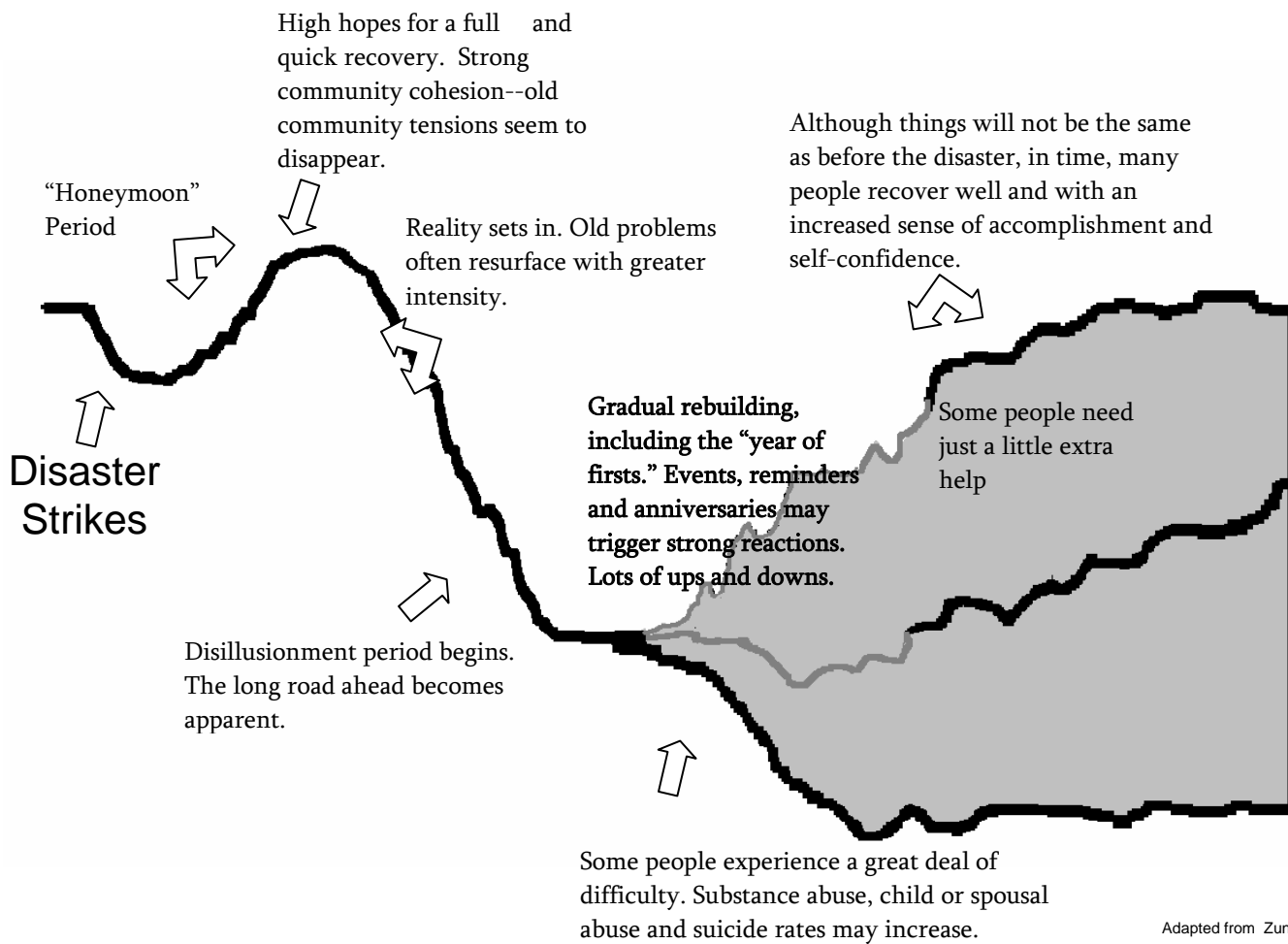


# Spiritual Care in Disaster Response



## Where Are You Along the Road to Recovery?

The television cameras leave. Early relief centers close.  
But for those directly impacted by disaster, it just may not be that easy.



"It seems like everyone around me is tired of hearing about disasters, so I just don't say anything. I keep it all inside, then I get depressed and angry."

"Everyone else seems to be doing so well. Why don't I feel better?"

"I keep telling myself it was *only stuff* we lost. Why do I feel so bad?"

"My least favorite four words are 'JUST GET OVER IT.'"

**Sound familiar? Your United Methodist friends understand recovery can take a long time. We can help.**

# THE PHASES OF DISASTER<sup>1</sup>

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## **Rescue Phase**

This stage begins at impact. It continues until all persons are found and in temporary shelter. Local and state law enforcement, plus government emergency management authorities are responsible for protection of life and property—the “official” responders.

## **Relief Phase**

This fast-paced phase is the “M.A.S.H. unit” of disaster response, designed to temporarily patch things together for survivors, buying time until longer-term survivor recovery strategies can be set.

## **Recovery Phase**

Many secular disaster response agencies will have completed their work. This leaves the various church organizations to do the hard work of long-term recovery. Rarely is recovery work completed within a year.

## **Disillusionment Phase**

As the frenetic pace slows and everyone catches their breath, traffic lights start blinking again, the tree limbs are gone and with soggy debris mostly shoveled up, the enormity of it crashes in. In the midst of almost mind-numbing exhaustion, comes the dawning realization that an overwhelming amount of work remains. Feeling hopeless, powerless and helpless, survivors may now have even more difficulty sleeping, concentrating or remembering than they did immediately after the disaster. Survivors now ask, “Why me? What did I do to deserve this?” They say, “If only I had...” “How come we came through this okay, but my friends didn’t?” Questions and self-imposed guilt hangs heavy over them. Grieving people must perform four tasks to achieve recovery. Each must be gone through:

Accept the reality of what has happened.

Experience the pain.

Adjust to a new situation.

Withdraw emotional energy from the past and invest it in the new.

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<sup>1</sup> From *A Ministry of Caring: Spiritual and Emotional Care in Disaster Response*, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), 2004 and *Recommendations for Developing a Disaster Response Plan for Your Annual Conference*, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), 1999.