

**LIFE PROMOTION AS SUICIDE PREVENTION:**

**ENGAGING FAITH COMMUNITIES TO PROMOTE ABUNDANT  
LIFE FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

**VISN I - Be There: Strengthening our Communities**

**June 26, 2019**

**Chaplain Steve Sullivan**

## *WHY* I DO WHAT I DO? 3 QUOTES

- Quote 1:
- “When I came back from Iraq to my church, I was either treated as a Hero or Monster. I’m neither of those.”
- Tyler Boudreaux, Marine, Iraq War

## **SUICIDE PREVENTION: WHAT WE HAVE DONE WELL**

- **Awareness-** 22, Out of the Darkness, PSA's, Mayor's Challenge, Governor's Challenge, TFV
- **Education-** S.A.V.E., MH First Aid, Soul Shop, ASSIST, ACE, BattleMind, CCTP, Mental Health Summits
- **Crisis Intervention-** gun locks, Vet Crisis Line, VA SP coordinators, 911, protocols.

# ***IMPORTANCE OF OPTIONS***

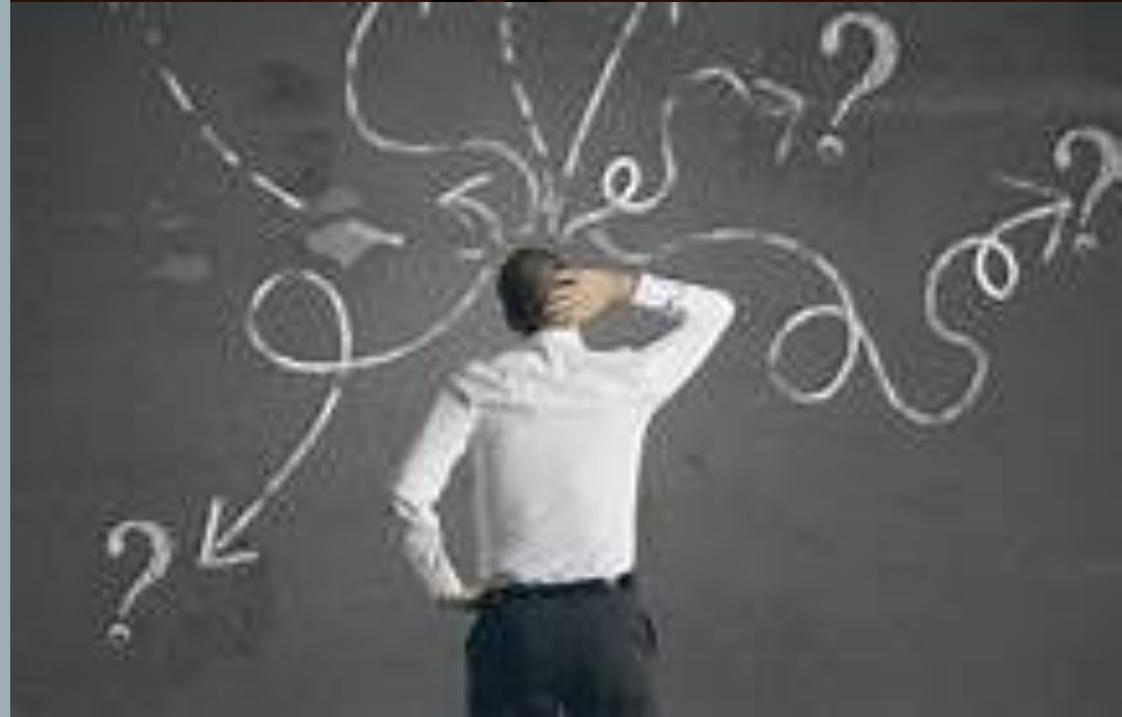
## Suicide and Veterans

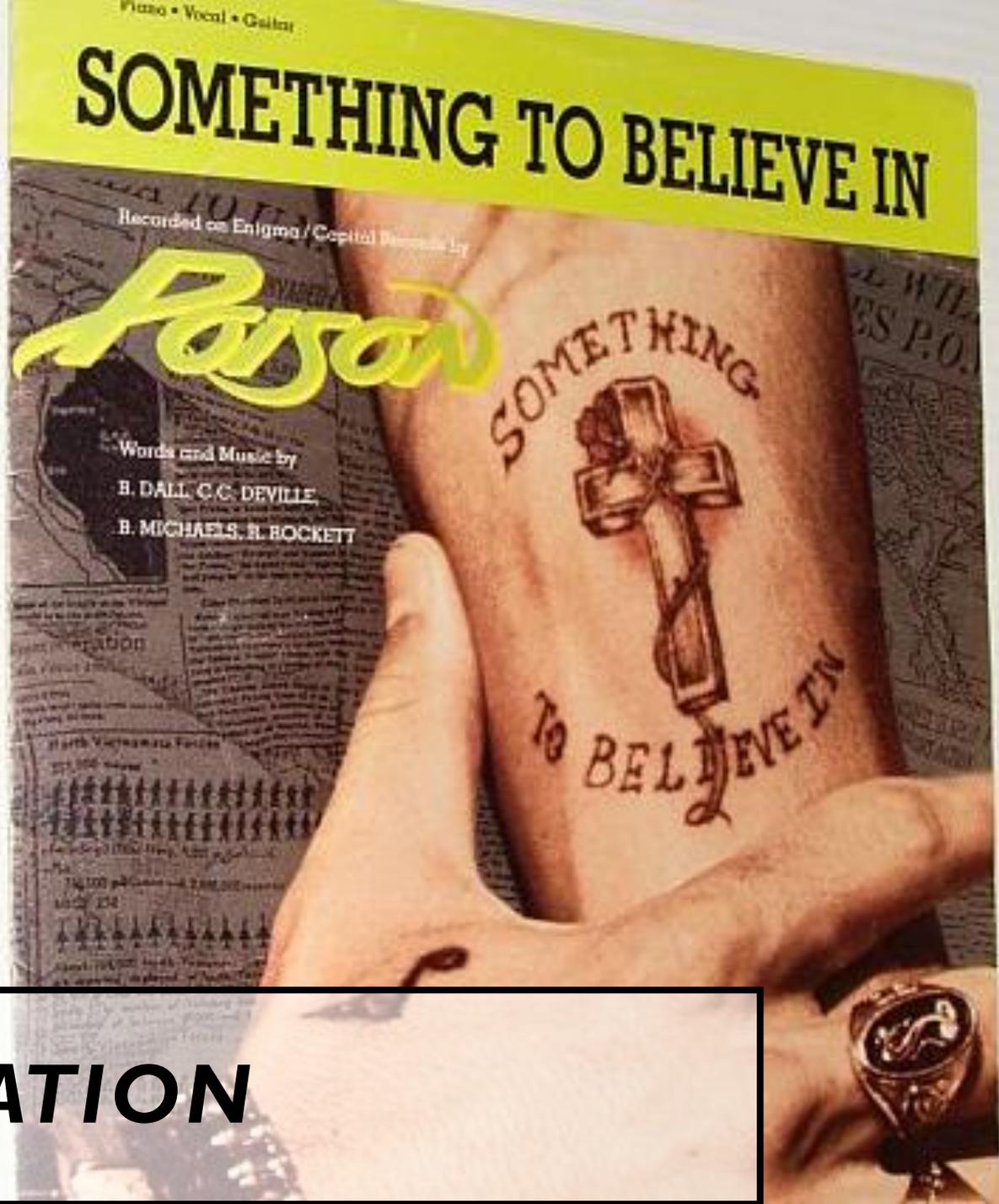
They've already died

They didn't sign up to be SAFE

Veterans run TOWARD things, not AWAY

Give them something to shoot at





**INSPIRATION**

## QUOTE #2

- “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

John 10:10 (KJV)

# WHAT ARE WE OFFERING?

## LIFE PRESERVER

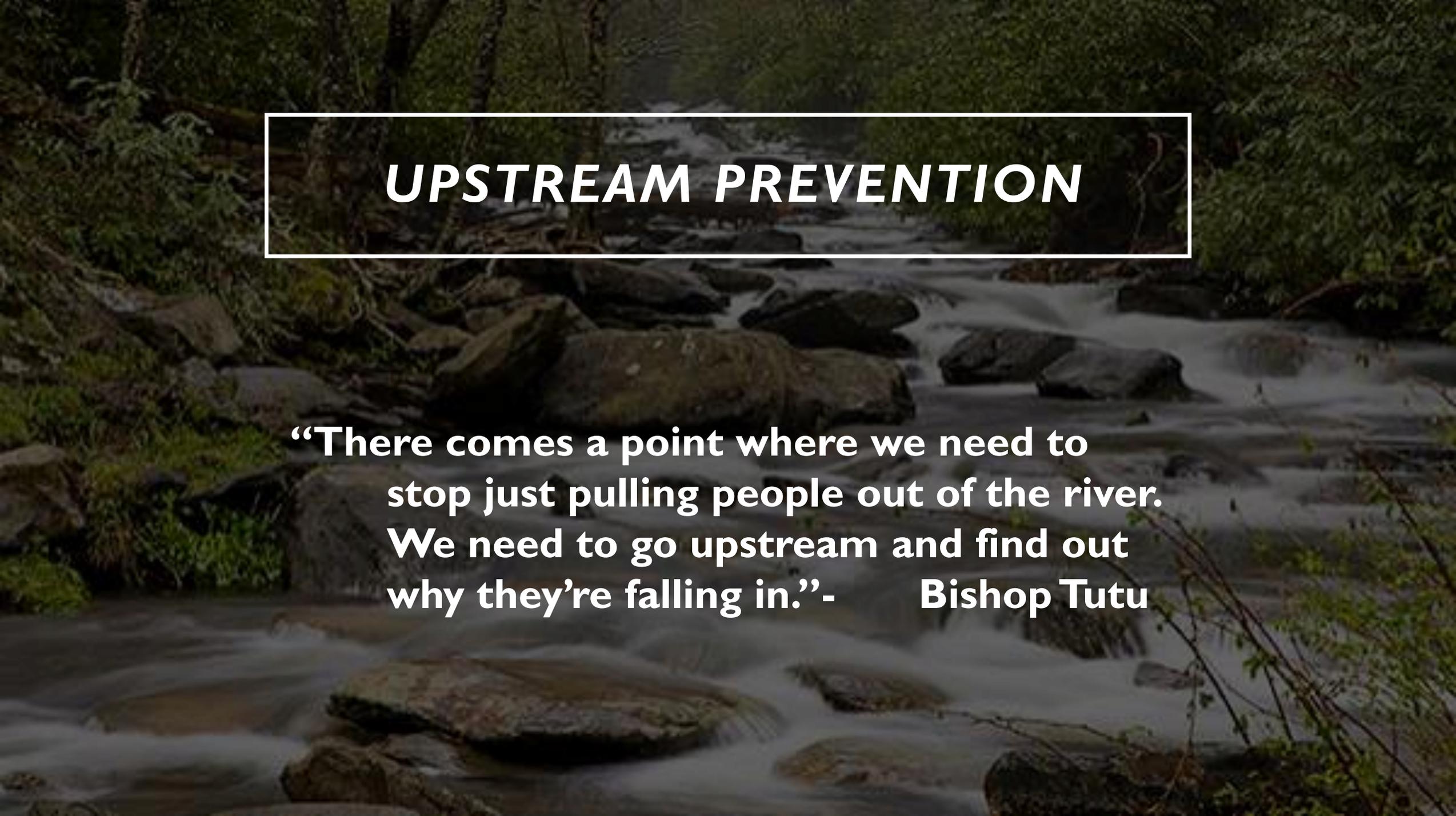


## LIFE PROMOTION



GREAT DEFENSE, BUT WHAT ABOUT OFFENSE?





## ***UPSTREAM PREVENTION***

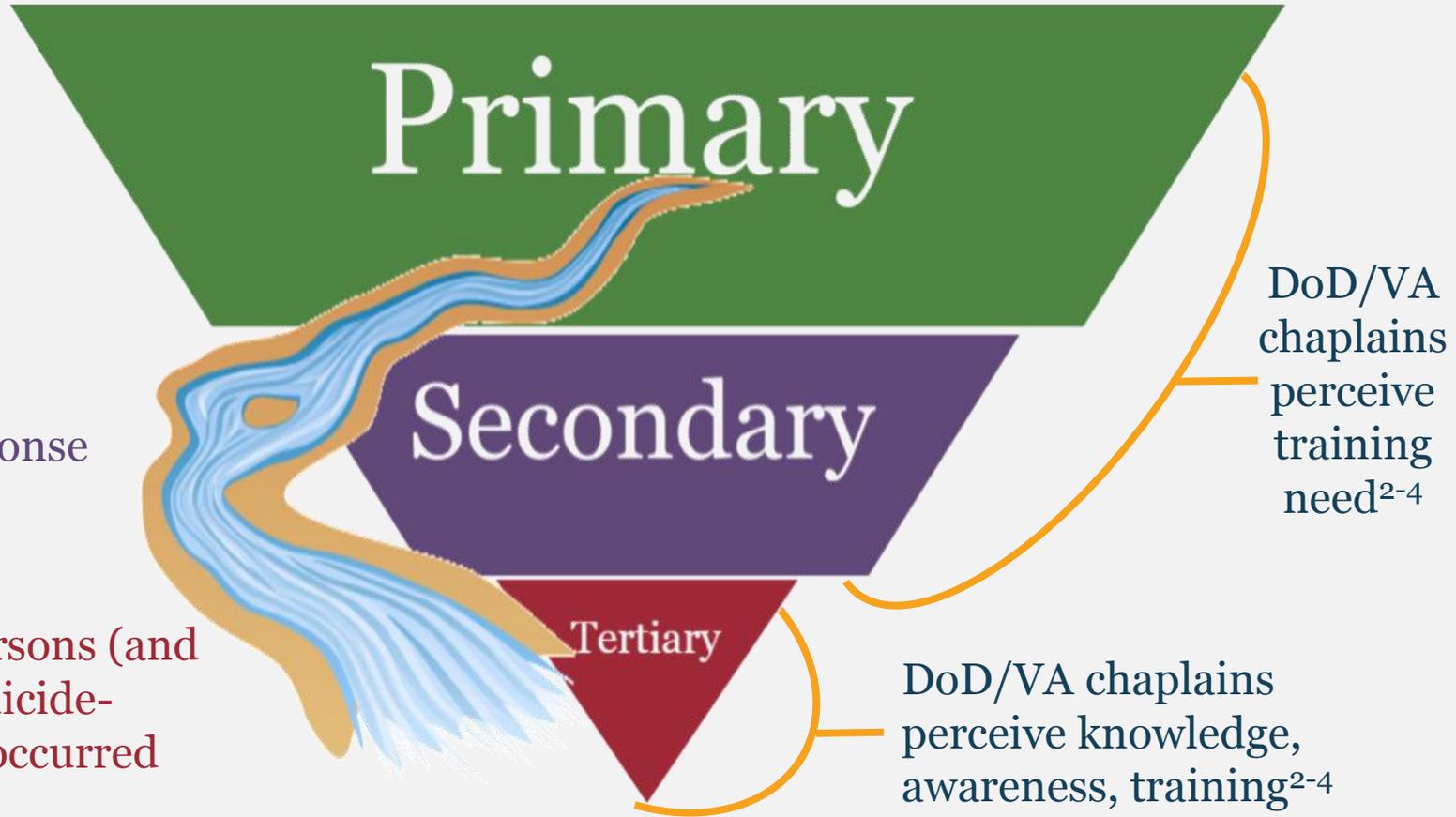
**“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.”- Bishop Tutu**

# PREVENTION CONTINUUM<sup>1</sup>

Reduce risk factors by promoting life enhancing practices

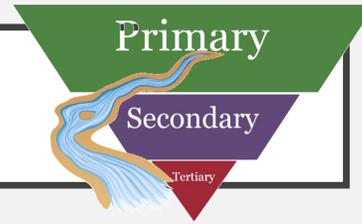
Intervening early in response to risk factors

Care/treatment of persons (and relations) in whom suicide-related behavior has occurred



1. Caldwell, D. (2008). The suicide prevention continuum. *Pimatisiwin*, 6(2), 145-153.
2. Ramchand, R., Ayer, L., Geyer, L., & Kofner, A. (2015). Army chaplains' perceptions about identifying, intervening, and referring soldiers at risk of suicide. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 2(1), 36-47.
3. Nieuwsma, J. A., Rhodes, Jeffrey E., Cantrell, W. C., Jackson, G. L., Lane, M. B., Milsten, G., ... Meador, K. G. (2013). *The intersection of chaplaincy and mental health care in VA and DoD: Expanded report on VA / DoD Integrated Mental Health Strategy, Strategic Action #23*. Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense.
4. Kopacz, M. S., Nieuwsma, J. A., Jackson, G. L., Rhodes, J. E., Cantrell, W. C., Bates, M. J., & Meador, K. G. (2016). Chaplains' Engagement with Suicidality among Their Service Users: Findings from the VA/DoD Integrated Mental Health Strategy. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 46(2), 206-212.

# FURTHER UPSTREAM: SECONDARY PREVENTION



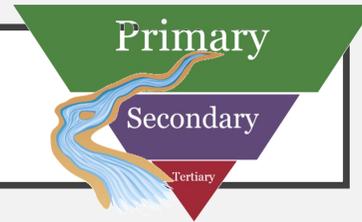
Numerous potential pathways:



Community/Clergy engagement:

- Care within the context of faith communities
- Facilitating access to VA and community care
- Collaboration with Mental health Care
- Supporting Family members

# UPSTREAM: PRIMARY PREVENTION



## Community/Clergy Engagement

- Promoting healthy behaviors
- Finding community leadership roles
- Helping identify a new “tribe”
- Connecting Veterans to service
- Religious /spiritual practices & resources
- Helping restore family relationships



WHAT DO I DO?

THE COMMUNITY CLERGY  
TRAINING PROGRAM TO IMPROVE  
RURAL VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH  
(CCTP)

- Equipping Community Clergy to Help Warriors



# WHAT OUR TRAININGS LOOK LIKE



## HOW THIS TRAINING HELPS?

- Equips rural clergy to minister to Veterans and families in their communities.
- Joins rural clergy together in community partnerships of care for Veterans
- Helps congregations and communities to take their rightful role and responsibility for our warriors
- Helps Veterans get the resources, understanding, acceptance and community support they need

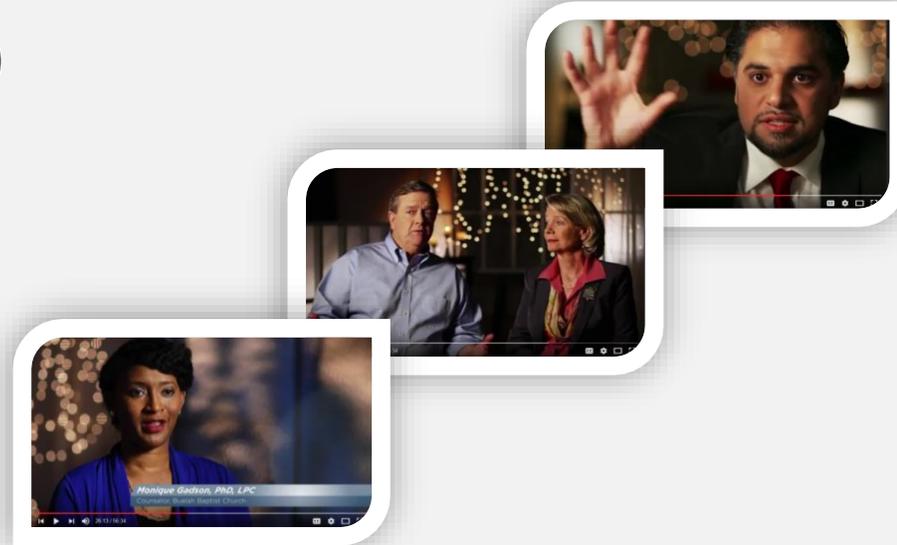
## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CCTP “PARTNER”?

- You care about Veterans and their families and are interested in learning more about how to help.
- You are willing to help coordinate a free CCTP Viewing Event in your area with one of our 25 chaplains in the U.S.

**You join the Manchester CVEB or new  
(coming soon) Community Action Board!**

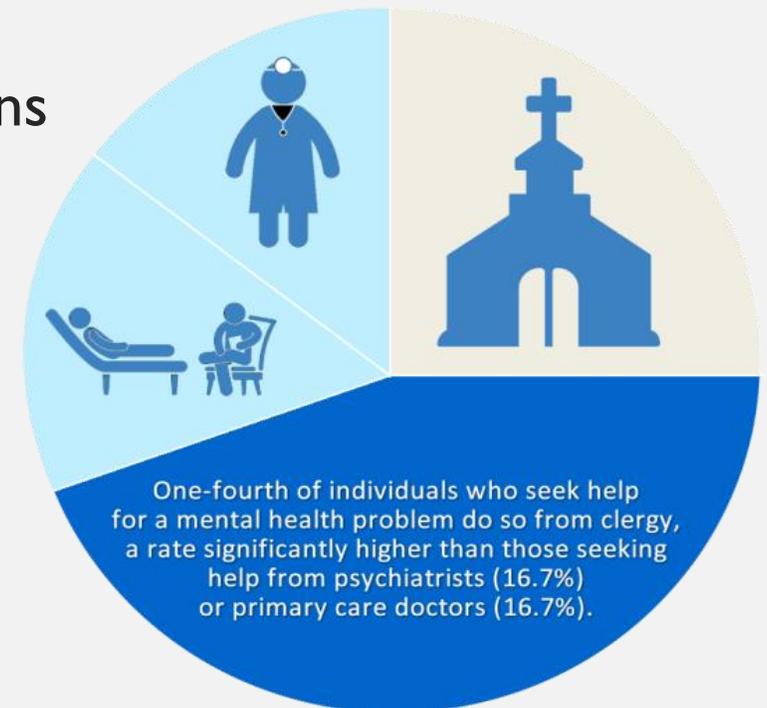
## ANOTHER OPTION: “A PLACE TO CALL HOME”

- Faith Communities (≈ 20 minutes each)
  1. “Partners in Care”
  2. “Trauma”
  3. “Moral Injury”
  4. “Belonging”



## WHY FAITH COMMUNITIES?

- Overwhelming ministry needs for Veterans
- Limited number of military and VA Chaplains
- Community clergy want to help, but ...
  - are unaware of the Veterans in their congregation
  - are unsure about what they can or should do to help
  - don't feel they know enough about Veterans issues and VA services



# OVERWHELMING MINISTRY NEEDS

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Depression

Suicide

Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Substance Abuse

# SPIRITUAL REACTIONS TO WAR

Guilt/Shame

Loss of faith

Growth of faith

Questions about God/theodicy

Questions about worldview

Loss of trust (in God or others)

Loss of community/relationships

Moral Injury

1<sup>ST</sup> TRIVIA  
DOOR PRIZE



# LIFE PROMOTION IN FAITH COMMUNITIES?

“THIS GUILT  
THING ISN’T  
GOING  
ANYWHERE”

## Study suggests feelings of guilt may be a top factor in PTSD

By Gregg Zoroya, USA TODAY

Updated 11/25/2011 1:32 AM

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87



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A leading cause of post-traumatic stress disorder is guilt that troops experience because of moral dilemmas faced in combat, according to preliminary findings of a study of active-duty Marines.

# MORAL INJURY

**“Perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”**

***Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy, Litz, Stein, et al, Clinical Psychology Review 29 (2009) 695-706.***

## Moral Injury

- Guilt and/or shame over something they have done, seen, or heard about

## PTSD

- Fear after a traumatic event that prevents normal reintegration into life

**“I don’t regret what I did in Vietnam. I was a marine. They should have known that we were calling in air strikes in that area....**

**But I’ve tried to go back to church. I just can’t. It’s like there is this wall there.”**

## WHAT CAN FAITH COMMUNITIES DO TO HELP?

### *THE 10 COMMANDMENTS*

- Come to this Workshop
- Pepper your public prayers with difficult words
- KEEP them on your prayer lists
- Focus on the Family
- Small Things are better than Big Things
- Keep doing what you already do well
- Let them plan their own Veterans Day service
- Engage Veterans in things that matter
- Engage Veterans in things that don't matter
- Above all, Listen and Love

## *WHY I DO?* QUOTE #2

- “You know, Steve, our goal is not to reintegrate Veterans to the VA, but to their communities.”

friend and colleague, Dr. Jeff Pyne

# WHY DO **COMMUNITIES** MATTER?

2<sup>nd</sup> Trivia Door Prize:

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

WHAT DOES LIFE PROMOTION  
LOOK LIKE IN COMMUNITIES?



***BREAKFAST FOR TROOPS ON  
DRILL WEEKEND***

# **“YELLOW-OUT” GAMES**



LIFE PROMOTION IN VETERANS?

JASON + BLUEGRASS COMMUNITY =  
LIFE



### 3<sup>RD</sup> TRIVIA DOOR PRIZE

- During what War did the U.S. first start offering benefits to Veterans?



“If we send ‘em,  
We must mend ‘em”

- Wendell Berry



“IF WE SEND ‘EM, WE MUST MEND  
OURSELVES”



WHAT DOES LIFE PROMOTION  
LOOK LIKE IN YOU?



LIFE  
PROMOTION IN  
ME?



I WANT MY  
DOG'S LIFE  
EXPECTANCY





ALL OF US PROMOTING LIFE TOGETHER =  
SUICIDE PREVENTION AND **ABUNDANT LIFE**



## QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, TESTIMONIES?

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- VA/Community Chaplain

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- [www.mirecc.va.gov/MIRECC/mentalhealthandchaplaincy](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/MIRECC/mentalhealthandchaplaincy)
- Clergy MH videos, “Pew vs. Couch” paper JORH

***Thanks!***

***Go live your life.***

***Amen.***