

**The Upper Room Crisis Hotline**

**Mission and History**

The Upper Room Crisis Hotline (TURCH) is a unique ministry in the Catholic tradition with the mission to humbly attempt to emulate Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in serving all callers from around the world to the hotline regardless of their background and needs. This mission serves as the foundation for the hotline and is reinforced throughout the training program and continued by phone counselors serving on the hotline. In March of 2007, the Upper Room Crisis Hotline was incorporated in the State of Illinois, and received registration as a 501(c)3 private not-for-profit status. TURCH was founded by Sister Mary Frances Seeley, OSF, Ph.D. and opened for service in January of 2008. Sister Mary Frances continues to serve as the President on the Board of Directors and Special Advisor to TURCH. TURCH is staffed totally by very dedicated and spiritually compassionate volunteers including the board of directors, administrators, office support staff, phone counselors and priests. The hotline is supported financially by individual donors, small business donors and small grants. Originally the hotline was designed to serve the clergy and religious, but due to the volume of calls and need from the general public, it was expanded by the board of directors to serve callers from all backgrounds in 2013. Based on data from the summer of 2023, the Volunteer Phone Counselors receive 625 calls per month from throughout the United States and 35 other countries to this point.

**The Upper Room Training Program**

Individuals that qualify to participate in the training program to prepare to serve on the hotline as phone counselors receive a comprehensive 8-week, (16 session) training program from highly qualified, credentialed instructors with extensive experience in mental health, education, theology and other areas. The curriculum incorporates training in communication and reflective listening, mental health disorders, substance abuse, suicide prevention and bereavement, sexuality and relationships, spirituality and prayer, non-directive therapy approaches, understanding the challenges of first responders, their families and other priority areas to prepare participants for the hotline. Phone counselors are also provided monthly Inservice Meetings conducted remotely where they are able to share, support each other and receive continued education covering topics relevant to implementation and ensuring quality services on the hotline.

**Upper Room Expansion**

The Upper Room Training Program has been conducted remotely since 2019 so that students are now able to participate from anywhere in the world, which has greatly expanded the opportunity to recruit quality phone counselors from across the United States, Canada and recently from Albania.

In April of 2019 TURCH also implemented a new phone system that made it possible for phone counselors to begin receiving hotline calls directly to their personal cell phones in addition to receiving calls at our Upper Room Line Center. This has made it possible for individuals that qualify from throughout the United States and other countries to join the Upper Room as phone counselors.

**Upper Room Programs and Services**

Individuals from all backgrounds are welcomed and received with open arms when they call The Upper Room Crisis Hotline (TURCH). It is easily accessible, provides confidentiality with personal information, is cost free, and is available when the caller is in need of support. TURCH is unique in that it provides all of the above advantages in addition to spiritual support in the Catholic tradition and outreach services with extended support for callers. The callers to TURCH reflect a microcosm of societal challenges. There are many callers diagnosed with mental illness that are being treated with regular counseling and medication but continue to call the hotline for ongoing compassionate human contact and support.

The Upper Room mission and training are demonstrated by the behavior of phone counselors reflecting 7 pillars of caring support incorporated in the services provided through the hotline including: spiritual support and prayer, focused and reflective listening, empathy, compassion, non-judgement, affirmation and patience. The callers to the hotline take the lead in the discussion and the phone counselors serve as facilitators to respond to the caller’s needs. This approach creates a safe and welcoming environment where callers are received and accepted just as they are. This open and supportive human contact with callers conveys a message of undivided attention, interest and care. Phone counselors are also trained to respond to callers at-risk for suicide or other crisis situations in order to provide immediate support, intervention and offer a wide range of referrals for additional support services.

**Upper Room Mission**

**Emulate Christ Through the Guidance of the Holy Spirit**

**(Pillars of Support)**

**Spiritual Support and Prayer**

**Focused & Reflective Listening**

**Empathy**

**Compassion**

**Non-judgment**

**Affirmation**

**Patience**

There are TURCH services that provide unique extended care as an outreach to callers that require additional support. The Sunshine Program and Extended Caller Support Program offer regular calls initiated by Phone Counselors at agreed upon days and times to callers that require ongoing contact and support. The Sunshine Program provides a daily wellness check call initiated from a phone counselor for retired clergy. The Extended Caller Support Program provides regular contact initiated by the same phone counselors on a weekly basis for an hour or more for callers experiencing a significantly challenging period in their lives such as the death of a family member, ongoing isolation without support, etc. Over the last 4 years 10 callers have received the Extended Caller Support in locations across the United States, Sweden and the Philippines. Another important component of the TURCH Ministry is the “Priest on Call Program.” When callers call the hotline and request to speak to a priest, their name and phone number are provided by the caller and a priest will call them generally within the same day. Many of the callers to TURCH are specifically seeking spiritual support, prayer and have faith-based questions and priests are prepared to provide consultation and prayer. Priests respond to approximately 55 caller requests each month.

In addition to the above outreach services, there are 140-150 emails received and responded to monthly. There is ongoing support provided through regular email exchanges for a limited number of individuals needing this extended support.

For more information please contact:

The Upper Room Crisis Hotline website: [www.catholichotline.org](http://www.catholichotline.org), or

Dr. Terrence Smith

Executive Director

email: [catholichotline@gmail.com](mailto:catholichotline@gmail.com-)

office phone: 815-727-4367.

Those in need of support may call The Upper Room Crisis Hotline at 888-808-8724.

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