistance. It was decided that the most helpful response would be to send teams of eight students and two faculty to NYC for a full week to provide assistance at the Disaster Assistance Centers. Since the College was 350 miles from NYC, the team was to be housed in a hotel near the disaster site. Eleven days after the disaster, the first group made the trip to NYC. Six more groups followed. As the resources at RWC began to run thin, three other Christian colleges provided teams using the same model.

A seasoned social worker and I led two of seven volunteer groups of BSW and MSW students from Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester to NYC. The individuals were asked to assist in a variety of ways including working at Ground Zero with the search and recovery workers, a Salvation Army warehouse, at the Salvation Army Command Center. The principle locations were two disaster assistance sites, referred to as Worth Street and Pier 94.

The Worth Street site consisted of the ground floor of a public health building within walking distance to Ground Zero. The Pier 94 site was a enormous pier on the Hudson River that was a considerable distance from the WTC site. While both locations provided disaster assistance to victims, Pier 94 had special services for the family members of police, firefighters, and others who had died or were missing.

Some volunteers had never been to New York City and the vast majority had not lived or worked there. Most were unfamiliar with the city's subway and topography. Movement to Salvation Army headquarters, and each day to the center, hotel and restaurants required rigorous walking. The days were typically long, often 12 hours. Following a long day of work with victims, volunteers were fatigued and hungry. The group usually opted for a period of rest before traveling to dinner, if time allowed. Such traveling and mealtimes provided necessary decompression, however. An opportunity to share experiences later in the evening helped volunteers to cope with the multiple tragedies that they had heard about all day. During the time together, volunteers were invited to talk about the events of the day and how they were doing emotionally.

Early in the week, some volunteers had difficulty sleeping because of the emotions that were stirred by the cases. Fatigue took over as the week continued. Times of prayer and brief tours around the city contributed to bonding as well as coping with our own grief over the tragedy. By the end of each week, Roberts Wesleyan College volunteers were very tired but greatly satisfied that they had contributed to the lives of victims. All of them were glad that they had participated and a few returned for a second week.

What follows is an annotated list of lessons from working with victims of the WTC disaster.

### **Use and adapt existing systems**

New volunteers for disaster relief organizations often have extensive experience and good ideas about how to use their skills in this new environment. When working with disaster victims, it is not necessary to "reinvent the wheel." Organizations such as the American Red

Cross and Salvation Army have extensive experience with disaster management. In NYC, SA had a hierarchy of officers, staff, and volunteers into which new volunteers could be relatively easily integrated. As security increased in NYC, SA was able to certify the authenticity of volunteers. And because of its reputation, Army volunteers were readily accepted into the Center's larger service system. Furthermore, structured casework interviews that had been developed for other disasters were easily adapted to NYC.

However, the sheer volume of victims stretched workers and processing systems. Forms had to be copied on site, then organized so workers could find them easily. In addition, the usual screening process was adapted slightly from day to day, until a smooth, accurate, time-saving approach was found. Whereas in the early days when victims would stand in line for the entire day, only to be told to return, in the latter weeks, time estimates for case work were calculated so that only those victims who could be served each day were screened. Latecomers were given early next morning appointments, which began the day earlier for workers but enabled SA to serve more people per day. RWC groups and SA supervisors readily briefed new groups about current systems, so that adaptations were not lost but the best of established approaches remained.

### **Assign volunteers to tasks that match their strengths**

Everybody who works in a disaster zone will be stretched and will develop new strengths. But in any group, there are already qualities that suit each person to a specific role or roles. Those qualities can be discerned early and are usually known by volunteers themselves. At Pier 94, it was necessary to have a "gate keeper" at the SA location. This person had to (1) quickly assess whether indirect victims had used other services first, (2) be pleasant and caring, yet screen out probable "cons," (3) discern which translators were needed, if any, (4) assign

screening numbers to people who may have already been in lines and other agencies for as much as six hours, and (5) dialog with supervisors to decide when victims should be given appointments for the next day.

In the first group I lead to NYC, there was one MSW student who was perfectly matched to this job. Her organizational skills were excellent. She loved people. And she had chutzpah—a quality that most New Yorkers understand. Other students excelled at working with one victim or family after another and filing endless forms, all day, without burnout. My strengths include assertiveness and the ability to establish relationships with people quickly. SA allowed me (1) to “work the line” of victims outside of Pier 94 with beverages, snacks, and blankets, (2) to establish liaisons with key personnel in other agencies and with translators, and (3) to advocate for victims with various agencies. Though it is sometimes necessary to work outside of one’s strengths in a disaster, agencies such as SA have typically increased their effectiveness by assigning volunteers to tasks that matched their strengths.

### **Expect the unexpected**

Although some aspects of the service system are stable, many other things are in flux within disaster services. For RWC groups and SA, the Service Center changed locations three times between October and January. At Pier 94, the internal organization of space (i. e., agency locations) changed over one weekend. In that same week, security systems changed and workers were kept out of the Center until mid-morning. SA officers in charge changed regularly, often in the middle of the week. The length of the workday changed. And the kinds of assistance provided changed periodically— often after workers had gotten accustomed to a different set of rules about aid or eligibility.

Workers cannot be prepared for these specific changes, but they could be prepared for the inevitability of change. Each RWC group attempted to brief the next group regarding current service systems but also the changeability of the situation. Frustration and disappointment were not eliminated altogether, but were lessened by the expectation that some things may be different than reported by the media or previous groups.

### **Recruit volunteers who have “servant hearts,” not merely useful skills**

Volunteers are better prepared when their motivation is to serve others regardless of the roles to which they may be assigned. When volunteers genuinely love others and want to serve them in the name of Christ, there are benefits to disaster agencies and victims. Such volunteers will not insist on certain limited roles but will stretch themselves and adapt to new roles.

A wonderful example of this took place in Group 7. Nearly everyone had been part of previous groups and had worked with primary or secondary victims. We expected to do so again. In early January, NYC and FEMA moved the Family Assistance Center to a much smaller space. The Salvation Army had no room for RWC caseworkers, but needed help in its warehouse, sorting medical and self-care supplies, and at Ground Zero feeding and doing ad lib counseling with recovery workers. Part of the group worked at the warehouse, but by mid-week the whole group was serving at Ground Zero on the 11 PM to 7 AM shift. The work involved feeding, hydrating, and talking with NYPD and NYFD personnel, and construction workers, many of whom had been there since September 11. Rather than be contentious about the change of responsibilities, the group viewed this as God’s providence and as a way of stretching us as well as ministering to others.

### **Plan for time off, debriefing, and grief counseling**



At the end of the first day at Pier 94, RWC volunteers in each group showed signs of grieving. They had been listening to many people's narratives about their many losses all day, and needed to talk. By the end of the week, a few required short-term grief counseling and all used traveling time as an opportunity to decompress. While at the Centers, SA supervisors soon saw the benefits of requiring that all workers take regular breaks and lunch in order to "clear their minds" and to regain perspective. Some regular SA staff had to be sent home, when supervisors identified burnout that was creating dysfunction. Although disasters themselves are usually unpredictable, fatigue, grieving are predictable. The lesson is that rest and debriefing need to be planned.

Preparation and team building beforehand and on site reduces drop-out, burn-out, and the interpersonal problems which often occur when under stress. Early RWC groups returned with many pieces of advice. An important one was, "Do things as a group together away from work." Each team reported on its activities and SA contributed information that prepared subsequent groups. Probably some formal team building exercises would have been helpful, too, though many students knew each other from classes. When in NYC, there were ample opportunities to eat, travel, and tour together in the evenings. These activities produced a bond within the group that showed itself in mutual caring, high levels of cooperation, and decreased defensiveness on and off the job, in spite of its stressfulness.

Another highly helpful preparation was the establishment of prayer partnerships on the RWC campus for the groups in NYC. Over seven weeks in a large and, for many, an unknown city, there were no serious incidents to any group members. Teams knew that people on campus were praying for them and that they were not alone in this disaster relief. God was with us.

**Spiritual issues are an important part of disaster assistance**

One of the frequently overlooked aspects of helping is responding to the spiritual dimension. In times of disaster, victims are forced to deal with questions of meaning and connectedness. At the WTC disaster, tens of thousands of New Yorkers were mourning multiple losses and found themselves re-examining the value of life and its insecurities. Many turned to their religious roots. Church attendance increased and there was a yearning for spiritually focused counseling. At the Salvation Army's area in the Center, many victims welcomed prayer and hundreds took Christian literature and tapes.

The WTC disaster affected people all walks of life. The victims were from all socio-economic levels, from different nations and ethnic groups, from all age groups, and from different religious groups. Knowing how to deal with spiritual issues sensitively is an important skill when working with disaster victims.

## **Conclusion**

The WTC attack has taught us many things about defense but also many things about humane response. We have learned the specific lessons listed above, but in a more general way we have learned that direct victims, such as Brian and Kristen, can be helped greatly by those who are new to disasters but familiar with helping hurting people. Even relatively brief grief counseling was found to be effective with WTC victims in a context of financial and spiritual aid. Indirect victims, such as Mr. And Mrs. Wu and Mr. Telanev, are too numerous and needy for agency staff resources alone to respond to.

Professionally trained helpers, such as the social work students and faculty described here, bring skills, caring, and needed energy into a wearying situation. It is not just fiscal aid or the basic provisions of life that are needed in times of disaster. Sensitive professional helping that can assess and respond to the many different needs that result from disasters, including

spiritual needs, is critical to lasting healing. It is, however, not only the victims who benefit. Those who give are changed as well. In giving, we receive.

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# **THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING: WORKING WITH RECOVERY WORKERS**

**Harmon Meldrim**

*This article is based on the author's experience in working with recovery workers in the Oklahoma City bombing of the Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995. Three phases of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing intervention is described is explored. A summary of lessons learned from the experience is provided.*

ON APRIL 19, 1995 THE BOMBING "HEARD ROUND THE WORLD" destroyed the Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City. I arrived in Oklahoma City two weeks after the disaster and during the following two weeks met with approximately 100 airmen and officers from Tinker Air Force Base who had volunteered as rescue workers. The dedicated and often heroic efforts of these workers involved going through the rubble, piece by piece, removing body parts of victims that were found. The unheralded efforts of rescue workers, such as the volunteers I worked with, continued long after the initial phase of a disaster fades from the attention of the media. It is demanding work that takes a toll on those who engage in it.

My role in the Oklahoma City disaster was to tend to the emotional needs of these rescue workers through the use of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). This article describes the work that the rescue workers from the Tinker Air Force Base performed at the Oklahoma City bombing disaster and procedures that were taken to provide emotional support by the Air Force during and after the rescue work. It also presents the use of CISM as an important and effective intervention for the stress experienced by disaster recovery workers.

## **Acute Stress Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

The entertainment industry would have us believe that after the legendary Rambo is done killing scores of people that his internal battle is done. There appears to be no emotional aftermath to the carnage he has been exposed to. This is far from what takes place in reality. One of the memories most ingrained from my experience at Oklahoma City was of a couple struggling in a variety of ways due to the effects of the bombing. The husband had been in the building when the explosion took place and the wife was at home. She did not know if he was alive or dead. Six hours after the blast, she finally learned he was alive. He was treated and released from the hospital with only minor injuries. Two weeks later, he still was not able to take on any responsibilities in the home. His body was there, but his heart was elsewhere. She had not slept an entire night since the blast. "Every one expects me to be ecstatic because my husband is alive," she told me, "and I am glad he is alive, but they don't understand that it's not over for me. I've got to take on all the responsibility. What no one seems to realize is I am hurting too and I can't explain why."

Traumatic incidents are commonly accompanied by a crisis reaction that can be debilitating. Acute stress disorder (ASD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are two clinical conditions that have been found to result from exposure to traumatic incidents (Mitchell & Everly, 1995). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV-TR (2000) ASD has the following characteristics:

- A. The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present:

(1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others

(2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror

B. Either while experiencing or after experiencing the distressing event, the individual has three (or more) of the following dissociative symptoms:

(1) a subjective sense of numbing, detachment, or absence of emotional responsiveness

(2) a reduction in awareness of his or her surroundings (e.g., "being in a daze")

(3) derealization

(4) depersonalization

(5) dissociative amnesia (i.e., inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma)

C. The traumatic event is persistently reexperienced in at least one of the following ways: recurrent images, thoughts, dreams, illusions, flashback episodes, or a sense of reliving the experience; or distress on exposure to reminders of the traumatic event.

D. Marked avoidance of stimuli that arouse recollections of the trauma (e.g., thoughts, feelings, conversations, activities, places, people).

E. Marked symptoms of anxiety or increased arousal (e.g., difficulty sleeping, irritability, poor concentration, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, motor restlessness).

F. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning or impairs the individual's ability to pursue some necessary task, such as obtaining necessary assistance or mobilizing personal resources by telling family members about the traumatic experience.

G. The disturbance lasts for a minimum of 2 days and a maximum of 4 weeks and occurs within 4 weeks of the traumatic event.(pp. 471-2) PTSD results from experiencing the same traumatic events, but has the following characteristics which are more long term:

A. The traumatic event is persistently reexperienced in one (or more) of the following ways:

- (1) recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions.
- (2) recurrent distressing dreams of the event.
- (3) acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring
- (4) intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event
- (5) physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event

B. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness, as indicated by at least three (or more) of the following:

- (1) efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings or conversations associated with the trauma
- (2) efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
- (3) inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
- (4) markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities
- (5) feelings of detachment or estrangement from others
- (6) restricted range of affect

(7) sense of a foreshortened future (e.g., does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or even a long life span.)

C. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (not present before the trauma), as indicated by two (or more) of the following:

(1) difficulty falling or staying asleep;

(2) irritability or outbursts of anger;

(3) difficulty concentrating

(4) hypervigilance

(5) exaggerated startle response

D. Duration of the disturbance (symptoms in Criteria B, C, and D) is more than 1 month.

E. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. (American Psychological Association, 2000, p. 468)

When a disaster occurs, it is important to have mental health professionals available to respond to the emotional needs of the victims of a disaster to reduce the negative emotional reaction and to reduce risk of ASD and PTSD. It is not the disaster victims alone, who are at risk from negative reactions to a disaster, including ASD and PTSD. Disaster workers, such as the airman who were involved in search and recovery work, are susceptible emotional distress. It is as important to have mental health professionals available to tend to their needs as well.

Assisting recovery volunteers was the focus of my work at Oklahoma City. The most memorable example of a recovery worker in distress involved an airman in one of the squadrons



which was given the gruesome task of moving body parts. The second day after I arrived the first sergeant called and asked the mental health clinic to assess one of his troops, a young male airman who was handling body parts for up to 12 hours a day. I met with the airman who described the strong emotional reaction he was having to the work he was doing. When he went home, he would throw his uniform in the dumpster and shower for a half hour. In spite of the fact he had scrubbed thoroughly and disposed of his clothes, he thought he could smell human flesh which he sensed came from his body. He was troubled by the smell and the inability he had to remove it from his body. His wife wanted to talk about what he had seen and done, but he did not want to talk about it. He just wanted her to hold him close. Being away from his wife was very hard and on one occasion when she needed to go out of town, he called her continuously at her out-of-town work location. He was not able to sleep at night and felt like “a real wimp” for not being able to handle his emotions. This airman was very embarrassed about these feelings and was concerned his friends might pick up on his perceived lack of stamina.

Fortunately, the debilitating effects of post-traumatic stress and acute stress can be mitigated through CISM intervention. This intervention, first developed by Mitchell in 1983 when it was referred to only as Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), progressed into Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). CISM is “an integrated system of interventions which are designed to prevent and/or mitigate the adverse psychological reactions that so often accompany emergency services, public safety, and disaster response functions” (Mitchell & Everly, 1995, p. 3). According to Mitchell and Everly, CISD is:

A group meeting or discussion about a distressing critical event. Based upon core principles of education and crisis intervention, the CISD is designed to mitigate the impact of a critical incident and to assist the personnel in recovering as quickly as

possible from the stress associated with the event. The CISD is run by a specially trained team which includes a mental health professional and peer support from the emergency services. (1995, p. 8)

CISM encompasses a larger system of interventions including:

- A. Pre-incident education and trauma immunization programs
- B. One-on-one crisis intervention
- C. CISD
- D. Defusings (*a shortened version of CISD designed to eliminate the need for formal CISD, or reduce the need for further intervention. It is typically provided soon after the trauma*)\*
- E. Family and significant other support programs
- F. Stress management and trauma management education programs
- G. Peer support programs
- H. On scene support processes
- I. Informal group discussion
- J. Follow-up programs (Mitchell, 1995, p. 5; \*italicized comments are mine)

### **Tinker AFB Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) Initiation**

As soon as the Tinker AFB command post received word of the bombing, a disaster response plan was put into effect. This included a previously well thought out set of procedures developed by the Mental Health Clinic to deal with the mental health needs of the workers who would be involved in recovery work. The mental health part of the plan involved providing Critical Incident Stress Management services to those who volunteered. The Air Force Materiel

Command Surgeon's office provided 12 Air Force mental health providers from various bases around the United States to do the work. The CISM effort was led by a team of psychologists assigned to the Tinker AFB mental health clinic.

The airmen who came to provide recovery work at the site all did so voluntarily. The career fields varied greatly including electricians, communication specialists, cooks and clerk-typists, to name just a few. The volunteers were not previously trained for disaster recovery work. In spite of efforts to communicate clearly to the volunteers what they would be doing, there were surprises. Some airmen, for example, who thought they were coming out to set up generators and lights, ended up moving body parts.

### **CISD Phase I: On Site Debriefing and Defusing**

The on-site briefing and debriefing process was relatively simple. The briefing took place on the buses that brought the troops to the bombing site. A mental health provider boarded the bus and briefed the volunteers on the work they would be doing and prepared them for some of the things they might see. The mental health worker also described the types of feelings volunteers involved in recovery work typically experience. The volunteers were told that there would be a debriefing at the end of their experience to process what they had seen and what they were feeling.

The briefing usually lasted for approximately one half hour. The debriefing at the end of the experience was more extensive and more personal. When volunteers were leaving the site to go home, they would go to a mental health tent that was used solely for debriefing. Mental health workers met with volunteers in small groups to talk about their experience. Each person was invited to describe how he or she was doing and to talk about the experience. Opportunity to talk with others about the experience is at the heart of CISD. The immediate response of those

involved varies greatly. Some are eager and quick to talk about what they experienced and how they were feeling. It is not uncommon for volunteers to describe themselves as numb and to not be able to put their feelings in words. The varied responses were validated by the mental health worker and the wishes of the volunteer honored.

Doing the debriefing in groups is important because individuals are able to hear the experiences and feelings of others, some which are like their own and some which are very different. It frequently takes time for the impact of the disaster and the recovery work to be absorbed and understood. The mental health workers emphasized the importance of talking to others about the experience. The volunteers were encouraged to talk about the experience and what was going on inside of them after they went home. The possibility of strong reactions was described and volunteers were encouraged to get professional help if this began to take place.

### **Phase II: Off-Site Post Trauma Work**

The second phase of CISM was working with first sergeants and commanders to set up follow-up post trauma CISD groups. The greatest difficulty was convincing those in charge of the need to conduct the debriefing. At first, there was some reluctance to have mental health workers talk to their troops. Their people were tough, they said, and did not need any “touchy-feely” counseling. In time, the stress became evident and they commanders relented. With over 600 volunteers participating, getting back to all of the volunteers was a big job, taking several weeks to complete. Most of the squadrons with volunteers involved with moving body parts agreed to participate.

The mental health workers wore clothing similar to the volunteer rescue workers during the post trauma meetings to decrease the impression that the volunteer were “sick.” A concerted effort was made to normalize what the volunteers were experiencing. Information and education

was provided on the spectrum of “normal” responses people have after experiencing a traumatic situation. A phrase we often used in the follow-up work was that “normal people often have reactions that feel abnormal to them.” Each group member (groups ranged from 12-20 people) was given an opportunity to respond three times. The first time around each person was asked to describe their experience without connecting any reaction to the experience. After this was finished, the group was asked to discuss their reaction to the experience. Finally, the group was asked if there was any good that came out of the experience.

I especially remember one post trauma group. It was the group that had the same airman I had seen for individual counseling in the mental health clinic described above. The airman was one of the first to talk and he was quite open what he had experienced and how he had reacted. He indicated was doing well at this point. His openness seemed to encourage others. Each described very similar events and emotions as they went around the room. They mentioned the smells that would not go away, described sleep difficulty (to different degrees), and talked about the feeling that “I should be able to handle this.” Difficulty in discussing the experience with a significant other was also a common experience.

The group members seemed relieved that they were not the only ones to experience these emotions. Many had not talked to others about their experience and reactions to anyone since the work was completed. The members of the group were enormously appreciative of the opportunity to talk to others. Post-trauma groups are an important part of a disaster response effort.

### **Making Sense Out of Horror**

One of the challenging issues for all affected by a traumatic event is coming to grips with why such horrible things happen. A common question is how a loving all-powerful God could

allow innocent children playing in the childcare center to be murdered. There are no simple, satisfying answers to the question of why disasters happen. In the midst of the struggle to make sense out of the horror, it was fascinating to hear rescue workers respond to the question about what good has come out of the experience. One commonly mentioned positive outcome was the sense of connectedness that emerged out of the work. The groups of people who shared the most horrific experiences were the ones who were the most connected to each other. They developed a camaraderie that bound them together with a common belief that no one outside their group would ever truly understand what they had been through together.

Another positive outcome was the discovery of the goodness and presence of God in the midst of great evil. Very often the goodness of God was inspired by the kindness and the courageous work of other people. For one squadron, this inspiration came from the selfless work of a chaplain. Nearly every member of the squadron spoke of the encouragement they received from this man of God.

When the decision was made to have members of the squadron assist in the recovery work, the chaplain asked to go along. For some reason, his request was denied. Because of his concern for the workers, he persisted and came close to getting in trouble because his persistence. He was finally given permission to go but as a volunteer and not in a chaplain capacity. The airman had learned of the depth of concern the chaplain had for them and the lengths he had gone to be with them. When he got on the bus to go down to the site with them, they responded with a rousing cheer. The chaplain went from group to group during the rescue work encouraging the workers and helping to move debris. He would also stop to pray with rescue workers who needed encouragement. The sting of the disaster and the gruesomeness of the work was made bearable by the love, support, and prayers of the chaplain. When I heard

about this chaplain, I wondered if he had been debriefed. Those who take care of others often have no one to support them. I was able to locate the chaplain and invited him to a debriefing. He attended the meeting with last group with in this squadron. It was important for him to hear from the troops that his presence had made a difference to them.

### **Reflections as a CISD Observer**

I went down to the bombing site after hearing the horror experienced there. Somehow I hoped to grasp some of what the workers must have gone through. It did not work. The smells were gone and I will never know what the rescuers actually experienced. What I did see though was the incredible damage for blocks around the Murrah building. The media focused mainly on the Murrah building, but for 10 blocks around there was property damage and human injury. People stood just staring at the damage in disbelief. Total strangers were drawn together like members of the same small town.

Several times during the week I spent at Tinker, I took the time to reflect on the impact that talking with the rescue workers was having on me personally. Throughout the week I really did not think I had been negatively affected. It was not until I was on the plane leaving Oklahoma City that some of the horror I heard started replaying in my memory. There was one picture I could not block out. The rescue workers carried a lot of rocks, rubble, and broken pieces of furniture out of the site. One worker picked up an aluminum leg of a desk. He thought it was just what it appeared, but when he turned it up side down he saw it was filled on the inside with human flesh. It had impaled someone. I was repulsed as I thought about it. I thought about a female non-commissioned officer who, while hard at work moving rocks and debris, was ordered to by a lieutenant to go to the area of the building where the child care center was blown up. She knew she could not handle seeing a child's pictures or a piece of a small body—not so different

from her own 2 year old at home. I began to think of my own children and the children who had died. The thoughts made me weak. The officer let her supervisor know she was there as a volunteer—not on a military assignment and she frankly could not handle going to that part of the building. The supervisor was not particularly happy with her refusal but I was glad she did what she needed to do.

I also thought about another female non-commissioned officer who they called the “tunnel rat”. She was the only one small enough to crawl through the tunnels into the debris, to bring back a piece of a skull or finger. Each time she went back in she told herself maybe she would find someone alive this time. The situation suddenly came to life in my mind. What if the tunnel had collapsed while she was in there? What if she can never get the feeling of carrying dead flesh out of her mind? I was glad we were able to provide her a chance to talk about the work and to start resolving the event so that it could be put in the past.

One of the rescue workers was similar in build and hair color to Timothy McVeigh came to mind. After McVeigh was arrested this airman was tasked to stand in the police line up next to him. I was expecting his response would be—”I wanted to kill him”, but instead the response surprised me. “He wasn’t that different than me. He laughed at the same jokes that were told. I hope he gets a fair trial. I don’t know if he did it or not. If he did he should die. If he didn’t he should go free.” It was refreshing to find that yes, there are still heroes. Maybe it takes a crisis to bring out the best in people.

As the plane headed toward my home, I became very aware that I had been affected by my work at Oklahoma City. I, like the victims of the disaster and the workers who worked directly in recovery, was vulnerable to debilitating effects of the disaster. Debriefing was as important for me as all those I had helped.



## **Lessons Learned**

I learned many things about myself, other human beings, and disaster response in working with the airmen and officers from Tinker Air Force Base who had volunteered as rescue workers for the Oklahoma City disaster. Following are a few of the more important lessons I learned about providing CISM to recovery workers.

- The more trauma rescue workers experience the more symptoms they are likely to develop and increases the need for CISM intervention
- Traumatic experiences unlock the door to past traumatic experiences. People need to talk about past trauma as well.
- Most traumatized rescue workers will not seek out assistance without prodding to participate. Therefore, convincing their leaders of the value of CISD is critical to the success of CISD interventions.
- CISD is done best by normalizing symptoms and reactions, meeting people in the cohort group that experienced the trauma, and meeting with them on their own turf.
- CISD workers may experience secondary trauma from being with traumatized people. It is very important to build in support systems for these workers. Daily debriefing meetings for the debriefers should be required.
- People who survive traumatic incidents often perform heroic acts that deserve recognition and validation.

## **Conclusion**

Critical Incident Stress Management for rescue workers in Oklahoma City provided an opportunity to help rescue workers cope with emotions that could lead to serious psychological consequences including PTSD. It could not have been done without the support of commanders

and first sergeants who came to understand the importance of this process for the emotional well being of their personnel. Most rescue workers would not voluntarily seek this service. They came and received education and assistance because they were "encouraged" to do so by their superiors.

However, many expressed appreciation and relief for receiving this care. Providing CISM to recovery workers is important work that needs to be provided on a regular basis when disasters take place. To neglect to provide this service has the potential to create another group of victims, victims who are tragically harmed in the effort to do good.

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**SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION**

**COLLABORATION IN DISASTERS:**

**LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE MURRAH**

**FEDERAL BUILDING AND WORLD TRADE**

**CENTER DISASTERS**

**Stephen C. Anderson, Lawrence Ressler,**  
**and Jon R. Wallace**

*This article reviews the collaboration between two schools of social work and The Salvation Army in the Murrah Federal Building and World Trade Center disasters. The development of the collaborations and services provided are described. The lessons learned in the experiences are discussed.*

THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 EMOTIONALLY UNFOLDED much like they did on the morning of April 19, 1995. Both events started with us watching the horror of what first we thought was a terrible accident. Then later we began to realize that it was a planned and purposeful act of terrorism. In each of these events, national, state and local disaster agencies, along with hundreds of volunteers went quickly into action to serve both the immediate and longer term needs of those victimized by the terror.

The Office for Victims of Crime report issued on the Murrah Federal Building bombing (US Dept. of Justice, 2000) identified four areas of need that must be addressed in disasters: the immediate crisis, post crisis needs, victim services and support during criminal justice

proceedings, and long-term victim needs. Victims were defined to include those who are part of the rescue and relief efforts.

This article looks at the collaboration of schools of social work and the Salvation Army in two different disasters, namely the University of Oklahoma School of Social Work (OUSSW) and the Salvation Army in the Oklahoma City Murrah Federal Building bombing and Roberts Wesleyan College (RWC) and Salvation Army in the New York City World Trade Center bombing. The focus of the article will be on the delivery of services during the immediate crisis stage.

### **Collaboration Initiation**

In both disasters, the foundation for the collaboration began well before the onset of the disaster. At the broadest level, the Salvation Army has established a strong and positive reputation for involvement in meeting social needs that extends back to its founding in 1865. When both disasters occurred, the local community was quick to invite the Salvation Army to assist in the response. In the Murrah Federal Building bombing, Jon Wallace, one of the authors, was given leadership responsibility as The Salvation Army's Disaster Social Services Director and asked to develop a comprehensive social services system and infrastructure through which a wide range of traditional and unique services would flow to the people tragically affected by the attack. In the World Trade Center bombing, the call for help went first to the Salvation Army Major who was stationed at nearby Long Island and was subsequently appointed Incident Commander for the disaster. The enormity of the disaster soon moved the call for assistance to the Eastern Territory headquarters where Major John Cheydleur, the Eastern Territory Social Services Secretary, provided additional leadership assistance.

In both situations, the Salvation Army disaster leadership's personal familiarity with professional associations and schools of social work was critical. Wallace, of the Salvation Army initiated the collaboration in the Oklahoma City disaster with a call to the Oklahoma Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The call for assistance was referred by the staff to his alma mater, the University of Oklahoma and two of his former instructors, Dr. Steve Anderson (one of the authors) and Social Work School Director, Dr. Julia Norlin. The mutual knowledge and trust between the organizations enabled the collaboration to move forward quickly.

The collaboration between the RWC social work program and the Salvation Army in the WTC disaster was initiated by Dr. William Descoteaux, Chair of the Social Work Department. Dr. Descoteaux, who had assisted the Salvation Army in previous disasters, called Major Cheydleur to ask if there was any way the social work faculty and students could assist in the disaster. Major Cheydleur, who served on the board of directors for the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) with Dr. Descoteaux and Dr. Ressler, one of the authors, responded affirmatively and the initial plan to send a team of eight students and two faculty was quickly agreed to. The NACSW connections led to the involvement of other schools with social work programs as time went on. As with the Oklahoma disaster, the mutual familiarity and respect between the two organizations brought about quick and positive response to the need that existed.

John Wallace requested no less than twenty-four social workers every day for the next three weeks to staff Salvation Army units and relief centers across Oklahoma City. Cheydleur, in the WTC disaster, asked for teams of eight social work students and two social work faculty to assist in the effort. The initial request for assistance for two week was extended quickly to 12

weeks. As the RWC resources became exhausted, teams from three additional social work programs were solicited by NACSW for four additional weeks, including Eastern Mennonite University, Redeemer College, and Taylor University. While hundreds of others also volunteered in the response, the social work faculty and students provided continuity and as time went on provided needed training and oversight to volunteers who came for shorter periods of time.

In both cases the collaboration developed spontaneously out of necessity. Consequently, the process and the services were less predictable and less well conceptualized than might be desired. Nevertheless, the value of involving social work faculty and students in disaster response soon became evident.

Disaster and terrorist incidents in any community constitute a disruption of the “person-in-environment fit” and therefore provide university schools and colleges of social work, in association with established disaster relief organizations, unique opportunities for service and hands-on experience while at the same time providing instruction in the fundamental values and principles of the social work profession. The Salvation Army received professional quality social service disaster assistance help. The social work students received a life changing social work education and a sense of satisfaction in serving others.

### **Services Provided**

Disasters bring to their victims an uninvited demand to reorder life. Daily routines are disrupted. Relationships are severed, some temporarily and some permanently. Normal social structures are suspended and disaster systems are put in place. Depending on the speed of the disaster, the response of the victims may be more or less orderly. Drought and floods provide victims and communities more time to prepare than do tornadoes or fires.

The bombings that took place at the Murrah Federal Building and the World Trade Center caught the victims and community off guard, with a sense of chaos resulting. Even in the most unexpected disasters, the needs of victims and their response to the disaster is generally predictable. This predictability has led to a disaster response discipline in which hundreds of organizations study and prepare for future disasters. Central to this discipline is an organization called the National Volunteer Organizations Assisting in Disasters (NVOAD).

One area that has been unaddressed in sudden disasters is the social service response, the arena that social workers are best suited to be involved in. Comprehensive social services brought relief to thousands through the efforts of more than two-hundred fifty Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral level social workers, students, faculty, and licensed clinical social workers from the OU campus at Norman and around the state. Over 100 social work students and faculty provided disaster assistance over a three month period at the World Trade Center disaster with in excess of 15,000 victims helped by these persons. Among the services included were the following.

### **Disaster Assistance Center**

Disaster Assistance Centers were set up in both disasters. The Family Assistance Center was established at Oklahoma City area command where assistance with housing, food, clothing, and essential supplies, finances, burial service, referrals, and travelers assistance was provided. Representatives from Travelers Aid, Legal Aid, and the Oklahoma City Housing Authority were present as was a nurse's station and day care and nursery. Clinical social workers were available to assist with critical counseling needs. Additional services were also made available along with other relief organizations at a nearby mall.

Two major disaster centers were established in New York City, one on Worth Street in lower Manhattan within walking distance to Ground Zero, and the other in Upper Manhattan referred to as Pier 94. Both sites were one stop centers, with several dozen agencies present, including the Red Cross, Safe Horizons, New York Bar Association, Crime Victims Board, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Office of Aging, Crisis Counseling, Hazard Mitigation, Social Security Administration, Small Business Administration, Disaster Housing, and Veterans Administration, to name a few. Pier 94 provided some services uniquely for police and firefighter families and family members of persons missing or deceased.

Social work students from both the undergraduate and graduate programs provided assistance with the roles dictated by skill level and need. Undergraduate students generally were involved in crowd control and gate-keeping roles, with involvement in case management as was appropriate. At the centers where death notifications were made to families of the deceased, clinical social workers and graduate students provided grief counseling and supported Salvation Army pastoral care ministries taking place there. All students, regardless of level of education, were expected to do what was asked.

### **Information and Referral**

During the early phase of a disaster, information and referral resources are in great need. This includes information about what disaster agencies are available and what services they provide. Social workers at both disasters were involved in developing these resources. The social work students and faculty in the Oklahoma City disaster were instrumental in developing a Resources Guide which was distributed to all units and workers. Included in the guide were phone numbers and locations of assisting agencies, practical information on the location of motels, food stores, and funeral homes, and helpful information regarding disaster stress and



self-care. Social workers at WTC collected basic information about the agencies providing services to the disaster victims and which was distributed to the agencies to enhance the interagency cooperation and reduce duplication of services.

One of the first tasks of the Salvation Army at Oklahoma City was to develop a policy manual specific to the work being undertaken that could serve to outline Salvation Army procedures regarding services offered, resources for the unique services needed by people in this particular situation, and procedures regarding writing Salvation Army vouchers. Vouchers were written for meals, motels, travel, gas, clothes, personal grooming items, funeral expenses, and so on. These represented some of the critical areas of policy that needed to be quickly provided to the volunteers.

The policy manual was done on three-hole punch paper and put in loose-leaf binders as policies were fluid and often changed several times during the day.

### **Disaster Mental Health Services**

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) for victims and for workers at a disaster site is needed. Disaster mental health services were set up to provide debriefing and defusing for Salvation Army personnel working at the blast site and in other highly stressful locations. Clinical social workers were stationed at emergency canteens in the restricted zone at both the Oklahoma City and New York City sites to help workers cope with the stress of their work. In addition, as noted previously, graduate social workers and clinical social workers provided mental health services to victims who were exhibiting signs of acute stress.

### **Additional Services**

Several additional important but less direct services were provided by social workers at both sites. The social workers assisted in developing volunteer orientation materials and sharing

the mission of The Salvation Army and disaster relief operation with other organizations. Social work students and faculty at Oklahoma City also assisted in Operation Restore Hope, an effort undertaken by the Salvation Army to take pastoral care, clinical social work, and emergency financial assistance into the affected community through mobile outreach units (RVs).

### **The Set-Up**

The immediate crisis stage at the Murrah Federal Building disaster lasted for approximately eight weeks. For WTC, the immediate crisis stage lasted for approximately 16 weeks. The need to change locations as the disaster response unfolded became evident in both disasters. In the Oklahoma City disaster, a Compassion Center was set up in the First Christian Church in downtown Oklahoma City by within half a day of the bombing. This operation was to be the place where those victims who had lost a family member could come for information and solace. It was also the place where family members came to help identify remains, receive information, and obtain support. Protecting the privacy of the individuals and shielding the victims from the media coverage was an important element of the Center (US Dept. of Justice, 2000).

The Compassion Center operated for approximately 16 days and then began to evolve into the longer-term mental health operation that was to be known as Project Heartland. In the WTC disaster, the first disaster assistance site was the 12th floor of a building on Water Street, within walking distance of the Ground Zero. It was clear that the space was not adequate to serve the large number of persons needing assistance and so the City developed two very large ground level sites, one within walking distance of Ground Zero and one in Upper Manhattan which provided special services for those who lost family members.

Long lines of persons seeking help was common. Reallocation of space among agencies and searching for better ways to handle the flow of people was a daily task in the early days. Even a year following the disaster, the Salvation Army is providing disaster assistance to individuals and family affected by the trauma. The services are located in their normal facilities.

### **Recruitment of Volunteers**

The bombing of the Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995 was the most destructive act of terrorism in the United States history up to that point. The power of the blast blew away a significant portion of the building. An unprecedented 168 persons were killed and hundreds more were injured. The destruction was so great that the structure that remained standing had to be demolished. The bombing of World Trade Center made the destruction of the Murrah Federal Building pale in comparison. The unthinkable collapse of the two 110 story towers resulted in death to nearly 3000 persons with over 6000 treated for injuries on September 11. The economic repercussion devastating. The entire lower Manhattan area was shut down for a period and made available gradually over months of time.

Both disasters placed overwhelming demands on the local community, with a great need for volunteers to assist in the recovery and to provide assistance. In both cases, the Salvation Army needed professionally trained social workers to help provide social services and to assist with the mental health work that was needed. The professional organizations and social work programs seemed like natural sources of professional help, and they were. Available in both social work schools and among social work professions were persons who had disaster relief preparation and experience, although no database existed to identify who they were.

In the Oklahoma City disaster, previous experience in recruiting over 400 housing hospital volunteers for the 1989 Olympic Festival in the Oklahoma City metro area proved to be

of assistance. Based on that experience, a plan for recruiting volunteers was designed and implemented. This basic plan was to first recruit a small group of five key coordinators. One of these individuals was to always be on duty to troubleshoot problem areas, coordinate with Salvation Army staff, assist in the ongoing development of policy, provide support and encouragement, orient and train volunteers, and to provide overall supervision to the volunteer staff.

Next, week coordinators, day coordinators, and shift coordinators were recruited. The coordinators were then responsible for recruiting individuals to their shift or assigned time block. A small group of floating volunteers was also recruited to fill in when the assigned volunteer was unable to fulfill their assigned shift or did not show up. This basic plan was put into action late on April 19 and over the next several days.

Students, faculty, and experienced social workers from the community were recruited to serve in the supervisory roles. Recruiting of professional social work volunteers was done from the membership list of OK-NASW. Independent and senior social workers of known reputation were immediately assigned to the Compassion Center and to provide crisis intervention services in the ground zero area. The remainder of the volunteers were to be recruited to staff the unmet needs response of the Salvation Army. This was quickly done and proved to be effective in staffing the Salvation Army relief services operation from April 19 to the closing of the Shepherd Mall office at approximately the end of May. Thus, during this six-week period well over 200 individuals were recruited that provided immediate need services from initially 7 am until 9 pm everyday of the week. At least 4 to 6 individuals were on duty at all times.

The request for volunteers from Roberts Wesleyan College assist in the World Trade Center disaster found a number of persons in leadership who could draw from previous

experience and training. The chair of the social work program had volunteered previously with the Salvation Army in several natural disasters in the Midwest, bringing an awareness of how the Salvation Army operated in disaster situations. One of the faculty had been involved in several disasters previously, including providing CISM to workers at the Oklahoma City bombing and to the family of the space shuttle Discovery.

The volunteers were first drawn from the Roberts Wesleyan College undergraduate and graduate social work program. The call for volunteers was met with a large response from both students and faculty. Teams of six students and two faculty were put together with students drawn from both the graduate and undergraduate programs. The faculty were selected to ensure there was at least one person who could provide assistance in supervising the graduate students who would be working with more intense grief counseling of family members. As the weeks went by and the College resources were exhausted, community social workers that the College faculty knew and respected were invited to serve with a faculty volunteer.

The RWC teams traveled to NYC and returned from the City together in a van, an important policy which students and faculty were expected to follow. This provided important time to bond together on the 350 mile trip from Rochester and to debrief on the return. Teams left on a Saturday morning, arriving at the Salvation Army Command Center headquarters by mid-afternoon. There they were given needed identification credentials and an initial briefing by the Incident Commander. They met in the evening with the team who had volunteered the previous week for a more extensive briefing, including providing an overview of the work, passing on policies as they currently stood, and review of the paperwork involved. The new team began their work on Sunday morning while the terminating team traveled back.

The RWC teams stayed together in a hotel provided by the Salvation Army. The days tended to be long and exhausting, normally twelve hours. The groups tended to eat and travel together. One evening was specifically set aside during the week to break the intensity of the work and to help cope with the emotional stress that would develop. Time was spent each evening debriefing and working on group issues if dynamics were emerging that needed attention. At the end of the week, the team met with the Incident Commander for a debriefing prior to the next group's arrival.

Crucial for future preparedness is to develop a relationship among the relevant organizations prior to the crisis situation. Identifying the core group of leadership, having periodic meetings, and maintaining up to date membership lists with current contact information are all recommended activities in building better preparedness.

### **Lessons Learned**

In general, the recovery work at both disaster sites went very well, with thousands of persons in need provided with excellent service. There were important lessons learned with respect to process as well as policy.

### **The Need for Support and Debriefing**

Disasters are demanding emotional sinkholes that may overwhelm the volunteers without their awareness. It was not uncommon for volunteers to work for 10 to 12 hours with an urge to keep working beyond that. Exhaustion may set in with the volunteer unaware of changes in their behavior such as crankiness. Workers may put in place psychological defense mechanisms that allow them to work with many horrific situations with no apparent impact during the present. Only later does the exhaustion and the impact become evident.

There is a need for support during the recovery work and debriefing during and at the end of the experience. A few days rest before resuming normal work may be needed. The support and debriefing should include volunteers providing direct services to victims, daily on-line supervisory staff, and volunteers providing support services to those providing direct services.

### **The Need to Codify Practice Wisdom**

The events of September 11, 2001 at New York City had many similarities to the April 19, 1995 bombing in Oklahoma City. The similarities included everything from what types of donations are needed and not needed, being organized in how and where people can volunteer, the need for a rumor control and services information center, the need for more effective inter-agency cooperation and a centralized computer victim database, and the need for clear communication to the public about where and for what disaster their financial contributions are going to be used.

The development and pre-testing of an operations manual would insure less initial confusion during an actual crisis. Particularly useful is a loose-leaf policy manual detailing the kind of information that can be used by volunteers coming into the agency. While some things cannot be anticipated due to the nature of disasters, many of the basic components of a manual could be developed in advance.

### **The Need for Disaster Training**

The disasters at Oklahoma City and New York City caught the social work profession off-guard. While volunteers were quick to emerge to assist in the disaster recovery, there were too few persons who were trained in disaster assistance response. As a result, there was a great deal of on the job learning what resulted in more confusion than was necessary. It is important for professional organizations, such as state chapters of NASW and NACSW, along with the

social service providers, such as the Salvation Army, to provide more focus, training, and orientation to their members in basic crisis work. Schools of social work and professional organizations could assist in working with disaster agencies to prepare basic training and disaster response training.

### **The Need for Inter-Agency Coordination**

Coordination and interface between the host agency and outside volunteer entities is critical to effective disaster response. Issue and needs in a crisis are fluid and subject to rapid change. Feedback from volunteers working with victims need a way to make it to those in charge and decisions from policy makers needs to be communicated down. Successful coordination and interface requires pre-disaster work as well as on-site work. The pre-disaster work includes developing a cooperative mindset between agencies to reduce turf protection competition. It requires that agencies become familiar with each other's strengths and resources. Inter-agency trust, familiarity, and knowledge established prior to the onset of a disaster will allow for much smoother disaster recovery response.

### **The Need for Greater Knowledge**

While knowledge about disasters has improved dramatically in recent years, there remains a great need for addition research about disasters recovery, especially as it relates to providing disaster assistance. One area of need is to clarify what are the requisite requirements are for volunteering in disaster work. Some agencies that take a mental health focus insist upon licensure and specific agency run training. Other agencies will only take individuals who are CISM certified. Some organizations require that one hide their professional identities in place of more generic role titles. Schools of social work and the disaster agency community need to come together and devise a plan for recognized disaster preparation and continuing education.



A second area of needed research relates to the best response to trauma and stress experienced in a disaster. One response to those in disasters is to provide Critical Incident Stress interventions. Another response is to assist people in getting back to normal living patterns, focusing the attention on assisting people with unmet needs. It is not clear when each is most appropriate and if either prolongs or intensifies the trauma. Sharing existing research findings and engaging in future research studies of these issues are essential to improving disaster recovery work.

A third area of needed research relates to the management of the many governmental and non-governmental agencies that are interested and willing to respond to disasters. More study is needed about organization and leadership needs prior to and during disasters. Efforts should be exerted to develop a basic standard for the preparation of disaster volunteers. Finally, it is necessary to reexamine our assumptions about what knowledge and skills will be needed to effectively respond to future acts which may well include chemical, nuclear, and bioterrorism activity. As important as improving the response to natural or human-made disasters is, expanding the response to other forms of disaster is at least as critical.

## **Conclusion**

“To the courageous and caring who responded from near and far we extend our eternal gratitude,” reads the inscription on the wall surrounding the Survivors Tree at the Oklahoma City National Memorial in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Poised nearby stand native Oklahoma and American trees symbolic of the thousands of individuals from dozens of emergency response and community organizations who rushed to Oklahoma City in April 1995 to help the state recover from what was then the worst terrorist attack in our nation’s history.

Among the courageous and caring who took part in the relief effort that day and in the weeks following the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building were the faculty and students of the University of Oklahoma School of Social Work. In a similar way, faculty and social work students from Roberts Wesleyan College provided disaster assistance in response to the World Trade Center Disaster in New York City. Those involved in the recovery efforts of both disasters found the work to be emotionally and physically challenging but enormously gratifying. The services provided were well received and the generous gift of time was an important antidote to the despair experienced by so many.

The partnerships of the Salvation Army and the two social work programs in two different disasters provide a powerful model for mobilizing a large number of professional social workers to assist in a crisis event. The success in which these partnerships were carried off resulted in providing victims of these disasters with some of the best and most professional services on a consistent basis throughout the events. Through better planning and cooperation in non-crisis times, an even better response to disaster relief is possible in the future.

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**HELPING THOSE VICTIMIZED BY THE  
TERROR OF WAR: REFLECTIONS ON THE  
DISMANTLING OF CLUSTER BOMBS  
IN A LAO VILLAGE**

**Titus Peachey**

*This article describes the on-going terror experienced by Lao villagers as a result of the massive bombing that took place during the Viet Nam War. The author, who has personally been involved in the effort to destroy an estimated 9 million bomblets that remain unexploded in the ground, describes the effect the bombs still have on the Laotian people more than 30 years after the bombing stopped.*

IT WAS 8:00 ONE MORNING IN MARCH OF 1998, WHEN PHOU VI eng, a villager in the northern Lao province of Xieng Khouang, was preparing his work for the day. Having recently built a simple house for his family, his first task for the morning was to dig several shallow holes in the earthen floor in order to anchor his bed. After measuring and marking the places where his bedposts would lodge, he got out his digging tool and squatted beside the first mark. In one short stroke of his digger, his life was changed forever.

All Phou Vieng can remember now is the sound of the explosion. Hundreds of shards of steel from a cluster bomblet buried just beneath the soil tore into his body. One of the pieces of shrapnel punctured a nearby can of gasoline, causing it to burst into flames. Fortunately, neighbors gathered quickly to carry Phou Vieng out, but the house and all the family's belongings were destroyed in the fire. Phou Vieng barely escaped with his life, losing an arm and

a leg in the explosion. I spent several hours with Phou Vieng and his family in May of 2000. Unhappily, this visit with Phou Vieng was not an isolated encounter. Rather, it was reminiscent of scores of similar visits in villages and hospitals throughout northern Laos between 1980 and the year 2000. As a representative of Mennonite Central Committee, a relief and development agency of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in North America, I had made frequent trips to the areas bombed during the Vietnam War to do what I could to help those victimized by several years of violence which rained from the sky. As villagers spoke of the bombs in their soil and the many losses in their lives, many emotions stirred within me. As an American citizen, I represented the country that had produced the bomblet and dropped it from the sky some 25 years earlier. Adding to my discomfort was the fact that I was always received with warmth and hospitality by those who had suffered so much for so long.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on the lessons learned about helping those who are victims of our acts of terror, a form of helping given too little attention.

## **Background**

From 1964 to 1973, Laos endured one of the most intensive bombing campaigns in history, as the US attempted to destroy the social and economic infrastructure of the Pathet Lao communist forces. Part of the larger war in Indochina, the US bombing attempted to block the flow of supplies over the Ho chi Minh trail which went through southern Laos. In addition, the US bombed northern Laos in support of Royal Lao Government military campaigns.

During the war, the US dropped over 6 million conventional bombs, or nearly 3 bombs for every inhabitant of Laos at the time. The 580,000 bombing missions flown over Laos equaled one bombing mission every eight minutes around the clock, for nine full years. Many of the bombs dropped were cluster bombs, which contained small tennis-ball-sized bomblets designed

to explode when they hit the ground. Bomb clearance experts now working in Laos estimate that some 90 million individual bomblets were dropped, and that somewhere between 10% and 30% of the bomblets failed to explode. Thus at the end of the war in 1973, there were likely more than 9 million lethal bomblets scattered across the Lao countryside, creating a vast, uncharted mine field waiting to explode.

### **What are cluster munitions?**

Cluster munitions are small bomblets or submunitions which are delivered to their targets in large containers or shells. The container opens in mid-air over the target area, often dispersing the bomblets over an area the size of several football fields. A drop of several canisters can easily create *kill zones* of a square kilometer or greater in size. The bomblets may be the size and shape of a baseball, a lawn dart, or an elongated soda can, and are designed to explode on or shortly after impact. The anti-personnel bomblets have fragmentation features which can send hundreds of shards of steel at ballistic speeds over a wide area. Anti-armor bombs have shaped charges which can penetrate heavy armor. The cluster munitions may be delivered in a bomb by aircraft, or launched by rocket or artillery projectile.

### **What is the difference between a landmine and a cluster munition?**

The primary difference between cluster munitions and landmines is in their design. Cluster munitions are designed to explode as a result of their impact, so that their effect is felt at the time of their “delivery.” Landmines are designed to explode as a result of contact with or proximity to a person. By design, their effects may be felt many months or years after their placement, depending on when a person initiates contact with the landmine. Cluster munitions which fail to explode on impact, however, are very similar in effect to landmines. Since dud rates for cluster munitions are often in the 10%-30% range, most cluster munition strikes create the

actual effect of a minefield. A significant difference between landmines and cluster munitions is their explosive power. Cluster munitions are generally more powerful than landmines and are designed to kill rather than injure or maim.

### **Lingering Terror**

Many Lao villagers fled the areas being bombed during the war, while others moved into the forests and caves, barely eking out an existence amidst the brutal bombing of their land. When the war was over, these displaced people moved back to their home villages to find everything destroyed. Having already suffered the physical and psychological trauma of war, these villagers were eager to rebuild their lives and homes. Little did they know that yet another dreadful trial awaited them; bombs the size of tennis balls lay hidden in their fields and gardens. They were illprepared to deal with this terror.

Mr. Thongsavanh, a teacher in Xieng Khouang Province remembers instructing his students to pick up the strange round pieces of ordnance which appeared in the forests and hillsides near his school. "I didn't know it was dangerous," he recalled. "I thought since the bombs hadn't blown up on impact they weren't dangerous anymore." During a visit to Lek Village in 1984, I met Mr. Thong Dee who was plowing his fields. Plows turned the soil gently and were not as likely to explode a hidden cluster bomb as the traditional Lao hoe which hit the soil with great force. In plowing between 3- 4 acres of land, Thong Dee had found over 20 bomblets. He had thrown some of the bomblets into a large bomb crater at the edge of his field. Others, he had placed in a small hole and covered with grass. Eager that I should see the bomblets, he quickly moved the bomblets into clear view, handling them like they were merely billiard balls! Fortunately for Thong Dee and myself, none of the bomblets exploded. Lao villagers possessed a courage borne out of necessity. Mr. Thong Dee and thousands of villagers

like him, had little choice but to confront the danger hidden in their soil with their bare hands. Noted one villager, “I can’t move my garden just because there are bombs in it. There wouldn’t be any point to it anyway. If I moved it to a new location, I’d just find more bombs there. I might as well keep it where it is.”

So in village after village, Lao farmers carefully removed the bombs from their soil. There were no international de-mining agencies to call upon. The Lao government had neither the infrastructure nor the technology to deal with the millions of bombs scattered over 1/3 of its territory. With the brief exception of some Russian and Vietnamese assistance, foreign governments ignored this huge man-made disaster. Between the end of the war in 1975 and the beginning of clearance operations in 1994, more than 10,000 Lao villagers suffered injury or death from unexploded ordnance. In many ways, the stories are remarkably similar to the stories of accidents from landmines. People were injured or killed through their everyday activities such as collecting firewood, herding cattle, or hoeing in their fields and gardens.

On March 18, 1995, 15-year-old Thao Mee struck a bombie while digging a fish pond in his family’s rice paddy. The bombie’s explosion filled his body with shrapnel. He was taken to the hospital the following day, stopped breathing, and had to be revived. Within three weeks his right arm had to be amputated. His family ran out of money, and had to sell off all their chickens and pigs to pay for his medical treatment.

On April 15, 1995, in the village of Tachok, Mrs. Iaya was killed when her hoe struck a bomblet while she was digging holes to plant banana trees. Tachok villagers have suffered scores of accidents since the end of the war. Because of the vast quantity of cluster bombs present in the soil, and because of the central role of agriculture in the lives of villagers, it is not unusual to encounter families who have suffered multiple cluster bomb accidents. Cluster munitions have

curious shapes and colors. Because many of them can easily be found on top of the soil, the bombs are almost irresistible to children. In fact, over 25% of casualties from unexploded ordnance in Laos today happen to children, none of whom had been born when the bombs fell.

On November 22, 1993, the four Tu Va Chao children were walking along a street on the edge of Phonsavan, Xieng Khouang Province's capital, taking the water buffalo to pasture. Kou Ya, 4 and Sia Ya, 6, noticed a round object in the ditch. It looked like the ball boys and girls toss to each other during Hmong New Year festivities. Sia Ya threw it to her brother. He couldn't catch it and it landed behind him, exploding and killing him instantly. Sia Ya died after two agonizing days and nights in the provincial hospital.

### **U.S. Disaster Response**

The U.S. government aid program was discontinued in Laos when the communist forces took control in 1975. While U.S.-Lao diplomatic ties were never cut, there was an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion on both sides. In the aftermath of the war, the primary concern which informed U.S. policy toward Laos was the accounting for U.S. missing-in-action military personnel (POW/MIA). In the midst of so much suffering and devastation within its own country, Laos was not inclined to make this concern a high priority.

In fits and starts over the next 20 years, Lao-U.S. relations alternately thawed and cooled, while unexploded ordnance continued to kill and maim Lao villagers, and hamper economic development efforts. Finally, in 1996, the U.S. government funded a mine/bomb clearance training program where Lao technicians could be trained to find and safely destroy mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). In the early years after the war, there were few nongovernmental organizations working in Laos. Those agencies which made occasional visits to Laos were typically not presented with the problem of unexploded ordnance or given the opportunity to



travel in areas where UXO was a problem. This, coupled with the secrecy with which the bombing campaign had been conducted, contributed to the long delay in addressing the tragedy.

Both Mennonite Central Committee and Quaker Service Laos worked with limited success to address the problem of cluster munitions between 1975-1994. A large shipment of shovels to northern Laos provided a moderately safe way to turn the soil. An MCC-supplied armored tractor (1979-1980) with a chain-flail device proved ineffective in destroying cluster bombs, and was used thereafter for agricultural purposes. By the early 1990's, however, the number of agencies in the world devoted to clearing landmines had grown dramatically. At the invitation of Mennonite Central Committee and the Lao government, the Mines Advisory Group began a training program in Xieng Khouang Province, a heavily bombed area of Laos. By the end of 1994, more than 20 Lao de-miners had been trained to locate and safely dispose of all types of unexploded ordnance, especially cluster munitions. Incredibly, by the year 2000, this program had expanded exponentially. As governments and UN agencies got involved, funding increased, and the work expanded to nine Lao provinces, employing nearly 1,000 people.

Sadly, in March, 2002, the clearance operation in Laos experienced its first fatalities. Two de-miners, Mr. Bounda and Mr. Khamsouk, were killed while trying to detonate an unexploded cluster bomb in Xieng Khouang Province.

### **Lessons Learned As Experienced by Innocent Victims, War is Terrorism**

It is widely assumed that terrorism is an act of indiscriminate violence by desperate groups who have little political standing or power. We do not commonly associate acts of terror with governments, or with the mission of the U.S. military. Yet, as experienced by the victims/survivors, there is surely little difference between the terror caused by a suicide bomber in a crowded Jerusalem cafe, or the terror of a cluster bomb which kills two curious children in

Laos. When Phou Vieng's digging tool struck the cluster bomb imbedded in his home in March of 1998, he became a victim/ survivor of terrorism.

To drop 90 million bomblets on a country of 3 million people over a 9-year period, and leave 10-20 million unexploded bombs behind, reproduces one of the most despicable aspects of terrorism: its indiscriminate nature. Phou Vieng was not an "identified target," nor had he committed an act of hostility against the United States or its people. Phou Vieng was only a child when the bombs were dropped. The fact that the Commander-in-Chief of a world superpower authorized the air war over Laos does not make Phou Vieng's suffering some 20 years later either deserved or meaningful. Phou Vieng's permanent physical disablement serves no political or military purpose. It is terrorism with a cynical twist. The war is over. The issues and passions of the cold war are largely forgotten, yet the maiming and killing continues.

The point is not to create a scale of evil on which to place acts of terror or violence in some relation to one another. The debates about which acts of terror produced the most pain or served a more worthy cause would be endless. Rather, the tragedy in Laos calls Americans to a time of introspection and honesty. Stated in terms of Christian faith, if we would address the violence or terror that we see in others, we must be willing to address it first in ourselves (Matt. 7:1-3). Laos is one of many places in the history of U.S. relations with the rest of the world which calls us to this deeply spiritual task.

### **The Importance of Listening to Those We Victimize**

Through visits with Lao villagers, MCC workers learned the value and the power of listening. In the years after the war, Laos suffered through a long period of political isolation from the West. In the early 1980s, Mennonite and Quaker workers were the only Americans in the country with permission to travel routinely, so it was a rare occasion for Lao villagers to meet

people from the nation which had dropped the bombs still littering their soil. It was always a humbling experience to be warmly welcomed by these villagers. We were not assailed with diatribes against America or met with cold stares. Rather, over cups of tea or a tasty meal of rice and spicy sauces, we learned about the realities of their lives.

It usually took a bit of gentle probing, but then the stories of the war and the bombs would flow. Lao villagers, eyes often welling with tears as they spoke, seemed grateful that someone remembered their pain and cared enough to listen. In early 1981 MCC workers visited a home which had experienced a tragedy just a day earlier. A mother of 11 children had been killed when her hoe hit a cluster bomb buried in a garden. Her husband showed MCC workers the spot in the garden where the accident had happened, and then gave them the shattered hoe head, saying, "Please take this back to America and tell the people what happened." It was not unusual for Mennonite and Quaker workers to be encouraged to retell these stories, for Lao villagers had no other voice in the country from which the bombs had come.

In communities victimized by years of war, suffering can begin to feel commonplace and people's lives devalued. The simple act of listening, remembering, and retelling the stories communicates respect and worth, a small step in the path toward recovery and healing.

### **The Necessity of Doing What We Can to Make Amends**

While Lao villagers were usually ready to retell their stories, it became increasingly frustrating for Mennonite workers to see the cluster bombs in Lao gardens and fields, without being able to offer a viable solution. Thus when clearance operations finally began in 1994, it was like a new day had dawned. The clearance project quickly became the focus of attention. International aid agencies and governments which had shown only passing interest in the issue before, made visits to the project and began pledging support. The project itself began producing

the kind of data and quantitative information that aid agencies and governments need in order to access budgets and build program support. School grounds, village pathways, markets, and temple areas were being cleared of bombs. Lao villagers themselves were being trained to find and safely destroy all kinds of unexploded ordnance.

What was once a depressing story of a community victimized by war, had now become a story of positive action and optimism. Listening to stories of pain and providing training to clear the bombs from Lao villages are easily understood in terms of the Christian mandate. Surely to “love God and neighbor” includes caring for those who have survived the terror of war. Surely Jesus’ commandment to “love your enemies” includes helping Lao survivors of U.S. bombing recover their land and protect their children from further harm. Yet tucked away in the lamplit villages of Laos lies an even greater challenge to American Christians; the challenge posed by the question of responsibility for systemic violence.

### **The Importance of Taking Responsibility for Our Violent Acts**

Scattered throughout many Lao villages one can find in the debris of war the calling cards of corporate America. Cluster bomb containers, used by villages as fence posts or vegetable planters, bear the names and addresses of the U.S. companies which produced them. These companies provided jobs to American workers and contributed to a solid tax base in many local communities. On one side of the world they helped create economic prosperity and opportunity, while on the other side the result was death and suffering. The companies, of course, were only part of a larger system of violence which engulfed Indochina, Russia, China, and the U.S. Since systemic violence often results from institutions and policies which are legal, the violence is typically described as *national defense*, or as the inevitable and inconsequential *collateral damage* of a just war.

To stand as an American Christian in a Lao village surrounded by unexploded U.S. cluster bombs, however, is distinctly unsettling. Are American Christians, who participate freely in the economic and political life of our nation, somehow implicated in this tragedy? Does Christ's ministry of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:18), apply only to interpersonal relationships or must it also guide the Christians' response to systems which dominate, violate, and destroy? In this regard, the *tri-level nature of violence* as described by Van Soest and Bryant (1995) is helpful. In their article, violence is depicted as a triangle, some of which is invisible or below the surface.

According to Van Soest and Bryant, the tip of the iceberg is violence at the individual level, the type which is easily identifiable as "harmful action against people or property" (p. 550). In the case of Laos, the story of Phou Vieng (see above) who nearly lost his life in a cluster bomb explosion is an example of the individual level of violence. Phou Vieng was severely injured and his house was destroyed. But the violence which caused such harm to Phou Vieng had deeper roots.

The next level of violence, the institutional level, includes harmful actions by institutions which result from oppressive policies or the misuse of institutional power. In the case of Phou Vieng, the violence which he experienced that morning in 1998 resulted from decisions made by a combination of many institutions and structures which are far less visible. They include, for example:

- The decision of military and political leaders in the U.S., Russia, China, and North Vietnam to feed the war in Laos with weapons and supplies.
- The U.S. decision to launch a secret air war in Laos in violation of the Geneva accords.
- A vast defense industry in the U.S. which produced components for the cluster bombs.

- The U.S. decision to drop millions of anti-personnel submunitions on Laos, even after it was known that they had a high failure rate.

Finally, the deepest level of violence is described by Van Soest and Bryant as the structural-cultural level. This is the level which contains the “normative and ideological roots of violence that undergird and give rise to the institutional and individual levels. The assumptions and values which give rise to violence are active at this level” (p. 551). Applied to the cluster bomb accident which nearly took Phou Vieng’s life, we might note the following assumptions which were no doubt present when the bombs were dropped:

- Only military force can stop the spread of communism.
- Stopping the spread of communism is part of a Christian’s mission in the world (e.g.: *Kill a Commie for Christ* bumper stickers were common in the mid-60s).
- Superior violence can save us.
- It is Christian our duty to serve our nation in the armed forces if called.

## **Conclusion**

It is not surprising that our response to violence is often to focus on the tip of the ice berg. In the case of Laos this is understandable. Lao villagers who survived the massive U.S. air war have struggled for more than 20 years to live on top of bombs which continue to maim and kill. This injustice needs to be addressed immediately and with an overwhelming commitment of resources for clearance and public awareness. This is a particularly important observation for Christians to consider. Even as violence has physical, institutional, and spiritual aspects, so the peace of Christ is expressed in all these ways. The Apostle Paul notes that “from now on...we regard no one from a human point of view (II Corinthians 5:16), because we have been given the

ministry of reconciliation. Because our minds have been transformed (Romans 12:1,2), we give our enemies food and drink, and overcome evil with good (Romans 12: 20, 21). In the context of the New Testament world, the peace of Christ broke down the barriers of hostility which separated Jews and Greeks, male and female, slave and free, and made them one (Ephesians 2:14, Galatians 3:28). The church became an alternative social structure, overcoming the alienation and exclusion among social groups in the surrounding culture.

The continuing terror experienced by Lao villagers is thus a challenge to the increasingly privatized faith of many Christians in North America. Can Christians offer a vision of security which does not include the loss of innocent life to cluster bombs? Living midst systems which consume hundreds of billions of dollars in preparation for new wars, can Christians offer an alternative community where allegiance to God supercedes the demands of political and military structures? Does not *overcoming evil with good* demand practical action from Christ's followers that is in stark contrast to the dreadful cycle of killing which has been visited upon Laos?

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines is a current world-wide movement that addresses violence not only at the tip of the ice berg (through the clearance of landmines), but also at the institutional level. By implementing a ban on the production, transfer, and stockpiling of landmines, the Campaign wants to change the policies of political, military, and economic institutions. There is now a growing movement to call for a moratorium on the production and use of cluster bombs. The Convention on Conventional Weapons, a UN Convention with some 50 signatories world-wide, has placed Explosive Remnants of War, including cluster bombs, on its agenda. Unhappily this remains a very current issue. Since Laos, cluster munitions have been used in numerous conflicts, including Russia's war with Chechnya, the Gulf War, the war in Yugoslavia/Kosovo, Israel's attacks on southern Lebanon, the war in Sudan, and the current war

in Afghanistan, to name a few. These uses of cluster munitions have created results dreadfully similar to their use in Laos. Unfortunately, the openness to a moratorium on the production and use of cluster munitions is very limited, as cluster munitions are considered an effective and necessary weapon by the world's militaries.

The disaster that affected the communities of Laos through the US bombing campaign is sobering. Equally sobering is the almost routine support which Christians give to the wars of their governments. To walk alongside Lao people in their recovery from the U.S. air war is to realize that the ministry of reconciliation is both a deeply spiritual and social task. Christians in particular should be willing to *go below the surface* of the violence ice berg to question the institutions and assumptions which lead inevitably to violence at the top. In so doing, we may find that we are as ready to clear the cluster bombs from our industrial parks as we are to clear them from the fields of Laos.

### **REFERENCE**

Van Soest, D. & Bryant, S. (July, 1995). Violence Reconceptualized for Social Work: The Urban Dilemma, *Social Work*, 40(4), 549-557.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Mennonite Central Committee Website with information about cluster bombs, clearance efforts in Laos, and advocacy against cluster bomb production and use.

<http://www.mcc.org/clusterbomb>

Independent Television Service Website, featuring "Bombies", a documentary (2001) on the air war in Laos and Mennonite Central Committee bomb clearance efforts.



<http://www.itvs.org/bombies>,

Website of the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Program <http://www.uxolao.org>