

# A GUIDE FOR MOVEMENT CHAPLAINS

SPIRITUAL & EMOTIONAL CARE DURING  
COUNTER-ACTIONS TO WHITE SUPREMACIST HATE RALLIES





# WELCOME

The open marching and rallying of white supremacist hate groups in our communities is an act of violence whether they result in physical violence or not. These events trigger high levels of stress, anxiety, and fear in the communities where the rallies are planned and among organizers, activists, and community members who respond.

For those of us who are chaplains, healers, caregivers, and religious or spiritual leaders, there are always questions about how to show up in movement spaces like protests or counter-protests in ways that best channel our skills and strengthen the movement for racial justice and collective liberation. There are no perfect answers in this document. Multifaith movements for justice are always in the process of learning. But one way to resist white supremacy is to use our skills to provide spiritual and emotional care to organizers, activists, and community members on the frontlines—to the people who participate in all types of actions from tension-filled counter-protests to more-removed community picnics held in response to white supremacist gatherings. These are the spaces where we must learn to better support each other, birth community narratives rooted in radical hope and love, and cultivate pastoral presence in situations of uncertainty, tension, conflict, violence, and trauma. We call this work “Movement Chaplaincy” and we believe that providing holistic care to frontline people is essential to movement building and working toward justice, equity, and collective liberation.

The bones of this document were created in preparation for a Movement Chaplaincy team from Nashville that provided care for counter-protesters and community members during the “White Lives Matter” protest in Shelbyville, Tennessee on October 28, 2017. We know, however, that white nationalist, white supremacist, and Neo-Nazi groups are planning rallies across the country. We hope this guide can help provide insight and direction to chaplains, healers, caregivers, and religious and spiritual leaders who are looking for ways to show up in response.

We share these insights with immense gratitude to the chaplains who lived out this work with us in Shelbyville and want to offer special thanks to Casey Miller and Sara Green for their role in helping prepare and coordinate, and to our many comrades and friends in the struggle from communities across the country whose courageous work this builds on.

In community, solidarity, and hope,

Margaret Ernst, Faith Engagement Fellow, Faith Matters Network  
Rev. Lindsey Krinks, Education and Street Chaplaincy Coordinator at Open Table Nashville



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# MOVEMENT CHAPLAINCY ON THE GROUND

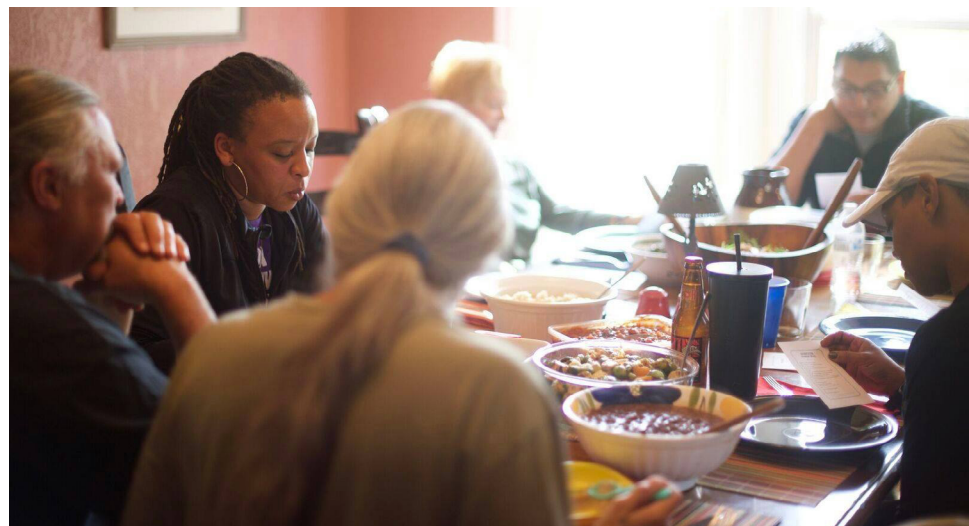
*Holding public witness or providing care on the streets in the context of counter-protests and community actions can look like many things. These are important roles can be played for direct actions and organizing in any context, not only for counter-actions to white supremacist rallies.*

## MOVEMENT CHAPLAINCY & DIRECT ACTION

1. **Offering a “ministry of presence”** by participating in and being a witness to what is happening and providing moral and spiritual support.
2. **Checking in with how people are doing emotionally**, offering to listen, offering words of care or prayer, supporting people on the streets who have experienced trauma.
3. **Offering space** for community organizing meetings, a safe house or safe haven during the action in case physical violence or mental health emergencies arise, and a healing place for “aftercare” when the action is over.

## ROLES OF MOVEMENT CHAPLAINS IN PROVIDING EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL CARE AT DIRECT ACTIONS, COUNTER ACTIONS, OR COMMUNITY GATHERINGS

- To care for ourselves and each other beforehand so we can be emotionally and spiritually present during the action.
- To care for the spiritual, emotional, and mental health needs of frontline people, protesters, organizers, street medics, and safety team members.
- To be a calming, centering, pastoral presence through our actions, words, and the energy we bring.
- To attend to people who are triggered, traumatized, injured, or experiencing emotional, mental, or spiritual distress.
- To use rituals and prayers when needed/requested to foster spiritual grounding, solidarity, and healing.
- To use our role to advocate for protesters’ needs with authority figures.
- To coordinate with organizers, volunteer street medics and safety team members to communicate about our role and keep people safe.
- To help facilitate movement to a safe house (such as a local church or community house) if/when things become unsafe and/or for people who experience trauma.
- To help people connect with healing resources and provide aftercare when possible.



# INSIGHTS FOR MOVEMENT CHAPLAINS & RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL LEADERS



- **On interacting with police:** As a religious or spiritual leader, it's important to not be co-opted into enforcing aggressive policing tactics that make marginalized people unsafe and which suppresses dissent. Clergy and chaplains who are not trained in situations of tension can feel the need to calm tensions or their own anxieties, and often begin with seeking out police for help. Police will also often look to people who are publicly identified to try to get them to follow police's instructions. It's important to acknowledge and live in this tension, to leverage your gifts and status in ways that also seeks to dismantle clergy privilege, not furthering it, at protests and counter-protests.
- **Respectability versus supporting:** Protesters may express themselves in ways that don't seem "holy" or "spiritual." That's okay. The job of spiritual caregivers is not to police people's expression into what seems respectable, nor to try to calm tensions so as to ease our own anxieties. Rather, we can play a role of ministry of presence to be amidst those who are outraged at injustice without judgment, while also paying mind to the ways we can provide care to those who may be experiencing trauma in that space.
- **On when to bring out the faith tools (like prayers or rituals), and how:** Spiritual abuse from religious communities can be triggered by loud public praying. In this role, we are taking an interfaith stance which means that we meet everyone where they are and don't impose any of our beliefs, traditions, or world views on them. We are putting our deep listening skills into practice in this space and if someone requests prayer, we can ask them what they want us to pray for and how they address a "higher power" and use that language. It's okay to offer prayer, oils, or other rituals, but we never impose and always respect where the person is and what they want/need.
- **Self awareness:** Be aware of your own privileges and how you come across to others. How do people of other racial/ethnic identities experience you? How do people of other gender expressions experience you? Before attempting to provide care, ask yourself if you are the best person to engage this person/situation or is there someone else on your team who could be perceived as more 'safe' and trustworthy? Do you best to be self-aware, mindful, and sensitive when providing care.
- **On religious paraphernalia:** Wearing religious paraphernalia to show visible clergy status on the side of counter-protesters can be a vital symbol that communicates that our faith traditions can and should be on the side of resistance to white supremacy and collective liberation. However, there are also important things to consider when making the decision about how to publicly identify as clergy or spiritual care providers. First off, to consider – do you see your role as providing care to counter protesters, or about symbolically representing your faith tradition's presence? A chaplain role is different from a clergy/religious leader's role, so being clear on how you're showing up is important when making the decision about how to identify with your clothing.
  - In Charlottesville, VA, white Christian clergy in religious garb were viewed by white supremacist groups as "traitors," thus escalating their aggression. If you are white clergy, this does not mean to not wear religious paraphernalia, however to take this information into account in your risk assessment when making decisions about wearing religious garb.
  - For serving in a chaplaincy role, keep in mind that counter-protesters will be from many faiths and spiritual traditions as well as from no faith backgrounds at all. Having a symbol that is affirming of all traditions can be helpful in making chaplains more safe and accessible. An alternative to wearing clergy religious paraphernalia that can still indicate your role as clergy is to wear a shirt, vest, or hat that says chaplain/clergy.
  - For the Shelbyville, TN action, the chaplain team wore purple hats that said "CARE" across the front, purple bandanas, and purple patches with an interfaith symbol. Writing "CARE" on the hats was chosen intentionally instead of "Spiritual Care" or "Chaplain" partly because spiritual wellness in mass protest settings (and other environments) is intimately intertwined with physical, emotional, and mental wellness. "CARE" reminds people that chaplains are there to attend to their holistic wellness.



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# CHECKLIST FOR MOVEMENT CHAPLAINS

## BEFORE THE ACTION

- **Consider – Who will be on my team?** Having a buddy or buddies for the day of, including people who are not at the rally location itself who are in a safe place, is a wise practice.
- **Consider – What are my triggers in a situation like this?** What will make me nervous, upset, or likely to behave in ways that could have detrimental consequences to myself or others? What will I need if I am triggered, and who will I inform about what I need?
- **Drink lots of water and eat nutritious food.** Your body needs and wants it!
- It is also important to **psychologically and spiritually prepare** in advance of the day itself. This will look different for different people, but could include meditation, physical movement, art, eating great food, talking to family, friends, therapists, or spiritual directors to process your thoughts and feelings in advance so as to enter as grounded as possible.
- Before the action, **discern what risks you are willing and ready to take**, and what risks you are not willing to take, so that in the moment you will have a greater foundation to go off. Assess these risks honestly with yourself, and allow others to assess risks for themselves without manipulating them.
  - Am I prepared/willing be arrested? If so, what do I need to have in place before the action?
  - Am I prepared/willing to endure physical harm?
  - Am I prepared/willing to intervene in a situation of conflict to prevent violence or harassment on others?

- Write on your arm (in sharpie): your emergency contact, the legal support number, and any medical conditions you have.
- Fully charged phone + extra battery pack if possible.
- Map of area.
- Chaplain bags (make sure to check if bags will be allowed at the protest site).
- Plastic water bottle (at least 2) + high protein snacks.
- Vinegar soaked bandanas? Goggles? Do not wear contacts! (Tear gas and pepper spray do not interact well with them ...).
- You may want to bring an extra change of clothes in case chemical agents are used.

## WHAT TO BRING: SUPPLIES FOR OTHERS

- Extra water bottles.
- Weather appropriate supplies like extra hand warmers, blankets, and disposable ponchos.
- High protein snacks.
- Cigarettes (these can help calm down people who are stressed out and can build trust).
- Resources, prayers, poems, essential oils, sage, and other supplies for rituals, healing, and altar spaces.
- Tissues.
- Snacks, tea, and electric kettle for the Safe House or safe haven.

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## DAY OF ACTION

### WHAT TO BRING: SUPPLIES FOR YOU

- What to wear: weather-appropriate clothing and comfortable. Interfaith patches, bandanas, and a hat that says “CARE” is a good way to make the chaplain team more visible. (You can buy white hats and bandanas and dye them.) Avoid wearing clergy garb for the Movement Chaplaincy role.

**“We cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates him or herself, but rather that people in communion liberate each other.”**

**Paulo Freire**

## SAMPLE RITUAL

*Light three candles.*

*With the first candle,* name and honor the loved ones, personal, spiritual or movement ancestors who give you strength, who challenge you, hold you, and have your back.

*With the second candle,* meditate on how your soul and body's freedom is wrapped up this action and imagine what it would be live in the vision of community you dream of.

*With the third candle,* notice your fears and where you feel vulnerable. Love and honor these places too. Acknowledge the risks you are willing to take, and let these settle into your being.

Say words, a prayer or incantation calling for protection of yourself and others and for the fulfillment of your intentions in taking action.

Close with singing or humming a song that brings you courage.

by Margaret Ernst





# TOOLS FOR PROVIDING CARE

## TACTICS FOR HELPING YOURSELF OR SOMEONE WHO IS TRAUMATIZED OR ANXIOUS BECOME MORE GROUNDED

5. Acknowledge FIVE things you see around you.
4. Acknowledge FOUR things you can touch around you.
3. Acknowledge THREE things you hear.
2. Acknowledge TWO things you can smell.
1. Acknowledge ONE thing you can taste.

(Source: [5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique](#))

**For more about responding to trauma in protests and mass mobilizations, check out [this great guide](#).**

## DE-ESCALATION TACTICS

When tensions, fear, and anxiety are high, conflicts can arise between counter-protesters themselves who may have many different views and strategies for resistance. De-escalation starts not only when an incident occurs, but in being proactive to look for where people look like they are angry, uncomfortable, or irritable, and checking in ahead of time. Checking in with someone who appears agitated by introducing yourself and asking, “How are you feeling? What do you need right now?” can go a long way. Offering something tangible like a piece of gum, bottle of water, healing oils, or a cigarette may help as well. If a conflict does escalate to verbal confrontation between two people or more, be present to talk to the person who is most agitated. To help bring the tension down, focus on just listening (no matter what they are saying!) and calmly ask open-ended questions, while standing with an open, non-threatening stance. Use a calm tone of voice to lower stress in the encounter. Avoid arguing with someone who is agitated at all costs. Try to build genuine rapport with them. See if there is any common ground you can agree on together. This could be as simple as saying something like, “I hear your side of things and I know you’re passionate about this. My role is to make sure people are safe and I’m wondering if we can find a way to work together to make sure everyone on our side stays safe.” Send for extra help if you need back-up. For more on de-escalation, check out [A Guide to De-escalation](#).

## AFTER THE ACTION

Taking care of ourselves after being exposed to white supremacist hate violence or violence from the police means taking care of ourselves the day of, the day after, and even in the days, weeks, and months beyond.

- It is ideal if a space can be provided for aftercare immediately after the action for members of the chaplain team and other organizers and frontline people. Providing aftercare is a great role for people who aren’t able to participate directly in the action. (In other words, if the chaplain team is providing care during the action, it’s helpful for them to receive care afterwards, too!)
- Ask yourself, “what support can I seek out to care for my mental, physical, and spiritual health needs following this event, not just the day of and after, but for an extended period?”

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Protest Chaplain Handbook](#)
- [What to Bring to An Action](#)
- [Bystander Intervention Resources](#)
- [How-to Guide to Creating Healing Justice Practice Spaces](#)
- [Black Lives Matter Healing Justice Toolkit](#)
- [Emotional and Physical Safety at Protests – Black Lives Matter](#)
- [Webinar on Street Therapy, Emotional Resistance in Action, from The Icarus Project](#)
- [Resources and Support for Healing in the Wake of Charlottesville from Faith Matters Network](#)
- [Radical Chaplaincy](#)



“We must now surrender to the obligation to understand and to care. We must surrender ourselves to becoming conscious, thinking members of the human race. We must put down the temptation to powerlessness and surrender to the questions of the moment.”

Joan Chittister



*Thank you to the Movement Chaplaincy team who showed up together in Shelbyville, TN for living out the work that helped inform this guide.*