

# Reflection

HEALING  
THE  
HEALERS

## *When Trauma Strikes Your Ministry Setting*

**Rev. Matthew Crebbin**

Senior Minister of the Newtown Congregational Church

On December 14, 2012 my life was forever changed. On that day, I found myself at the Sandy Hook Fire Station ministering to individuals and an entire town which had just experienced the mass shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School. As clergy person with over 20 years of experience in parish ministry, I had just been thrown into the deep end of the pool of Complex Traumatic Grief with very little practical training to help keep me and the victims around me afloat.

Although much of my previous experience and training with pastoral care and grief was helpful, I wished that I had been given more extensive resources and support. In the days that followed I sought out nearly every possible avenue of training and guidance so that I could try to understand how to minister most effectively within such horrific circumstances. Those early days turned into months and then years and slowly - from my own trial and error and with help from some skilled people along the way - I discovered a bit more insight about some of the ways trauma impacts the ministry and personal lives of clergy.

It is important that those of us who are charged to the care of souls do so in such a way as to "do no harm." Unfortunately, my time in the midst of trauma ministry taught me that many good and decent people (including myself) try to be helpful but do not always recognize the ways in which the best intentions are not sufficient to support of those wounded by trauma. In addition, many clergy often sacrifice their own well-being in the name of caring for others. We must learn about trauma and its impact if we are to be faithful in our call to care for those who have been touched by its devastating power.

Today, for many clergy, the question is not IF we will be called to serve in the midst of physical, emotional and spiritual violence, but rather WHEN such a call might come (if it has not come already). I am indebted to the other faith leaders in this series who were willing to sit down with me and share their thoughts from out of their own torrential experiences of heartache and tragedy. Their honesty, compassion and wisdom have been a blessing to me on my journey. I pray that this online series (and the supplemental materials) can serve as a resource to help faith leaders to prepare for extraordinary seasons of pastoral care and spiritual well-being. I also hope that these materials might assist denominational leaders as well as seminaries and other faith-based institutions to support those leaders in their care who might be called upon to navigate the challenging dimensions of complex trauma.

I pray that this series might assist you to discover and utilize insights and resources that are needed should waters of darkness, challenge and trauma engulf you or the people or community in which you serve.