

Lessons of Resilience

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What do a group of Norwegian Seaman's Church chaplains and the Tulane School of Social Work have in common? They are experts in overcoming disaster.



School of Social Work faculty member Charles Figley, right, leads a group of Norwegian chaplains on a tour of neighborhoods still rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A group of nine Norwegian chaplains recently visited the school to learn best practices in trauma, resilience and self-care during a week-long study tour featuring a uniquely tailor-made curriculum created by the [Institute for Psychosocial Health](#).

Chaplain Tormod Woxen said the experience was eye-opening for the seasoned group.

"It was a learning experience in every sense of the word," Woxen said. "We not only learned about aspects of disaster psychology, but it was a learning experience on the human level."

The trip served a three-fold purpose. First, it refreshed what they already knew, thanks to lectures and group sessions with Charles Figley, who holds the Paul Henry Kurzweg Distinguished Chair in Social Work and directs the Tulane Traumatology Institute, and Jane Parker, clinical associate professor and director of the Institute for Psychosocial Health.

Secondly, it was a chance to form a new perspective about resilience and self-care while learning about the latest trauma research. Finally, they learned more about themselves.



Chaplain Arvid Tveit, left, talks with Charles Figley, right, about helping residents cope after the disastrous storm.

"We talked about what was going on inside ourselves," Woxen said. "We talked about compassion and compassion fatigue and how to increase our own resilience."

Perhaps the most meaningful event was small group discussions with social work students.

All nine chaplains (eight men and one woman) are part of the Church of Norway, a Lutheran Church, and counsel workers in the North Sea's offshore industry. Each chaplain works with about seven North Sea platforms along with their on-shore duties. They spend four or five days on a platform before moving to another as

space permits.

"Our work is in the art of being present," Woxen said. "Offshore work is very dangerous, so anything that takes away from a worker's focus is a danger. We act like counselors."

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