

The Role of Pastoral Care in Crises Management and Prevention

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The last few years in American Society have been marked by a few notable violent events (Floyd, 2008). Since 1900, twenty-eight “major” industrial accidents have occurred worldwide, with “major” meaning fifty or more deaths (Mitroff, & Anagnos 2001). According to Mitroff & Anagnos (2001), half of the twenty-eight have occurred in the past fifteen years. Crises have become an inevitable, natural feature of our everyday lives (Mitroff & Anagnos 2001). Mitroff & Anagnos (2001), opined that, hardly will a day go by without the occurrence of a new crisis, or the unfolding – better yet, the “dragging on” – of old ones. Hence, crises have become an integral feature of the new information/systems age (Mitroff & Anagnos 2001).

In February 1993, the first World Trade Center bombings in New York City took place (Floyd, 2008). According to Floyd (2008), Islamic extremists planted a car bomb in an underground parking garage, killing six people and injuring hundreds. He further said, in addition to the actual horror of the bombing, this terrorist attack on American soil was a foreshadow of events to come.

What is Crises Management?

The field of crisis management deals mainly with man-made or human-caused crises, such as computer hacking, environmental contamination, executive kidnapping, fraud, product tampering, sexual harassment, and workplace violence (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001). Mitroff and Anagnos said “Unlike natural disasters, human-caused crises are not inevitable. They do not need to happen. For this reason, public is extremely critical of those organizations that are responsible for their occurrence.” Whereas, Aten & Boan define crises management as anything that can disrupt the piece of the civic society. In other words, it is an occurrence causing widespread destruction and distress, a grave misfortune, as well as being a total failure. Also, crisis management, can further be defined as being either a man-made or natural event that

results in death, injury, and property damage which cannot be managed through normal routine channels. According to Mitroff & Anagnos (2001), major crises occur not only because of what an organization knows, anticipates, and plans for, but just as much because of what it does not know and does not anticipate.

The Role of the Church

The early Church was organized in a way that let all members of each congregation play an active role in times of crisis. Also, the Church had a variety of people with different spiritual gifts necessary to support the victims when disaster occur. According to 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11 and Romans 12: 3-8 KJV, these portions of Scriptures enumerated the various congregational ministries in the Church. They are the word of wisdom to comfort anyone who have suffered disaster or crisis, the word of knowledge, the gift of faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, and many too numerous to mention. The early Church valued the work of the ministry of caring for the weak members of the congregation as well as giving moral and spiritual support to people in crisis better than just carrying title, or position (Damazio 1988).

The perfect example was Jesus Christ. He came to serve and not to be served. He stooped low to the point of washing the disciple's feet (John 13 1-17 KJV). According to Damazio (1988), the early Church Fathers did not desire to "fill positions" in the Church just for its own sake. Today, the Church needs to restore this same attitude, if they must fulfil their role in crisis management. The Church is God's agent to address injustice in the world, and crisis reveal the need for the Church to be engaged in the community and correct injustice (Aten & Boan, 2016). Both believed resilient churches are more likely to be able to resume core ministry operations and functions when face with crisis. Churches are in a better position to help those in crisis.

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This is not just because churches are willing to help but is also due to the special relationship of trust many churches have with the local community (Aten & Boan, 2016). Furthermore, according to Aten & Boan (2016), “The church is in a better position to know who is vulnerable and how to reach and serve them.” If the churches are going to become more resilient, then they need to start by identifying the most vulnerable in their own congregations and communities. If the door of churches is open after any crises, people will come to that church for help. Hence, knowing what to do when faced with crises can be the difference between calm and chaos, between courage and fear, between life and death (Aten & Boan, 2016).

When a crisis strikes, it is too late to cry when the head is off. That is to say it will be too late to get prepared and too late to start working with those in need. By acting now, you can save lives and prevent harm during a disaster as the church extend her ministry to those who need help. Many organizations and churches have not been designed to handle major crises. Most of today’s crises management programs are add-ons or afterthoughts (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001). In short, many of them lack adequate preparedness.

Facing Reality

The fact remains that crises are inevitable; hence, leader’s responsibility is to first define reality. Before you can lead your church or organization through a crisis, you must acknowledge that you are indeed in one (George, 2009). Thereafter, George, (2009) advised that everyone in the church must be allowed to get involved as well. Only then can you define the problems accurately and develop plans to deal with the crises. It is important to find the underlying cause of the problem rather than fixing it on the fly, irrespective of how high the cost may be.

Planning

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The church leaders must learn to develop simple planning strategies. This will help the church to identify areas of concern that will lay a foundation for successful preparedness. Crises management plans need to address a range of events and emergencies caused by both by nature and by people, including all hazards. As much as planning is not an easy task, and because it is time consuming, planning is manageable. Few of the steps required in planning ahead of crises management as suggested by Aten & Boan, (2016) are as follows:

1. Conduct a Crises Risk Assessment for the Church
2. Engage Leadership in Developing Crises Management Ministry Vision and Goals
3. Develop a continuity and Operational plan
4. Test and Practice Your Plan

Crises management plan is living document (Aten & Boan 2016), it must be updated and revised based on the exercise results and church leaders' recommendations. By conducting a risk assessment, it will help the church become more aware of the possible threats facing them and will help the church develop more targeted plans.

The Pastor as Priest, Prophet, and Wise Guide in Times of Crises

Right from the time of the Old Testament, the Israelite ancestors struggled to achieve among the functions of pastoral leaders as priests, as prophets, and as the wise guides of the people, through their wilderness journey. For instance, God prepared Moses to be His man to lead the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage. In fact, Moses spent forty years in Sinai desert, working as a shepherd for his father-in-law, before God called him to fulfil his mission (Exodus 3:1). It was credited to him that those years were not wasted because he would need that experience to lead the Israelites out of crises. So, God prepared him not in a day, but for a period. Similarly, God called Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Job, and many more as leaders whom He prepared to lead His people out of their crises. Therefore, Pastoral care is the ministry of care

and counseling provided by pastors, chaplains, and other religious leaders to members of their church or congregation, or to persons of all faiths and others within institutional settings.

This can range anywhere from home visitation to formal counseling provided by pastors who are licensed to offer counseling services in times crisis. Such care may be in the form of listening, supporting, encouraging, and befriending. Hence, it is imperative that pastors discover their gifts and use them in a way that will help the victims in their recovery journey. Most recently, the function of wise guidance has been predominantly for pastoral care practice (Gerkin, 1997). According to Gerkin, (1997), recovery of the role of priestly care through the ritual practices of the church as well as the educational function the priests played for the people of Israel needs now to be undertaken with care and imagination.

Implementing ministry crisis management plan

After pulling together the ministry crises management team and planning, the next phase is to determine the ministry capacity to make a rapid, fitting response that is based on having a plan with precisely determined roles and duties along with training and practice (Aten & Boan, 2016). According to Aten & Boan, (2016), “with proper training, the crises management ministry team, staff, leadership, and congregants will be more likely to respond promptly and appropriately.” Having a plan in place can make you think you have everything taken care of. Disasters will always surprise us, so no matter how well you prepare and preparing is important, you will still have some risk. Yet, it is a critical thing to make a plan that is as complete and thorough as possible, but always assume it is incomplete and that you are still vulnerable (Aten & Boan, 2016).

Recovery Strategy

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The church must be prepared to assist her congregation and community with the long process of recovery from disaster. One of the ways to assist the victims is by networking. Some churches may have volunteers, skilled labor, and resources to be able to carryout long-term recovery ministries. According to Aten & Boan, (2016) long term recovery efforts are more likely successful if churches come together with one another or with other organizations. For example, the rebuilding, mental health, spiritual struggles left behind after the event of a crisis can be overwhelming and in most cases are larger than what the church can cope with, unless perhaps it is a smaller-scale crisis or emergency. Still, Aten & Boan, (2016) recommended that the church may need to consider how it might collaborate with others.

Spiritual and emotional care.

It is beyond human understanding to grasp totally the greatness of the spiritual Body of Christ, and the various functions of its ministries and gifts (Damazio, 1988). Individuals are not immune from burnout or distress. Hence, many congregants, community members and responders would benefit from crisis spiritual and emotional needs. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate spiritual and emotional needs to decide whether congregational staff and leadership can provide the needed care and support. Perhaps, the church must be aware that recovery does not happen overnight. Long-term crisis management takes time, sometimes years (Aten & Boan, 2016). Thus, it is important that the church keep an eye on how to put in place extended strategy for recovery.

Conclusion

Navigating through the wave of complexity is not an easy task, but it is a task that must be done. With God all things are possible and not only that, for as long as this writer continue to

look unto Jesus the author and the finisher of his faith, one is able to do all things through Christ that strengthens us. If only we can hand over the management of any crisis or situation to God, who owns the plan, He will take over the crisis and will level all mountains. He has solution to every situation, including our crises management. The Body of Christ need to wake up to the full responsibility of incorporating crisis management into their business plan. The application of the 7 Lessons for leading in Crisis by Bill George, will be of immense benefit for churches and organizations who must have victory over their challenges. Below are the 7 Lessons suggested by George, (2009):

Lesson 1: Face reality, Starting with yourself. Until organization can acknowledge that they are facing serious problem, including the role of everyone in creating it, the problem will be difficult to solve, and the business will not be able to move forward.

Lesson 2: Don't be Atlas; get the world off your shoulders. A tree does not make a forest. So, you cannot get through this problem alone. Reach out to others for help so that church can be victorious.

Lesson 3: Dig deep for the root cause. Don't rush to fix the problem, otherwise you leave the church vulnerable to repeating the crisis. The best way to resolve the crisis is to get to the bottom or look for the remote cause(s) of the crisis and implement permanent solution

Lesson 4: Get ready for the Long haul. Get prepared for the worst conditions to survive the crisis. Never make assumptions that things can't be that bad.

Lesson 5: Never waste a good crisis. The challenges you are facing represent your best opportunity to make major changes in the church because they reduce the resistance that exists in good times. Out of a bad situation, God can use it as a stepping stone for the next level.

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Lesson 6: You are in the spotlight: Follow the True North. In a crisis, everyone watches what you do. Stay focused on your True North, or will you succumb to the pressure?

Lesson 7: Go on offense; focus on winning now. Coming out of crisis, the church may not look the same compared to where it was before the crisis. Use that opportunity to reorganize and change the business model and focus on winning now.

Correct application of these lessons will get church prepared for future crisis

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