

## National Advisory Group on Emergency Planning

### Code of Engagement

#### Preamble

A dynamic witness of the Christian faith has been the way in which communities of faith have responded to the needs of those who are living through emergencies or catastrophic events. As God calls all people of faith to care for one another, Christ invites all Christians to reach out in times of urgent need to “clothe the naked, feed the hungry, tend to the needs of those who are ill and welcome the stranger” (Matthew 25:40-48).

It is this teaching of faith which underpins the work of the National Advisory Group on Emergency Planning (NAGEP).

In November 2001, the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) Governing Board heard a presentation by the Chaplain General to the Canadian Armed Forces, reflecting on events related to September 11 2001, the Swiss Air crash off Peggy’s Cove and other recent disasters. The Governing Board passed a resolution asking the Commission on Faith and Witness (CFW) to consult with appropriate government offices to learn about existing pastoral care provisions within the mandates and protocols of the Emergency Measures Offices (EMOs). To this end, in 2002, the CCC established the National Advisory Group on Emergency Planning (NAGEP), now a standing committee of the CFW.

Since its inception, NAGEP has been building bridges between federal government agencies, local municipalities and not-for-profit emergency response organizations, promoting the value of non-judgmental compassionate and professional spiritual and religious care as it relates to the urgent needs of those caught within emergency situations.

In times of overwhelming crisis people search for meaning and hope. And while emergency response agencies can provide practical and essential aid there is still an urgent need for the reassuring message of hope and promise which can often be provided by spiritual and religious care. A 2006 report by the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (USA) [www.NVOAD.org](http://www.NVOAD.org), entitled *Light Our Way: A Guide for Spiritual Care in Times of Disaster*, states;

*Spirituality is an essential part of humanity. Disaster disrupts people’s spiritual lives significantly. Nurturing people’s spiritual needs contributes to holistic healing. Everyone can benefit from Spiritual Care in times of disaster.*

NAGEP understands the important role excellent spiritual and religious care can play in emergency recovery and NAGEP wishes to promote the principles and practices of spiritual and religious care which honour the context and history of the communities and individuals impacted by disasters or emergencies.

The **NAGEP Code of Engagement** is a foundational document which strives to encourage all communities of faith who wish to enter into the field of emergency response to do so with humility, grace and a willingness to serve.

## Canadian Council of Churches

### National Advisory Group for Emergency Planning (NAGEP)

#### **EMERGENCY RESPONSE CODE OF ENGAGEMENT**

*The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) is a community of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and also other churches which affirm the same faith but which do not make doctrinal confessions. The National Advisory Group for Emergency Planning (NAGEP), a standing committee of the CCC's Commission on Faith and Witness, is interested in encouraging Christian communities in responding to emergency events and situations. NAGEP is engaged in an ongoing learning process regarding current principles and best practices of emergency response work, and the particular role faith that communities have in providing spiritual and religious care during such emergencies. The goal of the Emergency Response Code of Engagement, besides striving for excellence in the field of emergency response work, is to contribute towards the creation of common understanding and a common emergency response language amongst faith communities. While the CCC does not require its members to adhere to the Emergency Response Code of Engagement, CCC member denominations, churches, and their representatives, are invited to consider incorporating such guidelines into their respective emergency/disaster response and recovery services.*

Christian churches and organizations, when providing spiritual care to persons affected by emergency and disaster situations, will strive to:

1. Alleviate suffering among those least able to withstand the stress and loss caused by disaster or emergency, based on need, during response and recovery phases. This may be achieved through needs assessment, presence and hospitality, spiritual care, advocacy, accurate information, resources and physical facilities and services.
2. Respect the diverse culture and religious values and traditions of those affected whom we serve and of those with whom we partner
  - a. by respecting diversity of culture, customs, nationality, community structures, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability and spiritual/religious practices and beliefs.

- b. by refraining from proselytizing, respecting freedom from unwanted gifts of religious literature or symbols, and/or promoting or forcing acceptance of specific moral and religious values and traditions in those affected and those serving.
  - c. by refraining from manipulation, disrespect, discrimination or exploitation of those affected.
- 3. Be aware of our imbalance of power relative to that of those affected. Refrain from using our position, influence, knowledge or professional affiliation for unfair advantage, harassment, intimidation or for personal, political or organizational gain. Assistance should be based on needs, clear expectations and best interests of individuals, families and communities.
- 4. Maintain ethical and legal standards of personal and professional integrity; respect and practice confidentiality; avoid conflicts of interest; maintain accountability to member organizations, to those we seek to serve and those from who we receive resources; contribute at levels appropriate with training and education and that guarantee the safety of those impacted; refer to other agencies when services are beyond our capabilities or mandate; do not accept financial remuneration for services.
- 5. Serve in collaboration with and support of program beneficiaries and local community resources and not as substitutes for local efforts; build on local capacities wherever possible when providing services and when able to provide training, employment or purchases, in order to increase sustainability and mitigation and reduce future vulnerability.
- 6. Understand and provide self-care or care of responders, to reduce effects of care giver trauma
- 7. Treat those affected by disaster as dignified and valued human beings with capacities and aspirations, not as hopeless objects, when engaging in personal interaction and in media coverage. Avoid publicity that takes precedent over providing assistance. Avoid competing with other response efforts or agencies.

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