

## ***The Role of Faith Communities in Suicide Prevention***

by: **Timothy Doty, Psy.D. and Sally Spencer-Thomas, Psy. D., MNM, Carson J. Spencer Foundation, 2009**

Reviewed by: **Frances Edstrom and Ann Gibson, Ed.D., L.P.**

I am a survivor of suicide. We lost our fourteen-year-old son in 1995. At the time of our loss, we sought guidance from our priest who was the chaplain at the Catholic high school our son attended. Although he was very gentle and caring and offered much solace, in retrospect, he most definitely could have benefited from more experience and knowledge about dealing with suicide, or at least mental illness.

While writing this review, I consulted a friend who is a psychologist at a local Christian Brothers university, Saint Mary's of Minnesota. She has worked for many years in the Wellness Center there counseling college age people with a range of mental health concerns including suicide among the other psychological stressors students face. She was also a great help to us after our son's death in leading us not to understand suicide, but rather the aftermath.

The authors' credentials as psychologists lend credibility to their writing. Given that their target audience includes professionals in the field of pastoral care and faith communities, the text might have benefited from a discussion of the specific role of these individuals in dealing with the issue of suicide.

The book's discussion in Part 1 about the lack of collaboration between the mental health community and faith communities is accurate. The text promotes more collaboration and understanding between these communities. Throughout the text there is specific and accurate mental health information, but it could have been highlighted in a way that encourages members in the faith community to establish and maintain relationships with good mental health counselors as referral resources.

Faith and spiritual communities can be an important part of both prevention and postvention support and healing. The field of psychology and other mental health disciplines (i.e., social work) focus on correction and problem solving. However, that only addresses one aspect of suicide prevention and postvention; the spiritual traditions have a lot to offer in terms of life wisdom that can be helpful, perhaps even to people who are questioning God during difficult times in their lives. The authors include a brief discussion of suicide from the perspective of different faiths, which should provide knowledge and reassurance to a diverse population of readers.

There are multiple web links to supplement information in the text and resources such as posters and booklets are recommended. These resources enhance the total package. There is a comprehensive recommended book list included as well. Finally, Appendix A and B provide formats for remembrance/healing ceremonies. These suggestions can then be adapted to multiple contexts, which is a positive feature that will facilitate planning for these events.