

## After the Storm: Cultivating Hope/Healing after a disaster

This experience can be adapted for a 1-2 hour session, in-person during a church education hour, retreat, or workshop, or online. Though designed for people of faith, it can be expanded for interfaith or broader community settings.

**Facilitator's Note:** Your role is to create a safe, courageous space for individuals to share, listen, and deepen empathy. Resources like Parker Palmer's *Touchstones for Creating Trustworthy Space* can help guide boundary-setting. This resource focuses on spiritual care rather than disaster preparedness. Let participants know if they start to feel anxious or have a trauma response please invite them to step out or raise their hand for support. Tears are welcome in this space. People may begin thinking they are ok and find that memories bring emotions and memories that are a surprise.

**Context:** There will be space during this time to turn attention to any variety of traumas, storm, flood, mass violence, fires, collective illness or something else. If your community has shared a common trauma, like a hurricane, try to include symbols or tangible items that have meaning in your community.

*Example: In Asheville, NC after a devastating hurricane that caused the water systems to fail long term, 5 gallon buckets were commonly used to carry water into homes. During a community lament service, buckets were used in place of a pitcher for water rituals during worship. The buckets had unspoken power to remind us of our shared*

### Hospitality Considerations:

- Will food or beverages be provided?
- How will the space be set up (indoor/outdoor, seating arrangements)?
- Ensure accessibility for all participants.

### Materials Needed:

- LED candles (or traditional candles)
- Cloth/items for sacred space
- Refreshments
- Paper, pens/markers, oil pastels, flat rocks(or less expensive cards or sticky notes) for optional benediction
- Nametags
- Canvas boards or thick paper (one per person)



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## Gathering/Meeting

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ ~ Matthew 11:28-30

**Opening Welcome:** Welcome participants, set intentions for the space, and encourage self-care. Mention bathroom and refreshment locations and nametags.

**Introductions:** Share name, connection to the community, and reason for attending.

### Blessing:

John O'Donohue's [Blessing Prayer in Difficult Times](#) offers healing words for those in pain, encouraging light and transformation through suffering.

### Ritual #1: Gratitude and Grief

(LED candles can be lit individually or by the facilitator.)

Please share a moment of sorrow or gratitude, lighting a candle as you speak, creating a sacred, communal space for grief and joy. [Each person should have an opportunity to share with no crosstalk or solutions]

## **Naming the Suffering and Healing Through Art:** (Adapted from Nicole Vickey)

Participants create a visual representation of their suffering, fears, and healing. They will rotate canvases after each prompt to add to others' artwork. [Do not share that they will rotate until they have completed the first prompt.] Please write your name on the back of a canvas.

**Prompts** [you may use all or some of these]:

1. **What was lost?** Visualize something precious you had to leave behind or something you feared would be lost in the disaster. It could be a place, a belonging, or even a sense of safety. Use your canvas to represent that moment visually—whether through color, shapes, words, or images. (4 min)  
**Rotate:** pass your canvas to the person next to you- all pass in one direction.
2. **The disaster:** Express a memory or vision of your disaster on your canvas. (4 min) *Rotate*
3. **Acts of support and love:** When did you experience love, care, or support during or after the disaster. (4 min) *Rotate*
4. **Images of healing:** What image or word represents hope, recovery, or new beginnings? (4 min)  
*Rotate*
5. **A symbol of resilience:** What represents our resilience or strength in the aftermath of the disaster. (4 min) *Rotate*
6. **Interdependence:** Visualize ways that you saw connectedness and ways you might offer a prayer for your own and the community's healing regarding this disaster. (4 minutes)

**Contemplative Art Walk:** Place your canvas face up on the chair. Take a brief contemplative art walk. Please stand and roam around noticing the expressions of your community. See what you notice about each piece and the expressions collectively (*Play Instrumental Music*)

**Small Group Sharing:** Settle yourself into trios and share (7 min).

- What did you notice about this experience?
- What was it like When you were asked to switch canvases?
- What did you notice about the canvases you saw?
- As your canvas evolved with the input of others, did you notice new perspectives or feelings emerge that you hadn't considered before?
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**Large Group Sharing:** Briefly share something from your smaller groups that you found interesting or helpful or unexpected. (4 min) What do you notice about our group at this point?

## **Closing Benediction**

Ask participants to reflect on a word or two that resonated with them and share their one word response. See the optional "Rock Benediction."

**Rock Benediction:** *When you are ready select a rock (or paper strips) from the middle of the circle and write your word on the rock that you will take with you as you go. Speak the word aloud. -Alt. is to speak word then place rocks with words on them in middle and then for people take*

**We are interconnected with creation,** with the Spirit of God and with one another. Go now knowing you have offered gratitude, honored suffering, touched beauty, and have remembered courage. May these rocks and art expressions be reminders that you are not alone on this journey. [invite people to take the canvas home that had their name on it or invite people to leave canvas in the middle and take the one that is interesting for them to take].

## **Additional Resources**

Scriptures: Psalm 31:1-5, Psalm 31:9-10, Matthew 11:28-30, Romans 8:38-39, John 14:27, 1 Kings 19:11-12  
For more on creating trustworthy spaces, see: [Touchstones for Creating Trustworthy Space](#)  
Learn more at [www.greenchalice.org](http://www.greenchalice.org) Designed by Nicole Vicky and Scott Hardin-Nieri

