

Book Review

The book *"In the Wake of Disaster"* by Harold G. Koenig has persuasive and powerful messages that address the state, federal and government policy leaders. He writes for the faithful since Koenig needs to make them understand about disaster preparedness and response. It targets policy makers seeking to prepare their communities for emergencies and disaster. The book elevates the role played by religious groups in countering disaster and terrorism. Koenig notes that without consideration of hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, or terrorism, every year a lot of residents in the U.S incur injuries, losses or property damages resulting from disasters. Interesting enough, when disaster comes, religious communities are the first to respond and still the last that remain standing after the excitement is over. They are however not recognized for what they do. This essay is a review of different aspects covered in the Koenig's book.

Koenig emphasizes that Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), provide long-term assistance for trauma issues especially those related to spirituality and purpose besides immediate assistance with food, shelter and clothing. Emergency Management Systems do not sufficiently meet either long term or short term spiritual and psychological needs of disaster victims. The needs require a healing group that understands supports and shows love to the community. He goes further to express the consequences disaster survivors exhibit about what they pass through in clarifying the forms of grace appropriate to the immediate situation. Koenig puts emphasis on spiritual injuries, and the needs to be addressed appropriately. On the other hand, FBOs need to understand state, national and local group's activities that constitute the disaster response system.

While all the relevant agencies have problems with coordination, it becomes vital that they learn to work concurrently to sort the physical, emotional and spiritual needs effectively. FBOs from the local religious institution such as Catholic Charities Office of Disaster Response,

Lutheran, Friends, Mennonite Disaster Services, United Methodist Committee on Relief, Salvation Army, United Jewish Communities, among others bring massive resources that tackle every disaster. Under most circumstances, the organizations are first on the scene. They distribute help due to their local and international networks of congregations. The networks also minimize administrative costs. They add up to 350,000 congregations in the US. The leaders of the congregations contribute to counseling. It amounts to about 140 million hours of mental health services yearly. Victims of disaster routinely visit counselors for talks and prayers. For FBOs to deliver their best services, they need to work under MOUs with other relevant authorized organizations.

Leaders of the congregations take up responsibility depending on the setting they are. FBOs are effective when prepared in advance regarding disaster management training and pre-disaster coordination. Koenig gives detailed assistance with the training, and implementation disaster management plans. Koenig continually calls for the need to have an integration and cooperation among EMS services, counselors, and religious disaster response groups. He seems aware of all barriers keeping this from implementing. He is specific on the inner and outer barriers and offers suggestions on how to negotiate them. Koenig does a good job of not only laying out structures and research but also bringing in many enlivening examples.

Reflection

Interestingly, the book depicts the importance of religious groups on the first few hours of managing disasters. The initial period possesses life-threatening injuries and illness that need to address urgently. The organizations offer water, food and shelter without which the people may die. After all bringing outside during such a period is difficult. The only effective responses are from the institutions closest to the scene. A success of the grassroots response demonstrated

during the Katrina. High-level organizations like the federal government could not mobilize effective response for the initial 72 hours. They never had any situational knowledge of local needs and how they could deploy the resources to the people and for the right purpose.

Surprisingly, local religious communities offered immediate relief efforts.

What bothers me about the book is ideally the exclusion of the federal government as the body holding the major responsibility for building response system and mobilizing national resources whenever disasters overwhelm the local communities. The central government ought to create plugs like information sharing that allows the state as well as local communities plug into national response systems. Under normal circumstances, the largest portion of the responsibility for disaster responses lies with the state. Local communities are only supposed to focus their energies on day-to-day situations. However, they struggle to assess the bigger emergency response plans, an act that is commendable. These federal governments should take it as a responsibility to equip the local communities.

Actions

FBO's activities like relocating people, offering relief and rehabilitation aim to minimize loss of life and further damage to infrastructure Preparedness is the only way to reduce the impact of such disasters. Religious and locally based preparedness is of a high priority in this case. The world is evolving at a faster rate, and I come to realize that more people are vulnerable to disasters. They are then forced to cope with violent crises and uncertainty without reliable support from the governments. The challenges of humanitarian coordination are due to low standards of accountability. I would recommend that capable States and Societies should exercise leadership and set standards for humanitarian response. Further, they should come up with opportunities that effectively mobilize collective resources and ensure that they remain

relevant so as to achieve the greater impact of humanitarian work. What is more, they should also provide good leadership in order to facilitate the development of disaster management policies and other programming approaches. The focus is disseminating the Principles of Humanitarian Assistance.

Koenig's book delivers an account of the social, spiritual as well as psychological responses to situations of trauma. Besides, it expresses how emergency response systems work and the roles of religious communities in disaster recovery and response by providing both spiritual and emotional concern to the victims.