THE TRAUMA-INFORMED CHURCH

PRIORITIZING THE ROLE OF CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITY IN TRAUMA RECOVERY

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Introduction

- We live in an age of trauma (Bond & Craps, 2020)

- Trauma is inseparable from the Christian faith (Baldwin, 2018)

- Christians often attribute mental illness to sin or other spiritual factors (Hartog & Gow, 2005)

- Community is essential for individuals to thrive (NAMI, 2019)

- Great need for the church to respond to the mental health crisis

Research Questions

- Q1) How do faith-centered approaches, rooted in Scripture, complement and enhance trauma recovery efforts within congregational communities of local churches?

- Q2) How do individuals who have experienced trauma perceive the support and resources offered by their congregational community in the local church context?

- Q3) What practical strategies can local churches implement to strengthen their congregational community and better support individuals in trauma recovery?

IMPACT OF TRAUMA

| EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIORAL	PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	SPIRITUAL
Difficulty regulating emotions	Self-destructive behavior	Headaches / Fatigue	Short-term memory loss	Loss of faith
Depression / Anxiety	Avoidance of situations / people	Insomnia	Flashbacks of the event	Feelings of abandonment

Need for Community

- One in five American adults live with mental illness (NIMH, 2021)

- Nearly half of the population will be affected in their lifetime (Reeves et al., 2011)
- Community enhances mental health recovery (Zuchman, 2022)
  - Sense of belonging
  - Source of support

- The church exists "as" and "for" community (Bonhoeffer, 1930)

Need for Community
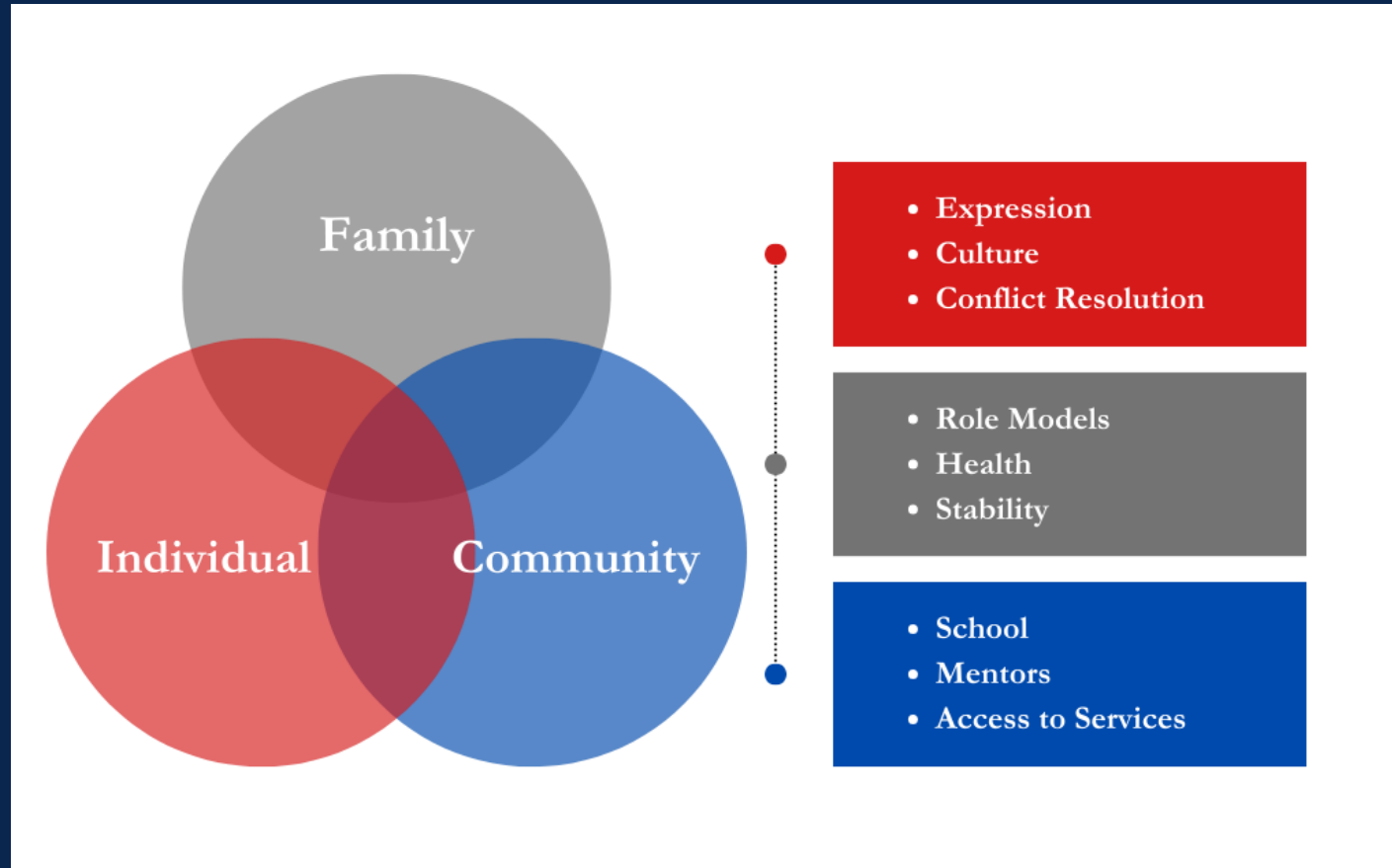
Adapted from "Promoting Resiliency Infographic" (2024). Futures without Violence. https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/promoting-resiliency-infographic/
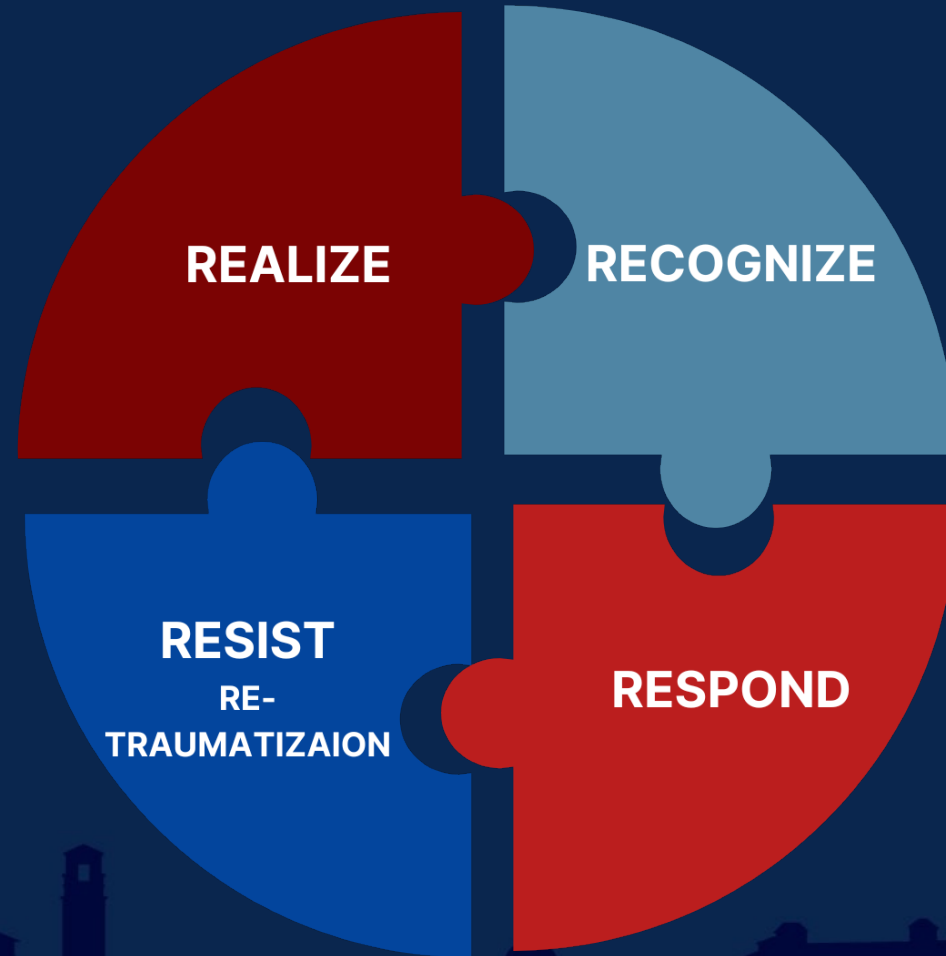
Scriptural Foundation

- Examples of Christ

  o The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

  o The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

- Pauline examples

  o The Call to Bear One Another's Burdens (Galatians 6:2)

SAMHSA Trauma-Informed Approach

Adapted from "Key principles of trauma-informed practice" (2014). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014). *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf

Realize the Widespread Impact

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Trauma only affects a person emotionally	7.5%	0%	2.5%	12.5%	77.5%
Exposure to trauma is common	25%	57.5%	7.5%	0%	0%
Re-traumatization can occur at any time	67.5%	30%	2.5%	0%	0%
Mental health issues are a reflection of past trauma	0%	25%	45%	27.5%	2.5%
I am confident I could respond to someone dealing with a trauma	12.5%	17.5%	25%	27.5%	17.5%
I am familiar with the concept of trauma-informed care	0%	37.5%	47.5%	12.5%	2.5%

Guiking, K., & Jacob, A. (2022). Exploring Church Staff Knowledge of Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care. *Social Work and Christianity, 49*(3), 241-255. https://doi.org/10.3403/swc.v.49i3.260

Realize the Widespread Impact

- No person is exempt

- No church is exempt

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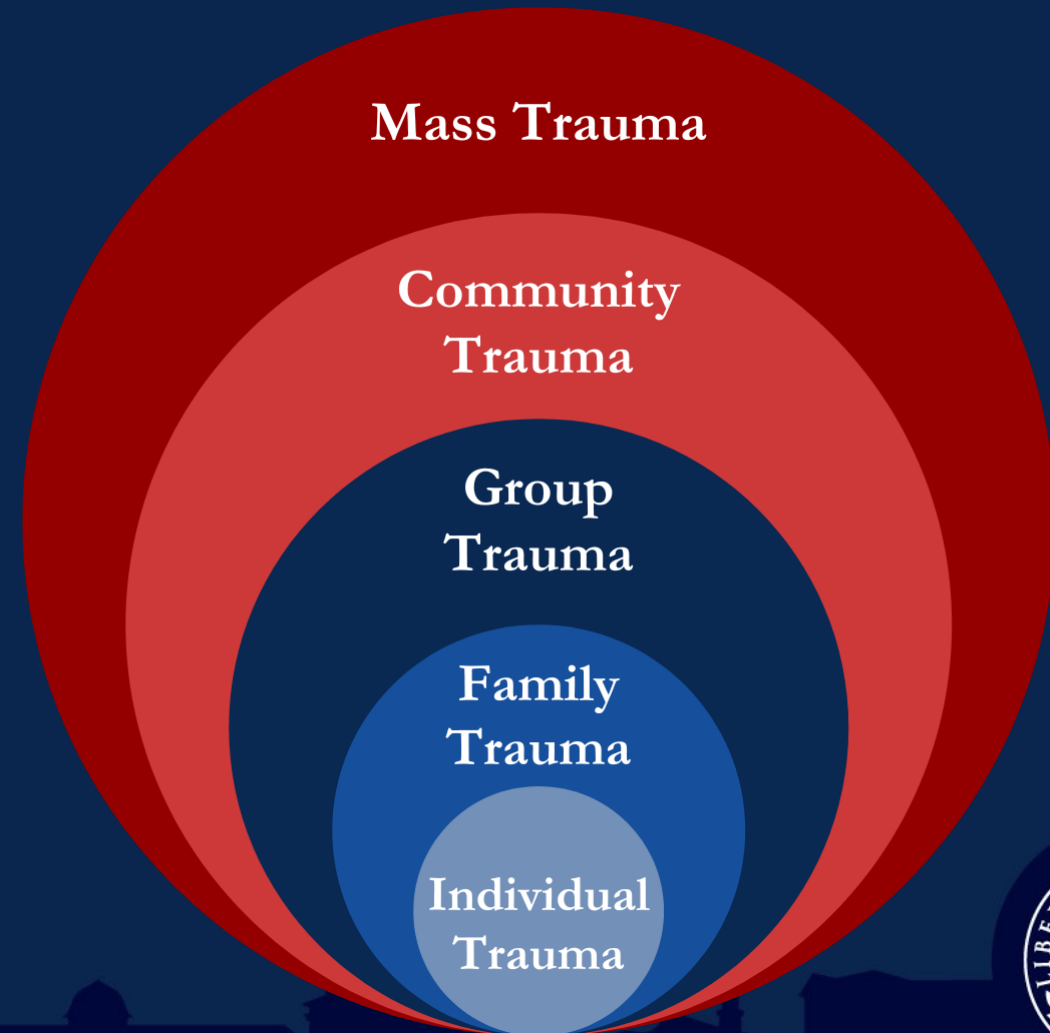
Recognize the Signs & Symptoms

THE SAFE LISTENER'S PROMISE

I WILL LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

I WILL KEEP WHAT YOU SHARE PRIVATE

I WILL NOT MINIMIZE YOUR PAIN

I WILL NOT COMPARE YOUR PAIN WITH MY OWN

I WILL LISTEN WHEN YOU ARE READY TO SHARE MORE

3 QUESTIONS TO ASK SOMEONE WHO IS HURTING

1 - WHAT HAPPENED?

2 - HOW DID IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

3 - WHAT WAS THE HARDEST PART FOR YOU?

ALWAYS THANK THE PERSON FOR SHARING AND BE WILLING TO LISTEN AGAIN WHEN THEY ARE READY TO SHARE MORE.

- "If someone would have just asked me, I would have told them."

Recognize the Signs & Symptoms

- Adverse childhood experiences
  - Abuse
    - Emotional
    - Sexual
    - Physical
  - Neglect
    - Physical
    - Emotional
  - Parental separation
  - Mental illness

- Adverse community environments
  - Poverty
  - Discrimination
  - Community violence
  - Economically disadvantaged
  - Lack of access to healthcare
  - Substandard educational institutions

Respond by Fully Integrating

- Implement trauma-informed practices

- Establishing partnerships with existing local resources

  - Mental health professionals

  - Know when & where to refer

- NAMI faith-based initiative

- Offering community support groups

- Integrating trauma-informed practices into existing church ministries

- AACC Mental Health Programs for Ministries

Resist Re-Traumatization

- Establish clear boundaries

  - Place safeguards in ministry

- Trauma-sensitive language

  - Example: person-first language

- Be sensitive to triggers

- Address spiritual wounds

- Collaborate with external resources

Results / Conclusion

- Educate ministry staff and volunteers

- Assess ministry environment

- Develop trauma-informed policies & procedures

- Regular training & evaluation

- Cultivate a culture of healing & resilience

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