

religious perspectives, an open casket, or other traditional funeral arrangements.

When we die, our body becomes the property of our legal next-of-kin—either our spouse, or if there is no spouse, then our adult children, or our parents, or our siblings. Because our legal next-of-kin will make all decisions pertaining to our remains, it is extremely important that you inform

your family if you wish to be a brain donor.

At the time of death or impending death, your legal next-of-kin will need to give written “confirmation of consent” at the time of donation. A questionnaire of family history and permission forms to access your entire life history of medical records will be sent to your next-of-kin. A neuropathological report will be sent to the family

approximately six months after the brain donation has been made.

The Harvard brain bank is a federally funded not-for-profit organization. Tissue is distributed to qualifying scientists throughout the United States, free of charge. Please consider this gift of hope. From knowledge will come a cure. ☺

## Faith Community Connection

# The Role of Faith Communities in the Midst of Disaster

by Reverend Susan Gregg-Schroeder, Coordinator of Mental Health Ministries, California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church

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*In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge until the destroying storms pass by.*” This scripture reference (Psalm 57:1) took on profound meaning when I entered into the deep shadows of my own depression. It immediately came to mind as well when I experienced the horrific scenes in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

But during this disaster, we also saw an outpouring of compassion and care as assistance and aid were provided by a wide variety of individuals and groups. While the territorial conflicts and finger-pointing became topics of discussion, the faith communities were already in the midst of the tragedy,

offering help and hope amid devastation, loss, and despair. No matter what a person’s faith or spiritual practices, we all share common threads of love, mercy, and caring for others in times of need. From mosques in Texas, to churches in Tennessee, to a Jewish school in San Diego, religious groups were offering support to the victims of Katrina.

We heard story after story of faith communities opening their doors as evacuation and distribution sites. In the aftermath of the disaster, faith communities “adopted” families and welcomed them as new neighbors and as part of their extended family.

Many victims of the Katrina tragedy are poor and lack access to medical insurance and transportation. They may turn to clergy members in their communities to express their emotional and spiritual turmoil. Faith leaders, in turn, can provide culturally sensitive spiritual and emotional care, because they know the needs and attitudes of their parishioners.

Mental health professionals, advocacy groups, service providers, and government agencies, however, have not

made it a priority to partner with faith communities. The reality is that, because of the historical schism between religion and science, mental health care in America is based on a medical model. Many doctors are reluctant to use the expertise of religious professionals due to prejudice and ignorance about what the spiritual caregiver’s role can be in the treatment plan.

Medications may stabilize symptoms, but it is relationship and love that heal the soul.

In 2003, the final report of President Bush’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*, proclaimed that our current delivery system for mental health services is in shambles and that only a total transformation of the system would benefit consumers. The Commission called for greater coordination of services and for provision of treatment through community-based groups.

Trained clergy, chaplains, and pastoral counselors who are able to use both their theological training and their knowledge of mental health

*If you know of resources that have been designed specifically for faith communities on the subject of mental illness, please e-mail this information to [FaithResources@nami.org](mailto:FaithResources@nami.org). We will print selected resources in this column.*

## Did You Know?

FaithNet NAMI is a network of NAMI members and friends that facilitates the development within the faith community of a non-threatening, supportive environment for those with serious mental illness and their families. For further information and to subscribe to NAMI’s FaithNet e-mail network, visit [www.faithnetnami.org](http://www.faithnetnami.org).

issues can be valuable resources. Faith leaders and mental health professionals need to find creative ways to break down barriers of mistrust and encourage partnerships to promote healing of the mind, body, and spirit.

At Mental Health Ministries, our mission is to produce high-quality media resources to educate faith communities about mental health issues and to encourage mental health professionals to recognize the important role a person's spirituality can play in the recovery process. Another way to encourage mental health providers to recognize the important contribution of faith groups is for religious communities to reach out and become a presence in their extended communities.

This past spring, Mental Health Ministries organized a team to participate in the San Diego NAMIWalk. Two team members walked in memory of their son, Ronald John Miller, who had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder while serving in the Army. Ron had become a Christian; he had a fiancée whom he met at a rehab center as they struggled with mental illness and alcoholism; and he was getting his life in order. He had a fight with his fiancée the night he took his own life, three years earlier. There was no memorial



*Mental Health Ministries Team members at the San Diego NAMIWalk.*

service. But after the NAMIWalk, the new pastor officiated at a memorial service for Ron in Balboa Park, in San Diego. Rosemarie, Ron's mother, said, "I can think of Ron and smile, knowing he was honored."

One positive outcome of the national tragedy of Hurricane Katrina may be an increased appreciation of the role of faith communities. In an interview on Larry King Live on September 6, 2005, the U.S. Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., mentioned faith communities as ongoing partners in the healing process after the disaster.

Healing and recovery from this natural disaster are going to take years. Perhaps soon, faith communities will be recognized for their unique perspective that offers healing of the spirit, a way to hold together the fabric of a ravaged community, and hope for the future. ☺

*Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder has produced a variety of resources on spirituality and mental illness available at the Mental Health Ministries Web site, [www.MentalHealthMinistries.net](http://www.MentalHealthMinistries.net). Susan and her husband, Stan, were among the persons interviewed for an ABC-TV documentary, Shadow Voices: Finding Hope in Mental Illness (see box for more information).*

## Shadow Voices: Finding Hope in Mental Illness

**F**rom December 4, 2005, through February 4, 2006, local ABC-TV stations will be showing—at their discretion—*Shadow Voices: Finding Hope in Mental Illness*, a one-hour documentary about mental illness, stigma, spirituality, and recovery.

Along with former First Lady Rosalynn Carter and former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, several NAMI family and consumer leaders are featured in the film's interviews.

Menonite Media, Inc. has produced *Shadow Voices* in conjunction with the National Council of Churches, as part of ABC's four-part "Vision and Values" series in 2005-2006. Filming included visits to

NAMI's national office and the 2005 national convention in Austin, Texas.

NAMI members can find out local broadcast dates by visiting [www.shadowvoices.com](http://www.shadowvoices.com). If your local ABC television station is not listed, contact the station manager or program director. Ask if they are planning to show the documentary. If necessary, encourage them to contact the ABC network to arrange a broadcast before the February 4, 2006 deadline. Copies of the documentary will be available in VHS format (\$19.95 plus shipping and handling) and DVD format (\$24.95 plus shipping and handling) starting December 15, 2005. Call 1-800/999-3534 to order. ☺