

## **Helping Those Who Are Going Through a Personal Crisis**

The word *crisis* is described in Webster's dictionary as “an emotionally significant event or radical change of status in a person’s life.” A crisis is something that we usually do not expect and so it catches us “off guard” and throws us into a state of shock or disbelief. And, though we rarely know the place or character of its occurrence, we eventually discover that no one is immune to encountering relationships and events that overwhelm us with feelings of fear, pain, loss, change or uncertainty.

Whether they are as dramatic as death or as shocking as natural disasters, as long term as divorce or progressive illness or as abrupt as accidents at home, work or on the road, they each have the potential to send our lives into a vulnerable tailspin of public and private encounters we did not desire or for which we did not volunteer.

During these times, we may frantically search for a center point or depth within us that will instill us with the courage to walk through the moment and the strength to take the inevitable steps beyond it. Crises often become catalysts for jump-starting our faith. But will we have the resources available or firmly in place to affirm God’s grace and presence during those times? And will the flurry of family, friends and people passing through or especially there to serve you enhance or further challenge the moment?

### **How You Can Help**

Here are a few ways that church leaders and members of the faith community can be helpful to someone going through crisis.

- Be available and present. Words are often secondary to the fact you are there. Your presence in itself can affirm your willingness to be a witness or support for them as they walk through the difficult moments. Be sensitive to the pace they need to take and try not to manage or dictate the moment with your own interpretation of what should be done.
- Pray. Express prayers of praise for God’s power, presence and ability to provide for the needs of all people. Pray for God’s blessing upon the immediate and innermost needs of the people in crises and the specific role you can play.
- Provide practical support. Offer meals and other appropriate gestures to ease the burden of responsibility.
- Continue to encourage them with cards and support as they move beyond the initial event and into the various stages of grief and recovery
- Encourage people who have had similar experiences in your congregation to share understanding and support.
- Model and nurture skills for prayer and care in a variety of circumstances. See [http://www.elca.org/dcm/christian\\_education/lifetransitions](http://www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/lifetransitions) to gather resources for encouragement and support, and to scan ideas for helping people deal with specific life transitions.
- Other places to look for resources for particular situations: The ELCA resource centers have a vast repository of materials on various subjects. Go to [www.elca.org/co/centers.html](http://www.elca.org/co/centers.html) to find a resource center near you. Also, *FaithandValues.com* has resources on its site, organized by topic. It's an inter-faith Web site on which you can find materials on subjects such as forgiveness, divorce, death and dying, coping with abuse and other life challenges.

As a congregation, you can offer real and relevant indications of God’s power, love and grace that are intimately available to us through prayer and community—no matter what may come our way.

*Pat Smith is an associate in ministry and ELCA Partner in Evangelism. She is currently serving Community Lutheran Church in Las Vegas, Nev.*