



WHAT IS “LAY MY BURDENS DOWN?”

The Lay My Burdens Down initiative is a “building-bridges” effort between faith-based communities and suicide prevention allies and the mental health profession. For centuries, religious, philosophical, and cultural norms have informed the public about how to regard suicide. Unfortunately, many victims of preventable suicides and their families have been left with extraordinary and complicated bereavement due to stigma, fears and judgment.

In 2008, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the Health and Human Services Department of the federal government along with the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) convened a summit meeting of religious leaders from a variety of world religions and denominations to discuss faith-based beliefs about suicide and faith-informed responses to suicide risk or death. This discussion has proven to be very beneficial to individuals at risk for suicide and their families who long have feared judgment about their illness and symptoms, a condition that has impeded vulnerable persons from getting the help that they need.

Belonging to a faith-based community is said by experts to be one of many Protective Factors, buffering the power of Risk Factors. When explored and utilized with a regard for the science of illness and psychological debilitation, faith-based community leaders and members, working in concert with trained mental health professionals and prevention allies, can provide a powerfully loving and safer climate within which an at-risk person can seek and obtain help. Persons who fear that they will go to hell, or be condemned by God or community face one more almost insurmountable obstacle from receiving proper medical care for a psychiatric condition.

Suicide is the 10th cause of death in the United States, and the numbers of people dying from suicide have been greater. Researchers, clinicians, public health and mental health professionals, government leaders, the medical field and countless suicide prevention and quite a few faith-based representatives have been updating to modern views of suicide as the result of debilitating psychological pain which renders at-risk persons from being able to be clear-minded, oriented well enough to make rational decisions, and confident enough to be help-seeking.



The “Lay My Burdens Down” project is a reference to a book of the same name by Drs. Alvin Poussaint and Amy Alexander. The ASPARC initiative is our hope to bring suicide prevention education and training into faith-based circles or to persons (not necessarily in a church or synagogue setting, such as a study group, book club, civic or community group, etc.) to promote a discussion about the protective factors of community-belonging and concepts related to healing from pain and suffering that the world religions study.

ASPARC can provide you with:

- one or two books, compliments of the Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Grant
 - Townsend, L.L. (2006). *Suicide Pastoral Responses*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
 - Poussaint, A. & Alexander, A. (2000). *Lay my burden down: Unraveling suicide and the mental health Crisis among African-Americans*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Meet with you to design a customized faith-based workshop, seminar, class, training event to be provided to your church leaders, pastoral care team members, Stephens Ministry caregivers, bereavement groups, church education and programming committee, and more.
- Provide church or synagogue-based postvention consultation and/or education
- Facilitate QPR Gatekeeper Training as a “next step” or postventive response following a suicide
- Supply website, book, and materials suggestions from the Comprehensive Resource Directory

