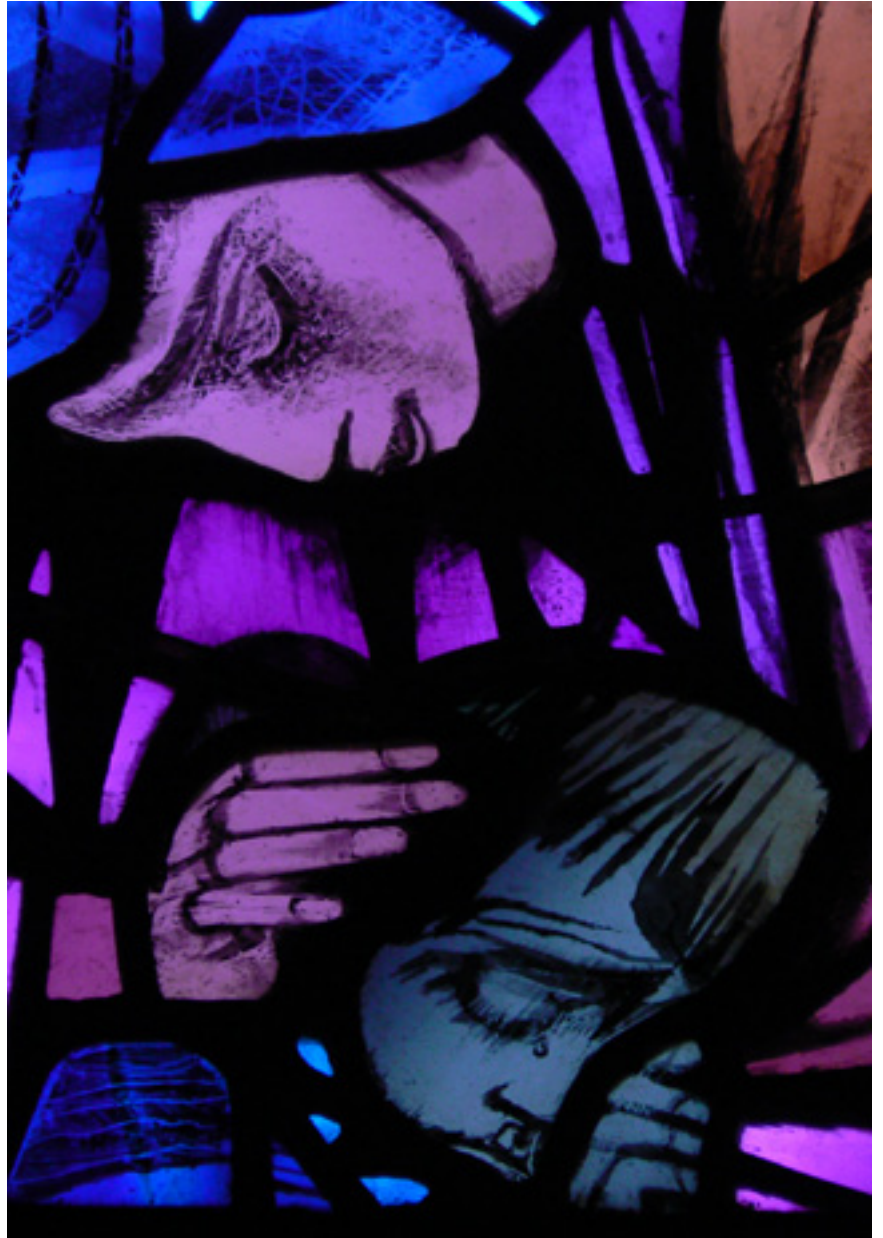


VOLUME 10 NUMBER 4 2013

*Pastoral Involvement with
Violence within Families*



CARING CONNECTIONS

An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling

C O N T E N T S

Pastoral Involvement with Violence within Families

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THE PURPOSE OF *CARING CONNECTIONS*

Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling is written by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable; solidly grounded in the practice of ministry; and theologically probing.

Caring Connections seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries and — not least — concerned congregational pastors and laity. *Caring Connections* also provides news and information about activities, events and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

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Editorial: Suffering

A picture can, indeed, speak a thousand words. At times, just a few statistics can speak even volumes more.

In the U.S., 24% of adult women and 14% of adult men have been physically assaulted by a partner at some point in their lives. Domestic Violence (DV) is now the most common cause of injury for women in the 18-44 age bracket. It leads to dramatic increases in chronic illness: abused women are 70% more likely to have heart disease, 80% more likely to experience a stroke, and 60% more likely to develop asthma. Nearly 25% of women report that DV has affected their work performance. One statistic left me simply reeling: of those women who experience intimate partner abuse, 30% report that the first incident occurred during pregnancy.

Alarming as those numbers are, the most troubling “statistic” is the more invisible one—a statistic none of us can even begin to fathom. That is, the breadth and depth of human suffering brought on by DV and intimate partner abuse.

Tragically, the extent of societal silence in response to this issue is in large part “deafening.” While one can safely assume that considerable numbers of faith community leaders—including those who serve in ministries of pastoral care, counseling and clinical education—join a wide array of healthcare professionals, social workers and others in realizing the importance of early diagnosis and intervention, that group is actually in the minority. In reality, many pastors, physicians, and other professional caregivers are still prone to “look the other way,” reluctant to even pursue training for DV screening.

If there is a “red thread” to be found in this particular issue of *Caring Connections*, it is that everyone has a vital role to play in identifying, addressing, and curbing domestic violence. Whether positioned in parishes, social ministry

organizations, church schools, seminaries, outdoor ministries, or other settings of the church’s ministry, all of us have the potential to play a major role in helping to prevent, diagnose, address and eliminate DV.

To that end, we are most grateful to the authors of the articles and personal testimonies that comprise this issue of *Caring Connections*. Their extensive personal/professional experience and open sharing offer readers an opportunity to learn much about the what, why, how and when of DV/intimate partner abuse. You will be both enlightened and inspired in terms of how the church and its leaders can be instrumental in breaking the silence, promoting understanding of the complex dynamics of DV, and making a real difference in the lives of victims. Most importantly, you will learn why both healing and hope are still very much alive as together we seek to eliminate this pervasive evil in our midst.

- In their article, “It Takes A Village,” Marie Fortune and Chris Andersen explore the phrase “domestic terror” as alternative language for getting people in touch with the intense fear battered women and children live with, the same fear abusers use to coerce family members. Next, they introduce us to the “Ending Family Violence Initiative,” sponsored by The Lutheran Community Foundation—a program for inspiring and equipping faith communities in addressing domestic and sexual violence.
- Robert Hullinger, a founding member of Parents of Murdered Children (POMC), shares how this international organization began in 1978 and outlines its ongoing mission of support for those struggling to find “a new normal” following the homicide of a son or daughter.
- Theresa Bianchi shares direct personal/pastoral experi-

Call for Articles

Caring Connections seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight with the wider community. We want to invite anyone interested in writing an article to please contact the editors, Rev. Chuck Weinrich (cweinrich@cfl.rr.com) or Rev. Don Stiger (dstiger@lmcmc.com). This call is a regular item in each issue of *Caring Connections*, but we are particularly intentional as we invite articles for upcoming issues on the following themes.

2014, No. 1 (Winter) “Zion XV” - We plan to include transcripts from Drs. Hummel and Herrmann, as well as information from various workshops. Do you have a particular response to the conference?

We welcome your input.

2014, No. 2 (Spring) “Chaplaincy Involvement in Working with Advance Directives for Health Care”

Have you dealt with any of these issues? Please consider writing an article for us. Or, do you know someone else who could write for us? Talk to them yourself or let us know and we will contact them. We sincerely want to hear from you!

ences from her own ministry in both parish and hospital settings. She lifts up some key experiential learnings and insights for the benefit of fellow caregivers seeking to bring support to victims of domestic violence.

- Antonia Clemente, co-founder and Executive Director of “The Healing Center” (Brooklyn, NY), shares the vital role an urban, Lutheran-affiliated social ministry organization can play in prevention, education, and the empowering of community/faith leaders as effective change agents.
- Bruce Cook demonstrates how indispensable pastoral/spiritual care is in serving victims of abuse. He presents an effective model for providing church-based, peer-level support groups for victims, including the essential dimensions of needs assessment and evaluation.
- Greg Townsend and two other judges identify legal ramifications and offer cautions for pastors engaged in counseling with individuals or couples where there is an environment of violence within the family.
- Sandra Silvestre’s poem, “Numb – Reflection of Me” captures some of the pain, suffering and resilience that can be found in a survivor of domestic violence. Her fuller article and open personal witness bring us directly in touch with what it is like to both experience and survive intimate partner abuse.

miracle” as Marcia’s thumb on her left hand moved voluntarily for the first time in three months following one of her therapy sessions. We give thanks for each day and look forward to any signs of improvement.

In addition to Marcia’s healing, we have been blessed by many who have kept us in prayer and contact us with expressions of support; by the LCMS that has allowed me to work temporarily deployed so I can be present with Marcia; and by a staff and colleagues who have assumed additional responsibilities during this time. We look forward to Marcia’s discharge in early February so we can begin to find a new way of living as we return home.

May our Lord bless each of you in your service to Christ and those whom he has entrusted into your care.

John Fale

A Special Message from John Fale

Dear friends and colleagues of the Lutheran Specialized Pastoral Ministry community:

In a recent pastoral letter to LCMS colleagues in Specialized Pastoral Ministry, I reflected upon the world of spinal cord injury rehabilitation for the past three months following my wife’s, Marcia, injuries. Since then, Marcia and I have been contacted by a number of LCMS and ELCA colleagues who have expressed love and concern for us, as well as regret that they hadn’t known about our circumstances sooner. These expressions of love and support have been very touching to us and bring strength and healing. Additionally, I have been asked to consider providing an update on Marcia’s progress to be included in Caring Connections.

Marcia sustained injuries on September 20th that resulted in two fractured cervical vertebrae and an incomplete spinal cord injury and swept us up into the whirlwind of spinal cord rehabilitation and recovery at Craig Hospital in the Denver area. We are most thankful for the progress that Marcia has made since her admission to Craig on October 1. Though still considered quadriplegic, Marcia has progressed from complete paralysis from the shoulders down to mobility in a manual wheelchair and some limited walking with a walker. Just this past Friday, with all of our kids and grandkids in Denver to celebrate the birth of our Savior, we had our own “Christmas

Numb Reflection of Me

Look at me
Look at me hard
Look at me long

Gaze deep, but do not get weak
I am everywhere, but some seem not to see me
Others hide me out of fear

I have no specific face
Nor gender
Nor race

I am powerful
I am fearful
I am forceful and often take you by surprise

You might say you leave me
Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha.....
Try it if you can
If you dare

You are weak
I am strong
I work overtime to control your world

I am the secret to many pains and isolations
I give you no mercy
I give you no peace
I would take your life in a heartbeat

Girl, please!
You have stressed me out
You have made me weak
You almost drained life out of me

But hear me now, as I stand out!
I have owned my steps
I am claiming my success
I have built an extra skin
I have built an extra skin to be numb
Numb so that I won't feel
Feel for what already happened
For what is near by
Numb so that I can revive in me the person that
once died

I am not your violence
You are not my pain
I removed the fear
I have dried the tears
And
You, ha ha ha
You have nothing on me
Nothing on me
Nothing on me

I am not your victim
I am a survivor worldwide
You are not my keeper
You cannot take my life
You cannot take my life



Sandra Silvestre was born in the Dominican Republic. She wrote her first poem at twelve years of age when she figured that writing poetry was an easier way of expressing her emotions. Since that time, her writing has improved as well as her ways of balancing and expressing matters of the heart. She holds an advanced degree in Criminology and Justice from Saint John's University. In 2014, she will complete another advanced degree in Forensic Psychology/Community Psychology. She works at Lutheran HealthCare, Brooklyn, NY as part of a Case Management Team. In collaboration with her church, she also teaches English as a Second Language, in an effort to create community improvement for people advancing into the English language. Sandra is the author of a book of poems called Numb Reflection of Me. Sandra is a mother of four beautiful boys. She is a Brooklyn girl and a domestic violence survivor. She loves watching Dexter, Criminal Minds, and Flashpoint. She loves 80's music, Gospel music, and eating apple pie a la mode.

It Takes a Village

Domestic violence is a term we have used for years as shorthand for a long list of harmful behaviors.

But there are two problems with this language: one is that it focuses on the violence that may not be constant, but rather is occasional. The other problem is that it is difficult for some to understand such violence if they haven't grown up with or lived through it to really understand the associated terror.

Let's explore using the alternative language of "domestic terror." Is the first image that comes to mind the twin towers collapsing in a pile of dust and mangled steel? Or, is it a house, very ordinary, with a woman and her children living in fear – never knowing when the violence would begin or end? Pull the image back and see the neighborhood where she lives and the 25% of homes where women and children are living in fear or carrying the memory of fear and the scars of violence. The term "domestic terror" is about a state of intense fear related to the household or family. This is what battered women are living with. This is what children are growing up with. This is what enables the abuser to coerce and control his/her partner and children.

It is happening in at least 1 in 5 families in our faith communities. You may not see black eyes, broken legs, cuts and bruises very often. So, you may convince yourself that this is someone else's problem. It isn't.

There are people sitting in worship every week who are living with domestic terror. There are others who have escaped. And, there are those who use domestic terror to enforce their will.

What do our faith communities have to say about this tragic fact of life? Or, more often, what do they not say?

Either by silence or instruction, the church has too often communicated to battered women that they should stay in abusive relationships, "try to be better wives," and/or "forgive and forget." To batterers, this has communicated that their efforts to control their wives or girlfriends are justified, because women are to be subject to men in all things. Men have been permitted to "discipline" their wives and their children, all for the "good of the family." Our history is filled with examples of justification of abuse by men: church fathers, like Martin Luther, who unapologetically describe their own physical violence towards their wives, or Pope John Paul II, who considered canonizing a woman because she remained in an abusive marriage. The stated purpose in all of this has been preservation of marriage and the family -- at any cost, even the well being of women and children.



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A news story in the *Los Angeles Times* reported that a convicted wife abuser tried to use the First Amendment protection of his religious beliefs to support his right to abuse his wife. Ramiro Espinosa believed that the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church gave him the right to have sex with his wife whenever he chose, because the marriage vows they exchanged signaled her consent to have sex with him; and, once given, this consent was somehow permanent. Espinosa, 54, seemed to think that breaking into his wife's locked room, slapping her and ripping her clothes was legitimate foreplay. Thankfully, this time the court was not swayed by this defense.

This is yet another tragic example of the appeal to church doctrine to justify wife abuse. Church leaders rejected Espinosa's argument, saying that Catholic doctrine teaches that sex should be part of a loving relationship. In the subsequent silence there is little recognition of the harm done to the woman (which is a sin) and of the need to call the husband to account for his abusive behavior. Mr. Espinosa's understanding of his rights as a husband is evidence of the inadequacy of traditional Christian teach-

ing on sexual ethics and marriage.

To illustrate how religious values are shaping the discussion of child abuse in the secular setting, consider a call we received from the local Child Protective Service office:

“We are dealing with a father who beats his kids.

We’ve tried to explain to him that he can’t do this, that it’s against the law, not good for his kids, etc.

His reply to us is, ‘What do you mean I can’t beat my child? I’m a Christian.’ What do we say now?”

Good question. Any church that distorts scripture (such as “Spare the rod and spoil the child.”) to justify the abuse of children must do so in contradiction to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels: “*Let the little children come to me and do not forbid them, for to these belongs the kingdom of God.*”

The result has been battered women and abused children who have been abandoned by their faith communities, shamed and guilt-tripped as well as abusers who have had license to continue their abusive behavior. The final consequence of all of this has been the destruction of families and individuals, and an erosion of people’s trust in their religious institutions.

Our religious institutions have a profound impact on the social norms of our communities. Religious leaders, for better or worse, help shape our society’s understandings of experience. The support of our religious communities in times of crisis is essential. The leadership of our churches is shaping our social norms - for better or for worse.

For those of us in the Christian community, the history of the western tradition of church and law are too often part of the problem for women and children in families. Regarding women and children as chattel in the family is still a dominant theme operating just below the surface of much of the public discourse on these issues. We have to look harder to find the values in our tradition that support us in seeking an end to domestic terror.

Church teaching on topics such as marriage and family, divorce, and forgiveness must take account of the circumstances that battered and abused women face every day. Otherwise, the church actually can have adverse effects, and become a major roadblock to ending such violence and bringing forth healing and justice.

What stories, scriptures, or images convey real family values to support family health and wellbeing?

An example from the Navaho people comes with their stories about *Changing Woman and the Sun*. The Sun is courting Changing Woman, and she is not particularly impressed by his attentions. Finally, she lays down the parameters:

“Remember, as different as we are, you and I, we are of one spirit. As dissimilar as we are, you and I, we are of equal worth. As unlike as you and I are, there must always be solidarity between the two of us. Unlike each other as you and I are, there can be no harmony in the universe as

Lutherans have a rich and varied history of working to address important societal issues with creativity, passion, and purpose.

long as there is no harmony between us. If there is to be such harmony, my requests must matter to you. My needs are as important to me as yours are to you. My whims count as much as yours do. My fidelity to you is measured by your loyalty to me. My response to your needs is to reflect the way you respond to mine. There is to be nothing more coming from me to you than there is from you to me. There is to be nothing less.”

This story teaches gender equality in relationship and stands in stark contrast to what Mr. Espinoza learned from his church.

So, the challenge for us as religious leaders is, in concert with advocates and other community resources, to lead our people. It is our job to teach, preach, and pray for the safety of victims and accountability for abusers.

It is our job to make justice in the midst of injustice and oppression. And, in doing these things in response to domestic violence, we are faithful to our values and religious teaching.

We are trying to find ways to create new community norms. Part of our problem these days is that in U.S. society, we don’t have a consensus that women and children should be free from bodily harm and that those who abuse them should be held accountable. If we as Christians act as if we believe that women and children have a right to be free from bodily harm and that those who abuse them should be held accountable, this will go a long way toward creating a new norm of zero tolerance for domestic terror.

Ending domestic terror is not an easy agenda. It is an agenda that takes us against the current. So it is sometimes easy to despair, to lose sight of our accomplishments, to feel overwhelmed by the minutiae of administration and forget what we are trying to do. How do we sustain ourselves in these efforts?

We need to celebrate small feats, remember that tomorrow is another day, and pray -- a lot. May we be sustained by the witness of courage and hope that we experience from those people who have resisted partner violence, who have gotten away, who have managed to piece their lives back together; and by the witness of adult survivors of abuse in families who have found healing and restoration.

Remember:

The way things are is not the way they have to be.
Do not accept it because your mother did.
Perhaps she did what she had to do then.

Do not follow unquestioning in your father's
foot steps.

He may have chosen a path you do not want.
You must do what you can do now.
You must choose for yourself.

Someday sexuality will be celebrated and shared as
God's gift by all people.
Someday equality will be an erotic experience and
violence will be abhorred.
Someday people will choose one another freely and
rejoice in their choosing.

That day is within our reach.
We need not wait for another life, another
incarnation, or another generation.
In the daily-ness of our lives, with those we love,
we can do this differently.¹

You can lead the way to authentic healing and change.
There is a great need for prevention education that combines secular information with age-appropriate discussion of scriptural teachings, ethical and religious values, and spiritual guidance/help for victims and survivors.

Congregational responses to incidents of domestic violence and child abuse typically focus on healing from the incident rather than preventing its recurrence. Prevention is made possible when it is taught in schools, in faith communities, and in the family. Religious leaders, both lay and clergy, who make it known that they are aware of the nature and extent of violence and abuse are more readily approached by victims, other family members, and, at times, even the perpetrators. Violence and abuse will only end when it is no longer a secret tolerated by a community and when there is support for victims and accountability for abusers.

Lutherans have a rich and varied history of working to address important societal issues with creativity, passion and purpose. They have accomplished this by working on a personal level with neighbors, within the larger faith community, and in collaboration with all who are committed to helping people find solutions to issues facing society.

The Lutheran Community Foundation (LCF) is part of this tradition. Together with donors and community

partners, the Foundation is addressing an epidemic that touches all of us directly or indirectly— family violence. The LCF believes that family violence is an issue for people of faith, and that faith needs to be part of the solution. It's an issue where people of faith can work together in common purpose. The LCF is a faith-based community foundation working nationally to help people give to the causes that matter in order to achieve effective, positive and lasting change throughout our community.

The Lutheran Community Foundation's **Ending Family Violence Initiative** was created to inspire and refocus the movement within our faith community to address domestic and sexual violence. The ELCA has a social policy resolution on Violence Against Women and a social statement on Community Violence. Both speak out against violence and discrimination against women, children and families while encouraging local congregations and communities to make their spaces safe for all. Together with FaithTrust Institute and the ELCA Justice for Women program, the LCF is working to help Lutheran rostered leaders and lay leaders understand the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence, and better equip them to respond to victims/survivors and abusers. This partnership is supported and funded by the Lutheran Community Foundation. Believing that all people are created in the image of God, this collaboration envisions a society in which homes, families, and churches are places of peace, mutual respect, and nonviolence; where physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual safety are experienced by every person.

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Safe and Healthy Congregations and Families is the initiative's first project, with a goal to prepare clergy and lay leadership to intervene in and prevent family violence, as well as create safe congregations and facilities. The project involved both in-person and on-line training.

To date, four **Safe and Healthy Congregations and Families** workshops have taken place from 2009 - 2012, with another to be scheduled in 2014. The in-person training workshop for congregational teams is designed to help team members establish a foundational understanding of domestic violence and to address the components

¹ Fortune, Marie. *Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest Of Us*. Continuum, 1995, p. 142

of a faithful response to domestic violence. Members of congregational teams are trained in the areas of pastoral care, healthy teen relationships, child abuse prevention, and safe congregations. The training also provides congregations with tools and strategies for implementation, including ongoing support and opportunities for skill building and best practice.

Through these workshops, 315 people from 88 ELCA congregations across the country were trained and returned home to prepare their congregations to be safe places for the most vulnerable. Participant feedback indicates very high satisfaction with the training and high energy as they determine their next steps as a congregation. The LCF is committed to making this training available to as many congregations as possible.

The LCF further supports continuing education with an on-line training series of FaithTrust Institute webinars available to Lutheran congregations and faith team leaders to address issues surrounding domestic violence.

The web-based training sessions are conducted monthly with a live trainer presenting and hosting a Q&A on applicable topics, helping learners understand the dynamics of violence and abuse, and better equipping learners on best practice. Sessions are recorded and available on demand at www.faithtrustinstitute.org. Topics include:

- Elder Abuse: When Caregivers Abuse and How Faith Leaders Can Help
- What Batterers Need from Their Clergy and Congregations
- Domestic Violence 101 for Christian Clergy
- Faith Issues for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse: What You Need to Know
- Faith Issues for Survivors of Domestic Violence: What You Need to Know
- What to Do if a Registered Sex Offender Comes to Your Church
- Human Trafficking: What You Need to Know
- Teen Dating Violence: What Every Parent Needs to Know
- Child Abuse and Mandatory Reporting for Faith Leaders
- Kids Exposed to Domestic Violence: How Can Faith Leaders Respond?
- Roundtable: Community Based Intervention for Batterers and the Role of Faith Communities
- Safe Congregations and Risk Reduction: A Starter Kit
- Military Sexual Assault: The Role of Chaplains
- Sex Offenders in Your Congregation: Policies and Procedures
- Violence, Trauma, and Forgiveness: What Does it Really Mean?

- Healing from Abuse: Resources for Survivors
- Walking Together: Working with Women from Diverse Religious Traditions
- Keeping the Faith: Accountability for Perpetrators

FaithTrust Institute

FaithTrust Institute was founded in 1977 to mobilize the religious community for active involvement in the prevention of domestic violence and sexual abuse. FaithTrust Institute has emerged as the only national, multifaith organization working with the faith community on these issues, having reached well over 220,000 clergy and lay leaders in the past 35 years.

FaithTrust Institute responds to the voices of women and children in pain from abuse. Their mission is to involve the faith community and local advocates in effectively taking action to end domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, and sexual assault, and to work toward prevention of all forms of abuse within families, congregations and communities. FaithTrust Institute asks faith communities to provide spiritual and material support for victims, call offenders to account, and teach prevention in all areas of religious life.

Through training, FaithTrust Institute provides tools for effective pastoral care to victims, offenders, and their families; assists in the implementation of prevention strategies and materials for congregations and denominations; and promotes institutional policies and procedures that address sexual and domestic violence in an informed, sensitive, and responsive manner.

For more information about the Ending Family Violence Initiative, contact Susan Hayes, LCF

For more information about FaithTrust Institute visit www.faithtrustinstitute.org or contact Jane Fredricksen, Executive Director at 206-634-1903.

Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune is the Founder and Senior Analyst at FaithTrust Institute. Ordained in the United Church of Christ in 1976, she is a pastor, educator, author and theologian. Her books include: Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse, Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited, and Is Nothing Sacred?

Chris Andersen has served as the Lutheran Community Foundation's executive director since its inception in 1995. In this time, donor gifts have grown to more than \$800 million, with \$10 million distributed annually to thousands of charities and causes worldwide. Chris has also assisted in the development of six nonprofits and has served on the board of several local and national nonprofits.

The Healing Center: Addressing Domestic Violence through a Lutheran Social Ministry Organization

Domestic violence, also known as Intimate Partner Violence, is the actual or threatened physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, verbal, spiritual and economic abuse that impairs the ability of the abused person to function in a self-determining and healthy way.

Intimate Partner Violence may cause the person to be afraid for their lives. It is a pattern of coercive behavior, the psychological motivation being to establish and maintain power and control. Domestic violence does not discriminate age, gender, social economic, educational background, religion, or race. Intimate Partner Violence is a community and church issue that affects one in every four women.

- An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year.
- 85% of domestic violence victims are women.
- Historically, females have been most often victimized by someone they knew.
- Females who are 20-24 years of age are at the greatest risk of nonfatal intimate partner violence.
- Most cases of domestic violence are never reported to the police.
- Nearly 7.8 million women have been raped by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.
- While the vast majority of victims are women, there is some evidence that men are also abused.

Victims of Intimate Partner Violence are often frightened and ashamed. They may be afraid to tell someone about the abuse. They may believe the myth about battering and abuse that our society reinforces – that the victim is to blame. Victims of Intimate Partner Violence often stay because they feel trapped. They may have nowhere to go, no money to get them to a safe place or to pay for basic necessities, such as food and clothing, due to economic abuse. Many women feel trapped by society's views about marriage and family. They may believe that their situation is just what normal family life is supposed to be like, or that their children need two parents even if one is abusive. Many believe the abuse will stop,



Intimate Partner Violence is a community and church issue that affects one in every four women.

or that the abuser will change. Some do not want to get their partner in trouble with the law. Others believe that the police won't help. Many women stay because they fear for their lives; statistics have shown that separation can increase the risk of violence and often leads to stalking, harassment, retaliation and fatal violence.

The Healing Center, also known as The Trinity Healing Center Inc., is a nonprofit, ELCA-affiliated agency dedi-

cated to intervention and prevention of family violence and abuse, valuing the diversity of faith, culture and personal experience. The Healing Center was created in 2000 in response to the growing need to serve those who are affected by intimate partner violence and who suffer in silence.

At the Healing Center, we seek to empower families to live safe and healthy lives, utilizing a holistic approach. We serve as a beacon of light for persons impacted by domestic violence. The Healing Center helps families affected by intimate partner violence by informing them of their options and steps towards healing and self-sufficiency. Reaching out to different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, we believe we can help to reduce family violence in our community.

In partnership with the Kings County District Attorney's Office, The Healing Center provides monthly clergy workshops and training to raise community awareness and offer alternative solutions in relation to intimate partner and family violence. We offer educational workshops at local schools and churches, empowerment support groups - which provide individual and group sessions to encourage self-esteem - and help clients understand the dynamics of violence and the cycle of abuse in their lives. In 2009, a new project was created with a grant from the Women of the ELCA called *The Daughters of the Lotus*, for teenage girls who witness and are victimized by violence in the home, and in response to the growing epidemic of teen-dating violence. The program encourages positive self-image and goals development through creative activities and discussion in a comfortable and secure environment.

At the heart of our mission is a set of core values that ground the ministry of The Healing Center :

- we work within the worldview of the individuals served.
- we believe in meeting our clients where they are by respecting their personal lifestyle and faith beliefs.
- we respect and value the diversity of each individual.
- we walk and partner with those we serve on the journey to healing.
- we address the holistic needs of individuals—emotional, spiritual, physical and mental.

At the Healing Center, we address domestic violence from a multidisciplinary perspective - social, cultural and spiritual. In all instances, we believe the individual, validate her or his feelings, emphasize safe choices, and affirm that the individual is not to blame. We respect, support and empower by presenting hope, choices and options available to them.

The women who come to The Healing Center find a safe place in the community where they can share their experiences, where they are not judged and are respected,

where they are valued and their stories believed, creating security and hope in their lives. Faith plays an important role for many of the women who come to the center. They are searching for spiritual meaning in the midst of the violence they are experiencing. Many of the women go to their religious leaders seeking answers, guidance and help. They pray the abuse will stop, pray in the hopes their spouse/partners will change. Many believe if they themselves change, the violence will cease. Many victims

Many victims struggle with their faith, asking why God is letting the violence happen and if God is really there for them.

struggle with their faith, asking why God is letting the violence happen and if God is really there for them. This can be challenging for the victim, especially when the batterer has spiritually abused them by telling them God does not hear them or that there is no God, and ridicules them for their faith.

1 Give ear to my prayer, O God; do not hide yourself from my supplication. 2 Attend to me, and answer me; I am troubled in my complaint. I am distraught 3 by the noise of the enemy, because of the clamor of the wicked. For they bring trouble upon me, and in anger they cherish enmity against me. 4 My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me. 5 Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me. 6 And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; 7 truly, I would flee far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; 8 I would hurry to find a shelter for myself from the raging wind and tempest.....16 But I call upon God, and the Lord will save me.....My companion laid hands on a friend and violated a covenant with me 21 with speech smoother than butter, but with a heart set on war; with words that were softer than oil, but in fact were drawn swords. 22 Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you.....I will trust in you.

Psalm 55 (NRSV), selected verses.

When a woman goes to a faith leader for help and the faith leader makes light of her story, she may feel obligated to stay in the abusive relationship. Victims who go to their pastors need to know that it is safe to do so. This means that the confidentiality in which the victim shares her story is received in sacred trust, ensuring that her safety is not compromised. The faith leader needs to listen

and connect her to the resources she needs. Many pastors are conflicted when a batterer is a church member or church leader. Many are concerned with issues of divorce and separation, feeling that it is not good for families to separate. These are not the concerns with which the victim needs to be burdened. She is looking to her pastor to believe her and to assure her that the abuse was not her fault. She needs to know she is not alone, that the church community and its leadership will stand with her. We need to see her safety as a theological response. This means religious leaders help connect the victim with the resources she needs, validate her story, pray with her and supportively journey with her. No one deserves to be intimidated, beaten or threatened. There is no excuse for Intimate Partner Violence and, indeed, it is not part of “God’s plan” that anyone be abused.

Resource List

The following books are recommended for pastoral care people who wish to learn more about domestic violence.

- Adams, J Carol: 1994 *Woman-Battering* Augsburg Fortress
- Miles, Al. 2000. *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs To Know*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress Publications.
- *Ministry with the Abused*: copyright 2010 ELCA/ELCIC
- Pellauer, Mary PH.D *Lutheran Theology Facing Sexual and Domestic Violence*, ELCA
- Murphy, Nancy. 2003. *God’s Reconciling Love: A Pastor’s Handbook on Domestic Violence*. Seattle, Wash.: Faith Trust Institute.
- Tjaden, Patricia & Thoennes, Nancy. National Institute of Justice and the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, “Extent, Nature and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey,” (2000).
- *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*. 2003. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control. Atlanta, GA.

[The victim] needs to know she is not alone, that the church community and its leadership will stand with her.

- Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *Intimate Partner Violence*, 1993-2001, February 2003.
- U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Criminal Victimization, 2005,” September 2006.
- U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Intimate Partner Violence in the United States,” December 2006.
- Frieze, I.H., Browne, A. (1989) “Violence in Marriage.” In L.E. Ohlin & M. H. Tonry (eds.) *Family Violence*. Chicago.

Antonia Clemente, Cofounder/Executive Director of The Healing Center, has extensive experience working with the Latino community. She is frequently invited to speak at schools, churches and community organizations. Antonia is passionate about being a catalyst for change and envisions the eradication of family violence in the community and throughout the global community. Antonia is married, has two sons, attended CUNY College of Staten Island, completed a two-year certification program in Pastoral Care Studies with the Blanton Peale Institute in New York and a one-year residency in Clinical Pastoral Education at Long Island College Hospital. She is a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church and has served on the Justice for Women Consulting Committee for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Her work has been featured in the documentary film, “What Harm Is It to Be a Woman” and “I BELIEVE YOU: Faith’s Response to Intimate Partner Violence.” In 2013, The Healing Center became an affiliated social ministry organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

My Story

I was born in the Dominican Republic. I came to the United States of America when I was eleven years old.

In the Dominican Republic, I lived in San Pedro De Macoris with my paternal grandmother and my father, surrounded by many cousins. One day, my maternal grandmother decided to bring me to the United States for a better opportunity.

Upon arriving, I met my mother for the first time ever. It felt weird, and it was not what I imagined. I moved out of my mother's house at age fifteen or sixteen to be with a man ten years older than me. Within that relationship, I lived many episodes of domestic violence, leaving me with many internal and external scars. Four boys were born.

You name domestic violence, and I LIVED IT. Upon high school graduation, I decided to study to become a medical assistant. On June 21, 2001, I was hired as a Medical Assistant at Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn, NY.

Did I mention domestic violence above? Yes, indeed I did, but I did not know what the term meant until I started working at Lutheran. It was not until a domestic violence conference, given about two to three years after I started working here, that I understood and recognized domestic violence for what it really is.

I thought that the life I lived with my ex-husband was normal. I thought that maybe part of it was in my head, that I was the one with the problem, and he was just trying to help. When I attended the domestic violence conference and the speaker began to talk about what it meant to be a victim, how the mind of the abuser functions and how to recognize it, I felt as if she actually knew me and my situation. I felt as if the training was designed for me, and all her words were directed to me. I felt emotional, angry, surprised, hurt, attacked, and really confused, as well as a really strange sensation of wanting to pass out. I pulled myself together and held everything in—since I was already good at that. After the training was done, I approached the trainer and I didn't have to say anything; she already knew. She gave me some additional information, and I began to wake up.

Prior to the training, I had a different thought about my life. After the training, I learned how to prepare myself for the escape, that my relationship was not normal. I was in danger. I was putting my children and my life at risk. I learned to plan; I became strong and, most importantly, I began to speak about my situation and seek help.

About eight months to a year later of planning, I felt



“I lived many episodes of domestic violence, leaving me with many internal and external scars.”

ready to move out. I managed to save enough money for an apartment. I got the apartment from one of the nurses at Lutheran to whom I confided my situation. She decided to rent me the place.

The special date came. I was ready, I was strong, but as I was opening the door to leave, my ex-husband (who I thought was working) opened the door to come in. I got caught. What a horrible night! It was more than what I can write in this essay. In short, I was tied up in a dark room for hours, but I am alive. When I was allowed to come out, my ex-husband apologized; he asked for me not to leave and for us to fix things. I accepted. He went out convinced that I was not going to leave him, but as soon as I knew he was far away I left him and never returned. I'm alive.

I spoke to my supervisor about my situation, and I was provided with a lot of support. My kids and I lived together for almost a year, when my ex-husband decided to

attack again. He told me that I had three weeks to come back to him or he was going to hit me where it hurt. I told him to do what he needed to do. I was petrified. I thought that he was going to kill me.

My co-workers thought the same. Some of my co-workers would guard the hospital exits to make sure that he was not around and I could go home. I became really depressed. I felt scared for them—I didn't want anyone to get hurt because of me. My co-workers did not leave me alone, and continued to be supportive.

The battle began, and my ex-husband gave me hell through the court system, fighting me for the children. My endeavors in the court system were ugly and always had negative outcomes. My depression was big; I was sick all the time with asthma. I wanted to give up, but an inner strength took over me and I decided to fight. I learned about the system that took my abuse for granted because it was under-reported. I enrolled myself in school and decided to study Criminal Justice. In June of 2007, I received my Associate degree in Criminal Justice. In May of 2009, I received my Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from Saint Joseph's College. In May of 2012, I received my Master of Arts in Criminology and Justice, Sociology and Anthropology from Saint John's University.

In April, 2013, I self-published my first book of poems, called Numb Reflection of Me, giving light to some of my experiences, including a "tribute" to domestic violence. I started at Lutheran HealthCare as a medical assistant, then was a Patient Centered Medical Home Advocate, and today I am a care manager, working as a part of the Lutheran Health Home Case Management Program. In November, 2014, I will be receiving my Master of Science in Forensic Psychology, focusing on Community Psychology.

"....the best is yet to come."

I am thankful to God for being part of the Lutheran HealthCare family. I hope to one day collaborate with the Center, focusing on domestic violence and community awareness.

My name is Sandra Silvestre, and the best is yet to come.

Sandra Silvestre was born in the Dominican Republic. She wrote her first poem at the age of twelve when she realized that writing poetry was an easier way of expressing her emotions. Since that time, Sandra's writing has improved, as well as her ways of balancing and expressing matters of the heart. She holds an advanced degree in Criminology and Justice from Saint John's University. In 2014, she will hold another advanced degree in Forensic Psychology/Community Psychology. Sandra works at Lutheran HealthCare, Brooklyn, NY as part of a Case Management Team. She also teaches English as a second language in collaboration with her church in an effort to create community improvement. Sandra is the author of a little book of poems, entitled "Numb Reflection of Me". She is a mother of four beautiful boys. She is a Brooklyn girl and a domestic violence survivor. Sandra loves watching Criminal Minds, Dexter, and Flashpoint. She also loves 80's music, Gospel music, and eating apple pie 'a la mode'.

We are the Survivors: Parents of Murdered Children

No one wants to belong to an organization of which I'm a member -- Parents of Murdered Children (POMC).

For 35 years, people have heard about us and have come to find help in grappling with their status as survivors of victims of homicide. Many chaplains, grief counselors and pastors have been involved with POMC over the years. Much of what we do can be found on our web page -- www.pomc.org -- and I invite you to check us out.

In this article I'll provide some background on the organization, how we started, what we have in common with others who grieve the death of those they love, and what makes our grief processes a little different. Then, we'll look at POMC's mission and vision.

We call ourselves survivors; but often, at least at first, we did not want to survive and did not know how we could survive. It was too painful, too grief-filled, too paralyzing. We were informed that someone close to us had died and that now there was one less in our close or extended families or circle of friends. Like others, we came to experience grieving as a process.

Readers of this journal know plenty about the grieving process. Pastoral ministry, hospital and military chaplaincy, and recognized/affiliated social ministry organizations provide many arenas for dealing with tragedy and suffering. Included here is a chart based upon the findings of Dr. Glen Davidson, setting forth what you undoubtedly already recognize.¹ What society, does not recognize, however, is how the grieving process is disrupted, intensified, and prolonged for many survivors of homicide victims.

We were thrown into the mourning process just as others who survive the death of parents, siblings, and friends. Unlike others, however, surviving for most of us does



*We call ourselves survivors; but often,
at least at first, we did not want to
survive and did not know how
we could survive.*

¹. Davidson was Professor and Chairman of Medical Humanities, Professor of Psychiatry, and Chief of Thanatology at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. Although he first presented the results of his study in 1980, they have been confirmed many times since. The chart is based upon his findings. Survivors of a homicide death may find that trials and news coverage may prolong the first three stages of mourning. Each phase may differ significantly for each individual. Davidson also said that the reorientation for children may stretch into adulthood, that it may take that long to put their loss in place for themselves. He further emphasized the importance of self-help groups in working through the loss.

not mean getting out alive from a dangerous physical or medical situation. Rather, it refers to those who are affected by intentionally inflicted violence. We are survivors of murder victims.

That is what led to the first POMC meeting in our living room in 1978, two weeks before Christmas, and almost three months after our daughter, Lisa, was murdered by an ex-boyfriend. We called ourselves what we were; no

guessing or explaining how our children died. We did not intend to shock, but to keep ourselves focused, to reduce our denial.

Unlike others introduced into mourning, our grief involved additional factors: betrayal, violence, hatred, and rage against someone we loved. But more than that, involvement of the media and the criminal justice systems protracted and intensified our grief and mourning.

And, like so many in our death-denying culture, we saw that speaking of the tragedy made many uncomfortable.

Public attitudes expect rapid recovery from the shock and awe of murder. Not that murder isn't mentioned, but only as news reports about it. It's a choice entertainment theme -- a real block buster. Movies, TV and radio programs, best seller books, magazines and operas are all so much based upon our fascination with murder. But, discussion of murder's effects upon survivors of homicide victims -- that was a no-no. It was as if our loved ones never had existed.

Of course, survivors knew that people avoided the subject, and why. We also were discovering strong moods and feelings within us about all that was involved in this. So, we adopted a motto from Shakespeare's Macbeth: "Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the overwrought heart and bids it break". That really captured it for us. When we survivors got together, we could give 'Sorrow Words'.

Behavioral characteristics often overlap during mourning, as one finds in Dr. Glen Davidson's typology:

Four Phases of Bereavement

SHOCK AND NUMBNESS

Characteristics most intense during first 2 weeks:

- attention span short
- concentration difficult
- decision-making impaired
- stunned, disbelief
- functioning impeded
- denial
- time confusion
- failure to accept reality

SEARCHING AND YEARNING

Characteristics dominant 2nd week -- 4th month:

- sensitive to stimuli
- anger, guilt, dreams
- restless, impatient
- double meaning
- testing what is real
- irritability, resentment, bitterness
- weight gain or loss
- sleep difficulties
- preoccupation with the deceased

- time confusion
- palpitations, headaches, blurred vision
- sighing
- lack of strength
- perception confirmation is the "key"

DISORIENTATION

Characteristics dominant 5th - 9th month:

- thinking "I'm going crazy"
- social withdrawal
- disorganized
- forgetful
- awareness of reality
- depressed
- guilt
- insomnia
- anorexia
- weight gain or loss
- sense of failure
- sadness
- exhaustion
- difficulty in concentration
- feels ill
- lack of energy

REORGANIZATION/RESOLUTION

- Characteristics dominant 18th -- 24th month:
- sense of release
- renewed energy
- able to make decisions easier
- eating and sleeping habits re-established
- able to laugh and smile again
- re-investing emotionally

Background

National murder rates rose to new heights in the 1970s, cresting in 1980 with more than 20,000 murders. The '80s decade turned national attention to violent crime, leniency in sentencing, and the death penalty. In Atlanta, from July 1979 to December 1980, 17 African-American children were murdered. In December 1980, the ex-Beatle John Lennon was gunned down in New York City. In 1981, during the January-March murder trial of the murderer, six more were slain (two per month). And, on March 30, John Hinckley tried to assassinate President Reagan, killed a Secret Service agent, and wounded two others.

From December 1978 through 1980, POMC grew locally in Cincinnati, met monthly, garnered notice from local media outlets, picked up momentum in its outreach to survivors, and began reaching survivors beyond the city limits. In December 1980, two years after our first meeting, a second POMC group formed in Racine, Wis. That

development coincided with the rising tide of murder.

Our monthly meetings had showed us that the attitudes, reactions, problems, and needs of survivors of homicide victims were not well known by the general public, nor by various professionals, nor by those working in law enforcement and in the criminal justice system. That also was true for professionals in social service, religion, medicine, psychology, and psychiatry.

National media turned for answers and understanding to an organization called (you guessed it) Parents Of Murdered Children.² That year, three national TV shows, three national magazines, and dozens of regional and local radio talk shows, feature articles, and TV appearances featured POMC. POMC officially started in 1981 with two chapters in Cincinnati and Racine. By May, chapters started up in five more cities, with a total of 20 before the year was out. Soon we discovered that others besides parents needed support surviving their loss. So, we added "And Other Survivors of Homicide Victims" to our name. Still, we continued to identify ourselves as POMC.

Our meetings surfaced many problems common to survivor's experience. Some of the top issues:

1. Seeming indifference of the community, especially the police, to the plight of murder victim survivors.
2. Isolation and helplessness in a world that is seen as hostile and uncaring, and that frequently blames the victim.
3. Growing public sympathy for perpetrators of crimes of passion (Jean Harris, etc.)
4. Disparities in the judicial system (frequently, punishments for property crimes are as great as, or greater than, the crime of taking a human life.)
5. Sensational and/or inaccurate media coverage.
6. Financial burden of hiring private investigators, etc., when they feel that law enforcement officers are not doing an adequate job, or when there are too many unanswered questions.
7. Anger over a plea bargain arrangement.
8. Outrage over the leniency of the murderer's sentence.
9. Frustration at not being allowed inside the courtroom at the time of trial.
10. The memory of a mutilated body at the morgue.
11. Lack of information as to what is going on.
12. Unanswered questions about the crime and the criminal system (Why is the killer on bail, walking the streets, after he has confessed to the crime? Why was the confession thrown out? Why do they keep postponing the trial and not letting us know?, etc.).

13. Feeling that the murderer, if found, gets help; but, as parents of a murdered child, you do not have any rights.
14. Getting back the personal effects of a murder victim after the trial is over, even those which are not essential to the trial.

What society does not recognize is how the grieving process is disrupted, intensified, and prolonged for many survivors of homicide victims.

The Question of Meaning

So many questions survivors ask boil down to humanity's age-old question, "Why"? Recently, the media quoted Californian Scott Minicelli: "I'll say to myself every day, why, why, why? But there is no why". Everybody who belongs to this organization [POMC] will ask that question forever. And yet, they know there isn't an answer.

Pat Ferrell of Los Gatos, California, another POMC questioner, commented about her 20-year-old son, Mark: "If I could not make something good come out of Mark's death, I don't think I would have made it".

My wife, Charlotte, said this to a POMC conference audience: "It is my very strong personal belief that all of life's experiences should be put to some use; and if they aren't, then they are being wasted. I do not want all the pain and suffering of living through Lisa's death to be wasted".

This is language worthy of Viktor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, who found the quest for meaning the most important factor in helping death camp prisoners survive the treatment of the Nazi regime. When no answer comes to the question, Why?, we still look for answers.

From the cross, Jesus asked, "Why have you forsaken me"? No answer. His disciples spent years searching the Hebrew Bible for an answer. And the results of their Spirit-led findings are the message of the New Testament.

There is a teaching of the famous psychiatrist, Carl Jung, that helps cast this in psychological language. Jung saw the sea as a symbol of the unconscious, that realm below human consciousness, where ideas common to humanity are found. From that depth, there comes the energy to face great challenges in life. And, as the subterranean surge thrusts upward into our conscious awareness, we want to do something to relieve others of the same suffering, to make the deaths of our loved ones mean some-

2. Books setting forth the POMC survivor experience: *What Murder Leaves Behind*, by Doug Magee, 1983. *Beyond Endurance*, by Ronald J. Knapp, 2nd edition 2005.

thing. So, we make visible those unseen inward energies.

But the search for the meaning of our loved ones' deaths can lead to other questions for survivors. Yvonne Pointer of Cleveland told of her 29-year-old hunt for her daughter's murderer, of her need to know why he had killed her daughter, Gloria. Last summer, he was arrested in another state and brought back to Ohio. She told the Cleveland Plain Dealer, "Even with the arrest, it still leaves so many questions in my mind that are still not being answered, that maybe only this person can answer". In a follow-up article, Pointer said, "My purpose was to find the person, for 29 years. Now you have this person. So what are you going to do now"? Her sister commented, "You don't have to pray for finding the killer now. Maybe you should pray to find yourself". Pointer wondered, "Where do you even start"?

Ultimately, we find we must start a new life and find "a new normal". Years ago, I read a poem about an American Indian father whose son had died. He went to a mountain to lament his son, wondering, "O my son, what is my life to me, now that you are departed? What, or who, am I without you"? This new normal forces us to see ourselves. Who are we now, what is our identity without our loved one(s) in our lives?

"Where do you even start", Pointer asked. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prayerful poem, "Who Am I?" captures so much of our experience, but he concludes his question with a commitment that many in POMC are not ready to make, "Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine"! Not Jesus' dying words, "Into Your hands I commit my spirit". However, many have made that commitment and struggle to understand how to do that as survivors.

Viewpoint: Theology or What?

In an article from Caring Connections several years ago, Dr. Phil Kuehnert noted the difference between counseling that is pastoral and Pastoral Counseling. POMC is a true melting pot of people with different experiences, beliefs, prejudices, and life orientations, dealing with life and death issues, fears and feelings. Much of what this self-help organization offers is pastoral counseling, what Kuehnert sees people like Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Phil, Dr. Laura, and Rush Limbaugh offering.

Let's look at a couple of theological issues often encountered in pastoral ministry, which are found in spades in POMC. One is forgiveness. Those with religious convictions may struggle with Jesus' command to forgive when it involves murder and his warning that not forgiving means not being forgiven ourselves. How can we forgive? Our natural response includes hatred and desires for revenge. Or, does forgiving mean feelings at all? Is it like the biblical agape, not a feeling but a matter of the will? Does this mean associating with the killer? What if the

So many questions survivors ask boil down to humanity's age-old question, 'Why?' When no answer comes to the question 'Why?', we still look for answers."

killer is a family member, a child, sibling, parent, spouse, relative? What about the disciples' response (to a different situation), "Who then can be saved"? Does Jesus' response, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" apply also to forgiving a murderer?

Even Jesus' own prayer for God to forgive his executioners seems to open itself to different responses. Murderers in the Old Testament were executed unforgiven. Talmudic scholars totally agreed. Jews, Gentiles and Romans alike thought forgiveness made justice impossible -- a whim of the court or judge. Modern thinking about Jewish attitudes toward forgiving murderers sees it as betrayal of the murder victim.³ Islamic attitudes are similar, if not identical. Much of Christianity and the larger society agrees. Many survivors agree.

Like many ministries involved in serving society, POMC offers and needs Christian involvement. People respond to caring persons of faith. Readers of this journal offer their ministries to survivors of all conditions. In our case, many murders occur in domestically violent settings. Perhaps when you help those who survive murder victims through their depths of mourning, we can help you learn what we need, and how pastoral counseling can open the door to Pastoral Counseling.

A second issue is how we regard God. Many survivors face inner turmoil they never imagined. Where was/ is God in all of this? Can a Christian hate God?⁴ Am I lost if I do? Does He will the murders of our loved ones? If so, how does that square with our understanding of

³ See the issue set forth by Simon Wiesenthal in *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, 1969, 1996. Essays by Christians, religious and non-religious Jews, and atheists respond to Wiesenthal's absolute refusal to offer forgiveness to a Nazi death camp guard who wanted forgiveness. Anne L. Buton, "The Forgiving Heart", *Caring Connections*, Fall 2009, 6-10, discusses forgiveness as a matter of the will. She discusses myths about forgiveness, makes a case for it, and outlines a process to achieve it. Similar ground, much more developed, is covered by Sidney B. and Suzanne Simon in *Forgiveness: How to Make Peace with Your Past and Get on with Your Life*. New York: Warner Communications Co., 1990.

⁴ *May I Hate God?*, Pierre Wolf, Paulist Press, 1979, is a gem for pastoral guidance in ministry with survivors.

Him as a God of love? Will we abandon God who has abandoned us? On and on the questions can come. We wonder, how can God be justified?

Readers of this journal know these questions and may themselves be conflicted. Beyond all rational pondering of possible responses, all we can offer, recommend, or believe, is what Jesus himself believed and did. He had heard, somehow, the claim of his Father, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased". But, on the cross he heard nothing from God, saw mostly only those who wished him dead or didn't care about his torment. Yet, in his dying, he trusted God, as he had trusted Him in his life.

Finally, all answers survivors seek finally come to this: In all extremities of life and death, when we find no answers to our cries, we choose to trust no one or thing, or we choose to trust God. Like a child finding comfort in a parent's reassurance, "there, there", that trust can help us find peace. Our message, our presence, our open hearts are what we can offer survivors. For many, that will help them -- and us -- find a new normal and new hope in life.

Through 35 Years

Since the 1970s, the victims movement has burgeoned. Dozens of city, state, and national victim service agencies have arisen to deal with the emotional debris violent death brings. Law enforcement has learned how better to interact with survivors. American courts have gradually come to accept the right of survivors to make a victim impact statement at the sentencing of those convicted of murder. Dozens of local groups have also arisen to support murder victim survivors. But, POMC was the only national organization. In recent years, a couple of differently oriented survivors groups have attained regional and national proportions.

Canada and the United States have national organizations of POMC. "Canadian Parents of Murdered Children and Survivors of Homicide Victims, Inc." formed in 2009. Its web page is www.cpomc.ca. The U.S. organiza-

tion is "The National Organization Of Parents Of Murdered Children, Inc." Its web page is www.pomc.org. The national newsletter, SURVIVORS, can be downloaded from its web page. POMC has held 27 annual, national conferences and helped find popular support for the congressionally appointed National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims on September 25. Its national theme song, "We Are the Survivors", ends with the cry, "hear our voice, we have learned to give 'Sorrow Words'."

Robert N. Hullinger is a retired LCMS clergyman, living in Cincinnati, Ohio. A 1958 graduate (M. Div.) of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., and 1969 graduate (Th. M.) of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, Cal., he served parishes in California, Ohio, and Kentucky, retiring in 1998. He was an LCMS commissioner to CORA (Commission of Religion in Appalachia) and editor of the LCMS Ohio District Newspaper for 20 years. Pastoral counseling has been one of his focuses in ministry. He was cofounder of a pastoral counseling center, a counselor in another, and counselor in the clergy and clergy couples-oriented LCMS Marriage and Family Counseling Program. He served as counselor to teens in several juvenile hall settings and a part-time hospital chaplain. Journalism was another focus, including founding and editing church newsletters and newspapers, reporter and editor for several newspapers, author of books, magazine, and newspaper articles. Upon his daughter's murder in 1978, he, his wife, and a Roman Catholic priest co-founded Parents Of Murdered Children, a self-help group to support those related to or close to a murder victim. He continues as editor of their newsletter.

What Three Lawyers Think Pastors Should Hear About Pastoral Counseling within an Environment of Violence within the Family

This article relates an online “conversation” among three lawyers who have experience in the practice of law, and also as judges. The purpose is to share their thoughts on the topic of pastoral counseling in an environment of violence within the family.

The reader is cautioned that every case is fact-dependent and that the laws of different jurisdictions vary, sometimes greatly. Nothing contained in this article should be construed as legal advice. The lawyer-participants' experience has been in the state of Illinois. References to types of cases and agencies reflect that environment. Where differences among states are known and seem significant, they are mentioned.

If violence within a family has yet to yield involvement with the legal system, then the pastoral counselor will have many fewer external considerations at play, but it certainly bears recollection that there is always potential for involvement with government agencies, or police, or courts when there has been violence within the family. Since the focus of the article is the lawyer perspective, this conversation largely relies upon experiences with legal proceedings and thoughts on implications those yield for pastoral counselors.

The “conversation” participants:

1. GREG is J.G. Townsend. He has been an attorney for over 38 years. He is a retired Illinois trial court judge who served for 25 years on the bench. His work as a lawyer has primarily been in general civil practice.

2. ANN is Ann A Einhorn. She has worked as an attorney on disability cases and done criminal defense and juvenile court work. She served as a county Public Defender. Ann is a retired trial court judge, having served more than 13 years on the bench. She has also taught in legal and judicial professional education programs.

3. JACK is John R. DeLaMar. He was in the private practice of law early in his career. He then served as an assistant state's attorney, prosecuting felony criminal cases for more than five years. Jack then served as a trial court judge for 23 years, 15 of which were spent presiding in juvenile court cases involving allegations of child neglect or abuse. After retiring from the bench, Jack served as a volunteer attorney with the Champaign County, Illinois Court Appointed



Among a pastoral counselor's key responsibilities will be to act as necessary to prevent harm to any family member.

Special Advocate program as an attorney for children and guardian ad litem in child abuse or dependency cases.

GREG: At the outset I want to thank my colleagues who have agreed to participate in this “conversation”

which provides thoughts from lawyers for consideration by those in pastoral ministry who find themselves counseling family members in the midst of family or domestic violence and abuse situations. An obvious starting point for a lawyer's analysis of what issues might exist would be whether or not violence within a family had reached the stage of involvement with the legal system. This would also seem to me to be an important screening determination to be made by a potential pastoral counselor. Whether or not there is involvement with courts, police or state agencies, I think an important caveat is that the pastor's initial step needs to be evaluating whether everyone appears to be in a safe situation. If they do not, then I submit attention to safety comes first.

JACK: Clearly, the counselor or therapist must establish at the outset of the counseling relationship that the number one goal is the safety of all family members, and that this goal is not subject to negotiation or compromise. Among a pastoral counselor's key responsibilities will be to act as necessary to prevent harm to any family member.

ANN: Resources to which a pastoral counselor can make referral to address safety issues will vary dramatically from congregation to congregation and from community to community, but clearly a safe environment for all family members comes first. I should add that a pastor would be wise to keep a list of community-wide resources that could be accessed. This list should include school personnel, counselors or psychologists who deal with family matters, and agencies that provide services including shelters or safe houses for those in need or in danger. Often there are community-training sessions available to broaden a pastor's familiarity with these resources. I cannot stress enough the need to recognize when the presenting issues require much more than a non-threatening discussion of problems within a family.

GREG: Once violence in a family surfaces outside the family unit, which presumably it has if a pastor has been contacted for counseling, the likelihood of legal involvement is pretty high, so let's consider some of the possible types of cases or involvements that might arise.

JACK: There are plenty. The person that is the victim of the abuse, if an adult, may obtain an order of protection against the perpetrator of the abuse that will bar or restrict contact by the perpetrator with the victim. If the victim of the abuse is a child or children, the non-offending parent may obtain an order of protection on behalf of the child or children seeking an order for temporary custody of the child or children and prohibiting or restricting contact by the abuser.

Also, a criminal prosecution may be initiated by the state's attorney against the alleged perpetrator of the abuse.

A case may be brought in juvenile court alleging abuse or neglect of the child or children, possibly seeking a court order for the removal of the child or children from one or both parents.

One of the parties to the marriage may seek dissolution of the marriage.

If the victim of the alleged abuse is a child or children and there is no non-abusing parent, or the non-abusing parent fails to act to protect the child or children, a relative may bring an action in the probate court asking the court to appoint the relative as the guardian and custodian of the child or children.

I cannot stress enough the need to recognize when the presenting issues require much more than a non-threatening discussion of problems within a family.

GREG: That is a thorough listing of possibilities, Jack. And while this is an Illinois list, I think most states will have similar options, although the names of the types of proceedings often vary.

ANN: While it is not a separate category of cases, pastoral counselors should be aware that in some jurisdictions divorce or child custody cases have their own court-imposed requirement for mediation, or at least attempts at it, before contested court hearings on the issues. At least in Illinois, in counties using these programs, the courts require the parties to use court-approved, trained mediators in that process.

GREG: Good point, Ann. And the mention of a mediation process, in which parties are aided in coming to agreements on issues, reminds that it is probably useful for pastoral counselors who may not be very familiar with the legal system to keep in mind that court proceedings are by design adversarial in nature. In trials and hearings, the process is built around the idea that one side wins and the other loses. Fortunately, there is a realization that in many types of cases, particularly involving children, adversarial proceedings have many downsides. When children are involved, "the best interests of the child" is often a standard applied by courts to make decisions. But

prosecutors, defense lawyers, police, and many of the players in the justice system are bound by rules and attitudes shaped in the adversarial “one side wins, the other side loses” environment of a contested trial. When there is police or court involvement, almost all of those working in the system have ethical obligations to one side or another in this adversarial legal system. Awareness of that fact often helps pastors to avoid problems and to understand what people may be experiencing.

ANN: Yes, the adversarial nature of the proceedings is a good point to emphasize. We judges and lawyers know from experience how few “civilians” recognize the repercussions that can flow from this environment.

GREG: In Illinois there are sometimes participants in juvenile cases who have a unique role in the otherwise adversarial process between the parties. One of these is a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). This is frequently a volunteer attorney appointed by the court in a case that involves the interest of a child. Judges often put great weight on the opinion of a GAL and their understanding of a child’s best interest. Many judges have a good working relationship with specific GALs, and trust their insights. The GALs’ function is to make their own recommendations to the judge on what is in the best interests of the child whose interests they are appointed to protect. There are also organizations such as Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), a not-for-profit organization that recruits, trains, and monitors volunteers who will advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children. CASA volunteers are court-appointed and work through the juvenile court system, advocating prompt delivery of services and making independent recommendations to the court concerning the child’s best interests.

ANN: For both GALs and CASAs, I would emphasize that their allegiance is designed to be to the child(ren), not to the parent(s). I am reminded that over the years, I saw a number of GALs and CASAs form strong bonds with the parent as well as with the children. The parents would then feel betrayed when the GAL or CASA didn’t take the parental side on contested issues.

GREG: With the variety of possible cases when there is legal system involvement, how does a pastoral counselor learn about the legal situation of the family or family member seeking to engage in counseling?

JACK: The counselor really does need to know what the legal environment is. For example, if the family is the subject of a child welfare agency (in Illinois, the Department of Children and Family Services, or DCFS) investigation, an essential and immediate goal may be

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keeping children out of foster care and in the custody of a non-offending parent. If that is the situation, an immediate task for the counselor may be to learn what the agency perceives the problem to be, and what that agency views as necessary to avoid foster care placement.

If children have already been removed from the parents, the counselor must learn the identity of the attorneys representing the parents, why the children have been removed and what steps must be taken to restore custody to at least one parent.

If the legal environment involves a criminal prosecution, the court file maintained in the circuit clerk’s office could be examined. If the person seeking counseling is the accused, the counselor should speak with the defense lawyer and obtain guidance as to how to proceed so as not to compromise the defense of the individual.

If the person who is seeking counseling is the victim of the alleged crime or the parent of the alleged victim, the prosecutor’s office (in Illinois called the state’s attorney) should be contacted and the prosecutor or victim-witness advocate assigned to the case should be informed of the counseling relationship. The counselor should seek to coordinate efforts to assist the victim without compromising the prosecution of the case.

ANN: In court-ordered counseling in abuse/neglect cases, the pastor would receive copies of the orders from the child welfare agency caseworker or the court or the attorneys. Those orders would spell out the timetable and goals for counseling. That would forestall parents who try to circumvent the court by misrepresenting their status. If counseling with the pastor was approved by a court, or the fact that pastoral counseling is taking place is to be considered by an agency in approving placement of child, the counseling pastor should realize that a report from the pastor to the court or the agency on counseling progress, or lack thereof, would be expected.

JACK: The office maintaining court files of pending cases (in Illinois, the Clerk of the Circuit Court in each county) almost always maintains a public index of pending cases, arranged and accessible by the names of the parties. This should be consulted. Frequently, people caught up in the legal system are genuinely confused as to the precise nature of a pending proceeding.

Juvenile cases are almost never included in a public index and are not made available to anyone other than the parties and attorneys. If a child welfare agency is involved, the parent will have been provided with documentation that will contain the name of any investigator and any assigned caseworker. Once the parent has signed an appropriate release, required and provided by the agency, a pastor may contact the investigator and/or caseworker. Lawyers for the parties in such cases can provide information at the direction of their client.

ANN: Pastors should realize that there might in fact be multiple cases involving an individual. From those case possibilities Jack listed earlier it may well be that a family violence situation has led to the same family member being a party to a juvenile abuse or neglect case, and a criminal case, and a divorce case and so forth. Often looking for the applicable case really turns into looking for the record of several pending court cases.

GREG: It is worth noting that courts are not likely to initiate an order for any party to participate in counseling with a pastor, because of separation of church and state considerations. My experience, both as a lawyer and as judge, has been that this does not prevent a party from asking for approval of a religious entity or a pastor as a source of counseling. And a judge might or might not approve such a request. Such requests are often approved—as Ann’s preceding comment mentioning the possibility of court-ordered counseling in juvenile abuse or neglect cases addresses.

ANN: In cases involving juvenile court proceedings, I assume that pastors would almost always deal with parents. My experience has been that judges would insist that children in abuse/neglect cases receive counseling from those with particular expertise in treating children. I would think it very unusual for most pastors to have the credentials for that. As for juvenile delinquency cases, how could a court order pastoral counseling for an adjudicated delinquent? There’s a church/state conflict, for sure.

GREG: Let’s talk about counseling goals. At the outset we all agreed that safety for all family members was the primary consideration when looking at goals. What else?

ANN: It was my practice to order the counselors to postpone any joint counseling in abuse/neglect cases until after the parents had successfully gone through individual counseling. There was little to be gained if neither parent had confronted any of his or her own individual issues. From the beginning a pastor must recognize the potential for conflicts of interest in joint counseling situations.

Since each child is entitled to confidentiality just like each parent, the potential for trouble is great. The pastor needs to be so careful not to be used as a conduit and not to betray confidentiality.

JACK: Having had the benefit of observing the work of many therapists over the years, I am convinced that the success of the counseling relationship often depends upon establishing appropriate and realistic goals at the outset. I respectfully suggest that the parties to the counseling establish realistic goals, both long term and short term. I have found that establishing a single goal that depends for its achievement on the actions or cooperation of another individual who is not part of this counseling relationship is unwise and frustrating. Thus, I have found that establishing a goal to preserve or restore the family unit is unwise and unrealistic. To allow the counseling relationship to proceed from such a goal usually distracts the individual being counseled from those things that he or she must recognize and be able to control. Therefore, I suggest the establishment of realistic and essential goals, both short and long term, such as: 1) identifying the precise nature of the violence afflicting the family i.e., physical, verbal, as well as more subtle forms of control and manipulation; 2) a realistic identification of those steps which the person being counseled is able to undertake to address the problem (and what steps must be the responsibility of the other involved party); 3) a realistic sequence and time frame for the achievement of each goal and for resolution of the problem or problems. The goal or goals should be established at the outset, with the person seeking counsel-

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ing being the primary person establishing the goals, but guided by the counselor and with the understanding that the safety goal is non-negotiable.

ANN: I strongly concur with Jack’s recommendation to establish pragmatic goals of counseling. The goals should be as specific and detailed as possible and, if the court is already involved, must be consistent with any court orders. That distinction between court-ordered counseling and voluntarily initiated counseling often gets blurred.

GREG: Jack, I read the last couple of sentences in your prior answer, “the person seeking counseling being the primary person establishing the goals” as acknowledging that external parties such as child welfare agencies or

courts may communicate what counseling goals are important to them for their purposes, maybe even required, but that the counseling recipient, “guided by the counselor” to the extent that can happen, bears the ultimate responsibility for the direction of the counseling. Do I have that right?

JACK: That is absolutely correct.

GREG: Also, both Ann and Jack, I am reading you both as holding the view that, during the pendency (commenced but unresolved) of any criminal or juvenile or domestic violence court case, joint counseling with the parties at the same time is, if not positively dangerous, at least very unwise from a legal perspective. I know that is my own view. Do I read both of you correctly on that?

ANN: I feel strongly that during the pendency of such cases, there are too many possibilities for manipulation and coercion, and for the inadvertent or deliberate violation of confidentiality of the parties for a pastoral counselor to try to have more than one family member present for counseling. It really may be beyond a pastor’s ability to provide for safety of the parties or to deal with spontaneous violence in these circumstances. When children are involved, we have established that even a friendly chat by a pastor with a child might be perceived as very coercive by the child if the pastor is seen as being in collusion with the parents when they are present. Wow, so many minefields!

JACK: For the reasons stated by both of you, I believe joint counseling with an alleged perpetrator and victim to be extremely unwise.

GREG: On the question of understanding the status of investigations or cases, the pastoral counselor has to remain aware of the possibility of change in that status during counseling. I believe it necessary, if the pastoral counselor ever does undertake joint counseling (whether at the outset there is or is not pending court, child welfare, or police agency action), a clearly stated condition of the counseling is that if one of the parties initiates, forms the intent to initiate, or becomes aware of investigation by law enforcement or child welfare authorities, or of court action of any kind, then that party has the duty to privately advise the counselor of the same so that the counselor can evaluate whether continued joint counseling is appropriate.

JACK and ANN: That’s an excellent point.

GREG: As long as we are examining counseling situations which might involve domestic violence cases, it

may be useful to remember that, when there are court orders—certainly under Illinois law and I think likely under almost all similar laws in other states—the orders can be very detailed. There are usually lengthy applicable statutory provisions and definitions, often the “fine print” in a form order. Not all of the order provisions are immediately obvious, and some have impact on the conduct of the counselor. For instance, here is the Illinois domestic violence law explanation of what a “stay away” provision in an order means: “‘Stay away’ means for the respondent to refrain from both physical presence and nonphysical contact with the petitioner, whether direct, indirect (including, but not limited to, telephone calls, mail, email, faxes, and written notes), or through third parties who may or may not know about the order of protection.”¹

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A pastoral counselor is obviously a third party and, if a domestic violence order with a “stay away” provision exists, then there should not be communication with the protected party through the pastor. That would be prohibited indirect contact. The foregoing is just an example of one constraint that might not be immediately apparent to a pastoral counselor under one law in one type of case. The opportunity for similar limitations in other types of cases is manifold. To this lawyer’s mind, this is an important reason why counseling more than one party at a time in a situation where court action exists should be undertaken only with the greatest of caution, if at all.

ANN: Greg, your point is well taken. I would emphasize that a pastor should not allow any exceptions to a court order. The pastor should not encourage opportunities in which parties might come together or be in places in violation of existing orders. In these sorts of cases, court orders frequently forbid contact with specified people or places.

GREG: In cases where an order under a law like the Illinois Domestic Violence Act was obtained (usually involving prohibitions against abuse, threats, harassment and the like), eventually I included among the cautions I articulated to the person receiving the order that it was the court’s order, and that they needed to return to me

or another judge to have an order changed. This was my attempt to reduce the frequency of problems that arose when a person who obtained a “stay away” order invited or permitted a violation – the “there may be a court order prohibiting contact, but it is OK to come over today since we are getting along fine” scenario. As a practical matter, victims potentially place themselves in greater danger when police respond to calls for help only to find that there appear to have been invitations, in violation of court orders. Also, some jurisdictions may have “must arrest” policies when police respond to domestic violence calls. In those situations, a person subject to an order could sit in police custody for an apparent violation of an order even if it were invited. Police computer systems have a record of orders and if an order says “no contact” or “stay away” and there is no record of termination or modification of the order, a police officer responding to a call is not going to have a trial on the merits at the scene. The person subject to the order may well end up in custody. For families or people already in stress, the incarceration, missed work shifts, and escalation of tensions cannot help. Pastoral counselors do everyone a real service in urging careful adherence to court orders when they exist.

GREG: Do either of you have thoughts about referrals for counseling by divorce lawyers when the divorce proceeding is the only type of case pending?

JACK: Unless the referring attorney is a member of the same congregation and is suggesting that the client seek spiritual guidance, comfort and counsel, the motivation for the referral is probably a desire to strengthen the legal position of the client. This situation is fraught with risk for the counselor. There is a distinct possibility that the spiritual mandate of the counselor will not coincide with the attorney’s perception as the best way to prevail in the courtroom. If a counselor does agree to accept a referral from an attorney, there must be a clear understanding, preferably reduced to writing, that the efforts of the counselor will be directed exclusively to the spiritual welfare of the client, which may not coincide with the tactical and strategic goals of the attorney.

ANN: A referral from a lawyer for one of the parties to a divorce requires the pastor to have the lawyer make clear the context and the goals. It is true the counselor needs to consider how the lawyer might be trying to shape the case.

GREG: I suppose that both adult parties to a divorce case, if that were the only legal case, even were violence between them alleged to have taken place in the past, might be candidates for joint counseling if they agreed

that was what they wanted to do – but I would require assurance that any lawyers involved were informed what was going on. If I were advising a pastoral counselor in such a situation I’d probably suggest strongly that the counseling agreement clearly communicate to all that the pastoral counselor would not be a witness in the case.

ANN: Divorce is an area where church doctrine might be particularly relevant as a matter of faith. But the possibility of extreme anger is often present, even if the parties appear to agree to jointly speak with a pastor. There are real differences between the role of a mediator and that of a counselor. A pastor should recognize limitations if not trained in mediation and refer cases when appropriate. The pastor’s list of community resources I mentioned earlier should include trained marital mediators.

GREG: What considerations apply when a family member has been charged with a crime and there is a pending criminal case?

A pastor undertaking to counsel a parishioner ought not stumble into a controversial topic or setting without being alerted to the possible legal ramifications.

JACK: At the very outset of a criminal case, often a court order may be entered at the request of the prosecutor, with or without the agreement of the alleged victim, prohibiting contact of any kind by the defendant with the alleged victim. If a counselor becomes involved, working with either an accused or an alleged victim, it is critical that the counselor learn such an order has been entered. In Illinois, the law² establishes a privilege prohibiting the compelled disclosure in any court of a confession or admission made to clergy acting in that capacity. For that reason as well as others, clergy should never undertake to counsel both the defendant and the alleged victim. Under the doctrine of the “invited third ear” this would probably result in the defendant being deemed to have waived this privilege. This privilege does NOT apply in cases involving the abuse or neglect of children.

A closer question arises with respect to whether the statements of an alleged victim are privileged from compelled disclosure under Illinois law³. That law establishes a privilege with respect to statements made by the victim of a violent crime to a counselor employed by a “victim aid

organization.” Nonetheless, under certain circumstances, a court may order such statements to be disclosed. A counselor should clearly advise an alleged victim of this possibility before counseling is initiated.

GREG: Jack, you mention a really critical point for pastoral counselors—namely whether, and under what conditions, there is a privilege protecting communications between a pastoral counselor and the person being counseled. Illinois has the detailed statute that you describe providing for the privilege in Illinois.

I believe that federal courts have recognized the existence of such a privilege, stating that: “American common law, viewed in the light of reason and experience . . . compels the recognition of a clergy-communicant privilege. Both state and federal decisions have long recognized the privilege. The Supreme Court Rules Committee also recognized the privilege. That is doubtless because the clergy-communicant relationship is so important, indeed so fundamental to the western tradition, that it must be ‘sedulously fostered.’ Confidence is obviously essential to maintaining the clergy-communicant relationship. Although there are countervailing considerations, we have no doubt that the need for protecting the relationship outweighs them.”

In analyzing when and how the privilege should apply, that circuit court listed three conditions for its existence.

The privilege should apply in a federal court when: “[C]ommunications [are] made (1) to a clergyperson (2) in his or her spiritual and professional capacity (3) with a reasonable expectation of confidentiality. As is the case with the attorney-client privilege, the presence of third parties, if essential to and in furtherance of the communication, should not void the privilege....”⁴ That statement of the law applies to cases and trials in federal court.

So as to not have this conversation turn into a law review article, perhaps the thing to say is that it is important that pastoral counselors understand what the law on privilege is in their state – and that it can and does change.

Now, what are your comments about the types of juvenile court cases that might arise in family violence situations?

JACK: One type would be delinquency cases involve the charging of a person under the age of 17 (in some instances under the age of 18) with a crime. The same considerations apply in this situation as do in criminal cases.

The other type of case, arising in the Illinois Juvenile Court Act, involves children who are alleged to be abused, neglected or dependent. Anyone engaged in counseling must be very aware of three things with respect to this type of case: 1) counselors and clergy are mandated reporters under the Illinois Abused and

Neglected Child Reporting Act⁵. A failure to report child abuse or neglect of which they learn in their official capacities subjects them to civil and criminal penalties.

2) In the State of Illinois, domestic violence constitutes child neglect even when the violence is perpetrated exclusively against the parent and not the child, and even when the child may not be present, and even when the child is very young and may not be aware of the violence⁶. 3)

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No privilege exists under the Illinois Juvenile Court Act for communications to clergy or counselors. The only communication recognized as privileged under the Illinois Juvenile Court Act is between attorney and client. The Illinois law does not afford a counselor to whom child neglect or abuse is reported the right to determine for himself or herself whether the report of child abuse or neglect is credible or true. The clergy or counselor must report if he or she “has reason to believe” the report.

GREG: Jack, you are absolutely correct about Illinois law on mandatory reporting. Pastoral counselors in other states should keep in mind that their own state law may be different. At the risk of directing pastors to information they may already know, one source of information about the status of these laws in various states relating specifically to clergy is a 2012 publication of the federal government Department of Health and Human Services, entitled “Clergy as Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect.” As of September 2013 an electronic version can be accessed at: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/responding/mandated.cfm>

There is useful overview information in the document and, rather than paraphrase, I quote briefly from it (with footnotes omitted):

“Every State, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have statutes that identify persons who are required to report child maltreatment under specific circumstances. Approximately 27 States and Guam currently include members of the clergy among those professionals specifically mandated by law to report known or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect. In approximately 18 states and Puerto Rico, any person who suspects child abuse or neglect is required

to report it. This inclusive language appears to include clergy but may be interpreted otherwise.

As a doctrine of some faiths, clergy must maintain the confidentiality of pastoral communications. Mandatory reporting statutes in some States specify the circumstances under which a communication is “privileged” or allowed to remain confidential. Privileged communications may be exempt from the requirement to report suspected abuse or neglect. The privilege of maintaining this confidentiality under State law must be provided by statute. Most States do provide the privilege, typically in rules of evidence or civil procedure. If the issue of privilege is not addressed in the reporting laws, it does not mean that privilege is not granted; it may be granted in other parts of State statutes. This privilege, however, is not absolute. While clergy-penitent privilege is frequently recognized within the reporting laws, it is typically interpreted narrowly in the context of child abuse or neglect. The circumstances under which it is allowed vary from State to State, and in some States it is denied altogether.” This document also contains tables outlining the law as it existed—at time of publication—in each state, as well as other information that may be important to pastoral counselors.

ANN: There is real potential for conflict between church and state in this area of mandated reporting by clergy. Some religious bodies and denominations undoubtedly take a different view of clergy freedom to divulge communications from what is required by a number of these laws described in the federal report you mention.

GREG: That is absolutely correct, Ann. We noted at the outset that this “conversation” is from the legal perspective. I know that I, and I think I am free to speak for all three of us, do not presume to give an opinion on the theological aspects of what we are discussing. I am aware that the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod promulgated a fifteen-page document in September of 1999 regarding privileged communications⁷. It traces the theological aspects of privilege and explicitly acknowledges that even though the law may compel disclosure of a communication, under some circumstances a pastor ought not divulge. The CTCR report states that this is so even though legal penalties may be imposed on the pastor. I expect other religious bodies may also find some aspects of the legal framework we are addressing to be theologically unacceptable. For me, the main point to be

made in this regard is that a pastor undertaking to counsel a parishioner ought not stumble into a controversial topic or setting without being alerted to the possible legal ramifications. That really is largely what this “conversation” is about.

Well, as lawyers often do, we could continue this conversation at much greater length, but let’s try to wrap up by listing the top two or three points that we hope a pastoral counselor reading this article will take away from it:

ANN: What I hope a pastor takes away from this article:

1. Recognize one’s limitations and know when and where to seek outside help. Many family situations require specialized professional help beyond a pastor’s more general abilities.
2. Understand the adversarial nature of existing or future legal proceedings as they may relate to present counseling, including the possible limitations on clerical privilege and confidentiality.
3. Safety of all the parties must be an ongoing concern.

JACK: Before undertaking to provide counseling to a person or persons who have been affected by domestic or family violence a pastor should:

1. Consult with a competent attorney in the state in which the pastor works, and learn thoroughly what the law of that state requires with respect to reporting child abuse or neglect and family violence, as well as the nature and limitations of any privilege for communications to the pastor about violence which may constitute a crime or child abuse or neglect.
2. As a precedent to beginning the counseling relationship, secure a written document setting forth the nature and limitations of the pastor’s undertaking, as well as the responsibility of the person being counseled to fully and truthfully disclose whether the counseling is being sought in conjunction with any pending or anticipated court case, and, if so, what type of court case, where the case is pending, and whether the person seeking counseling is represented by an attorney, and if so, the name and contact information for that attorney, and whether any court orders have been entered with respect to limitations on contact by or between the parties; an understanding that the first responsibility of the pastor is to act for the safety of all family members.
3. Establish in writing when, how, and under what circumstances, the counseling relationship will end.

GREG:

1. Be very cautious about having more than one family member in the room at one time to engage in spiritual counseling in the context of family violence, unless and until the legal environment is clear and the pastor has made an informed decision about what is appropriate when the counseling session is to be undertaken. I have the feeling some of our preceding “conversation” can be read as an admonition, “Do not...” when in reality it is more properly, “Do not, until the appropriate time...” The healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling that the spiritual content of pastoral counseling brings is of unmistakable value. I see many of the points we have been making as alerting pastors to possible impediments to their spiritual counseling activities when the legal system is engaged or involvement is imminent. I have real trouble picturing a circumstance where it is appropriate for a pastoral counselor or those whom they seek to counsel to be in one room for counseling on any basis other than individual if there is a pending and unresolved child welfare or police investigation or legal action about the family violence. The risk that legal complications will be destructive of spiritually valid counseling goals seems too great.
2. If there is a pending case, understand what court orders exist. The pastor wants to help. Pastoral conduct or advice becoming the focus of controversies in an adversarial legal process cannot aid that end.
3. Be aware that the law changes constantly. Find an avenue to keep up to date on mandated reporting laws and the law governing privilege of communications to a pastor in the pastor’s jurisdiction.

With those thoughts our “conversation” concludes. This is not an easy area of the law. We hope our comments provide assistance, or at least food for thought, for pastors as they counsel those confronting violence in the family.

Endnotes

- 1 Section 112A-3 (9.5) of the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1963 (725 ILCS 5/Art. 112A-3 (9.5) (West 2010))
- 2 Section 8-803 of the Code of Civil Procedure (735 ILCS 5/8-803 West 2010))
- 3 Section 8-802.2 of the Code of Civil Procedure (735 ILCS 5/8-802.2 West 2010))
- 4 In re Grand Jury Investigation, 918 F.2d 374 at 384-85 (3d Cir 1990) (internal footnotes omitted)
- 5 Section 4 of the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (325 ILCS 5/4) (West 2010))
- 6 In re ADR, 186 Ill. App. 3d 386 (1989)
- 7 The Pastor-Penitent Relationship, Privileged Communications: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, September 1999

Church-Based Survivor Support Groups: Pastoral Care for Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

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Any ministry that serves crime victims needs to include pastoral care for those crime victims that are hurting and wounded, both physically and spiritually. There are a number of secular therapeutic resources that crime victims can use (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, licensed professional counselors, marriage and family therapists, community-based support groups). Pastoral care models seek to introduce spiritual care and coping skills to overcome the trauma and stress that are caused by intimate partner violence (IPV), stalking, battering, sexual assault, or murder in the family. The models need to use evidence-based practices that are proven to work, based on evaluative research.

A pastoral care support group model should try to repair broken relational ties with the faith community, family and friends. This brokenness is often experienced as a crisis of faith and a loss of trust in society when a victim of intimate partner violence or a homicide survivor sees how evil and hurtful the offender can be. In the past, pastoral care models of criminal justice ministry have been directed to prison ministry, law enforcement chaplaincy, and some professional pastoral care counseling agencies. Often, the long-term counseling needs of victims of violent crime have been neglected and have not been targeted by faith communities. The initial responses of crisis counseling, prayer, funeral services and the outpouring of Christian love give way to not knowing what to say or do for crime victims months later.

The *Crime Victims Advocacy Council (CVAC)* in Atlanta, GA is one of a few ministries in North America that has used pastoral individual sessions, family sessions, and support groups by crime type (homicide, stalking, domestic violence, innocent parents of the abused child) to aid victims of violent crime in coping with their suffering and pain. Other support groups for sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, assault and battery, robbery, theft/identity theft, and fraud can just as easily be included or developed by a faith community.

The support group movement is very large in this country, with the most notable programs including Alcoholics Anonymous, Rainbows and Compassionate Friends.



Often, the long-term counseling needs of victims of violent crime have been neglected and have not been targeted by faith communities.

CVAC offers the survivor of a violent crime an opportunity to meet weekly in the Vinings United Methodist Church in Atlanta; share the truth about the crime; give and receive help from persons who experienced a similar crime; and facilitate coping skills for the stress-related trauma that the crime caused. The group promises to keep the matters discussed as confidential. While no one is forced to participate, it is hoped that they will interact, rather than remain silent. The sharing and caring is deep because of the intensity of emotions. Oftentimes, excessive crying occurs because of feelings of vulnerability,

loss and grief. Anger is expressed and listened to without judgment in order for ventilation and catharsis to occur. In addition to anger and grief, members express difficulties with depression, confusion, and frustration as symptoms of the acute stress or post-traumatic stress reaction.

Support group members have stated they feel like they are losing their mind and “going crazy” after a violent crime. They exist between extreme reactions from mad to sad. They cannot work at all, or work like workaholics. They sleep too much or not at all. They overeat or do not feel like eating. They are irritable and snap at friends, family and coworkers, or withdraw in isolation. They are hyper-vigilant, or hyper-aroused and easily startled. They are sometimes dysfunctional at home or work and have short-term memory loss. They are obsessed with details of the crime. They complain of physical illness, soreness in body parts related to the grief and stress and often over-medicate or self-medicate with drugs or alcohol to mute the intensity of the pain. Many of these symptoms occur because the trauma of the crime induced more stress in their life than they are accustomed to handle.

The offender broke the Golden Rule to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. This traumatic crime broke the horizontal relationships of respect and love and standards of decency and care. When the offender is an intimate partner, the loving relationships and decency standards were altered by the effects of hatred, evil, and deceit - promulgated by the criminal assaulter. The notion that a loving relationship is altered does not apply when the perpetrator is a stranger to the victims.

The nature of a self-help, peer-level support group is to heal and “*get better instead of bitter.*” A pastoral care support group calls upon spiritual resources to restore the person to as much wholeness and sanity as is possible. One cannot be made whole again as if the crime never happened, or as if the murdered loved one could ever be replaced. But, degrees of wholeness are possible with the care and support of faith, friends, family and sharing in a support group. The support group becomes a spiritual family of bonding, fellowship, and closeness.

Note: if federal funds are involved in paying for the support group, then prayer must be separated in time or space from the federally supported group. Federal programs prohibit religious discrimination, worship, proselytization, and use of scripture unless the client brings it up.

The sharing of deep emotions in the group allows members to ventilate and experience catharsis. “Talking it out” and “talking it through” diminishes the destructive power that the criminal offense inflicts over group members. With each retelling of the criminal event from a new member, the group experiences a “desensitizing” to the horrific nature of the crime. Each time it gets a little easier to talk about it, especially when talking about it has often been discouraged, or denied by friends and family

A pastoral care support group calls upon spiritual resources to restore the person to as much wholeness and sanity as is possible.

who want the person to “get over it and get on with life.” These words attempt to rush a person’s healing before they are ready. The support group is a listening post and a sharing session for those who need to tell their story to people with similar experiences. Each member is encouraged to take as much time as necessary to heal.

A pastoral care model for the support group should include an evaluation component in order to provide feedback to the group members, and to determine if the program is effective in meeting its goals. Since one of the goals is to restore broken relationships on the horizontal, or personal, level and on the vertical or divine level, a focus group evaluation tool should assess whether or not these goals are being met. Other goals for a crime survivor’s support group are: to increase coping skills; to foster or augment problem-solving skills; to seek information and resources about the criminal case and to help one understand the legal system; to learn how to negotiate with others; and to draw upon others for emotional support.

In one such focus group evaluation, the members of the peer-level crime victim’s support group said they “felt encouraged by each other and no longer felt they were alone or crazy.” They liked both “getting and giving help, because by helping others they moved beyond their own situation.” They liked the mutual sharing and support, because it was confidential. They could tell the truth among crime victims who had experienced a murder. They liked the nonjudgmental nature of the group and most liked the prayer as “soothing and healing.”

The focus group evaluation revealed that the group members liked resources given out.

In particular, the focus group participants liked being shown how to write a victim impact statement and how to file a victim compensation form. They also expressed appreciation for learning how to request victim notification of an offender’s release and how to make a Freedom of Information Act or Open Records Act request. The participants also appreciated being told how to cope with the crime by sharing feelings with others and learning how to search internet websites for helpful resources, books and articles. The group liked the “go-around” technique and helping those in greatest need first. The use of role playing and developing listening skills helped them to better understand each other’s unique circumstances and needs. The group learned how to relax by using anger

release techniques, meditation, exercise, and learned the pros and cons of physician-prescribed medication. Several group members expressed that they were unable to relax, so relaxation techniques were shared and learned by group members.

Another goal for the group is to learn coping skills in order to reduce the stress experienced after traumatic bereavement or crime victimization. A support group model may incorporate techniques such as client-centered listening, guided interaction, or relaxation exercises; yet having a group that is both caring and understanding is at the heart of an individual's healing and recovery.

The leader of the group has to be honest and patient. He or she should guide and facilitate the participants to ask for help and to help each other. The group leader needs to listen deeply in order to hear what is being said beneath the words and draw the feelings out. The leader should affirm what is said without judgment. He or she needs to facilitate discussion and interaction that enables the group to help each other work through their problems. Statements that "build up" group members are encouraged and modeled by the leader and ones that "tear down" a member are discouraged. By helping others, the individual can get beyond one's own "sticking points."

Basic education about the criminal justice system and describing victims' rights are important to share in the support group. Information presented should be accurate, such as: the right to participate and be heard at all phases of the criminal justice process; the right to protection from harm; the right to be treated with dignity and compassion; the right to notification of court and parole hearings; the right to information about the criminal case that can be disclosed; the right to compensation in crime victims' compensation, civil justice remedies, and restitution. These are basic crime victims' rights and will vary from state to state. For example, a Georgia resident who is a victim of a violent crime or homicide survivor is eligible for compensation and may receive up to \$25,000 per victim claim from the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council: \$15,000 for unreimbursed medical expenses; \$3,000 for funeral expenses; \$3,000 for counseling expenses; \$10,000 for lost wages; and \$1,500 for crime scene cleanup. As a chaplain, I have shared such information with hundreds of crime victims in the past and many have thanked me for finding this financial resource in their time of need.

After the leader, or co-facilitator, opens with prayer, the group begins with a relaxation exercise. The relaxation exercise is as follows:

Imagine you are a tall glass of water and it will run down your spine through your toes. Take three deep breaths first. Breathe deeply in and reach a higher lobe of the lung than normal. Sit straight with eyes closed and hands on knees and now imagine the water is trickling

down behind your eyes. As it goes behind your eyes, relax your eyelids. Let the water run down to your throat and then to your chest. As it reaches your chest, relax your shoulders. Let it run down to your stomach and to your hips. The water separates into right and left hips, turns down to the knees, the ankles, and then runs out the toes, completely leaving the body. One minute of silence. Now the participant can come back to where he or she is sitting and open his or her eyes. "Share reactions briefly."

Having a group that is both caring and understanding is at the heart of an individual's healing and recovery.

The "talking stick" involves the use of an object, such as a religious item, a small leather bag, or a smooth stone, that is passed around. A common question is asked in sequence and each person holds the object while talking. No one else talks or asks questions but tries to "deeply listen, or hear the meaning behind the words." After all have talked, a form of respectful questions or statements can be made to each other. The motive for the reflection and questions should be healing in nature, to "build each other up" rather than to "put a person down." Some people may talk with the object in hand for as long as ten minutes and others may be brief, talking only a few minutes.

To measure the coping skills the support group leader can use an online test at [Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.](#), called Coping Skills Assessment, a 64-item question test that can be taken in 20 minutes and scored online for a small fee. It measures problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and levels of avoidance, helplessness, social withdrawal, and opposition. Other tests such as the anxiety symptom test, depression symptom screener and the anxiety management questionnaire are also available online for a fee. The client should discuss any test results with the group leader and a professional counselor.

Evaluation

During a 6-months period, the chaplain administered the Coping Skills Inventory Tests to 19 homicide survivors. During that time period there were 20 homicide survivor support group sessions held weekly with 96 attendees meeting for for 1.5 hours (average of 4.8 per session). Some groups were canceled, due to holidays or bad weather. A core group of 8 attended five or more times and 12 others came less than five times. Four persons attended 14, 14, 13 and 11 times each. Eight of

the support group participants took the pre-test and the post-test. The average pre-test mean score was 66.375, and the average post-test score was 73.63; ($t = -3.55$; $p < .01$). The improvement in coping skills was seven points on average. Post-test scores improved for all the participants. Only two of the stalking victims took the pre- and post-test measures and both went up 5 and 4 points, respectively. Nine others took the pre-test, but did not take the post-test as they moved or came too infrequently.

While the sample size is too small (8) and the time frame too short to make any generalizations about the effectiveness of the support group for surviving family members of a homicide, it does invite further research to determine if preliminary findings can be replicated. Two factors make the test noteworthy: the test is immediately scored on the Internet and is free. Other tests may be better, but they take longer to complete and can be expensive to score. Also, while the test does measure coping skills (a goal of the group), the group leader and participants should not rely exclusively on the test to determine individual progress and recovery.

Victim satisfaction surveys may also prove useful. For example, after a client terminates attendance with the group, a series of questions can be asked to determine how satisfied he or she is with varying information (e.g., understanding basic victims' rights, developing a safety plan) and experiences (meeting physical and emotional needs), shared during the group sessions. Similarly, the results can be used to assess the extent to which participants are satisfied with the format and information offered in the support group.

Summary

Faith communities can provide peer-level support groups for crime victims that can assist in their healing process. A needs assessment should determine what crime type is underserved, and efforts should be made to develop support groups to meet particular needs. For example, it may be determined that a stalking support group in the area is needed and that the faith community should consider setting up such a support group in their church.

The Good Samaritan Parable indicates that Jesus Christ desires for His followers to take the wounded crime victims to the inn of healing (the faith community) and give them the resources they need to heal. "Go, and do thou likewise." (Luke 10:37)

Chaplain David Cook in Newport News, VA, Chaplains Edna and David Morgan in Pine Bluff, Ark., Chaplain Saneta Maiko in Fort Wayne, IN, Chaplain Irv Childress in Newark, NJ and Chaplain Sandra Lydick in Ft Worth, TX have also been trained as chaplains serving crime victims and are good resources. A DVD of crime victims chaplaincy training is available for a fee from Shaw Communications (423-855-3435). A support group leader should receive crime victims advocacy training online at OVC TTAC by attending the VAT online course. (Google OVC TTAC)

For more information: Contact Rev. Dr. B. Bruce Cook, Founder and Board member, CVAC, 3101 Paces Mill Rd. Atlanta GA 30339

Websites:

www.cvaconline.org

www.youtube.com/cvaconline

Email: askcvac@aol.com.

Much helpful information can also be found at the Futures without Violence website, www.futureswithoutviolence.org.

*Chaplain Bruce Cook retired from the United States Penitentiary in Atlanta in 1999 and from CVAC and the United Methodist Church in 2009. He has authored the book, **Redeeming the Wounded**, and the script for the TV Series, called **Redeemed**. He has presented some of the above information about support groups at a NOVA Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.*

Pastoral Interventions with Domestic Violence in the Family

The desperation faced by many women in our society who are caught up in an abusive relationship is deeply troubling. Equally troubling is how often such abuse occurs on all levels of society, including within faith communities.

My first pastoral encounter with domestic violence happened one night during my parish internship. A knock came at the door of my apartment. When I opened it, there stood a mother and her three daughters, members of the congregation. “Can we stay here with you?”, asked the mom. “My car broke down a few blocks from here and we grabbed what we could and walked to the only place we knew we could be safe.” They looked terrified. I invited them in.

It had taken months of thinking, planning, and secrecy to reach this point. This woman had confided in me throughout the process, trusting me to hold it close. So, while I was surprised they ended up on my doorstep that night, I was also relieved, because now I knew they were all right.

Over the years, I’ve observed that the local congregation serves as a microcosm of society. The issues and dynamics in the community are also very present within the church community, for persons involved in a faith community also live within the greater community. The church is not necessarily a safe place from the ills of society.

One of the core beliefs we espouse as the Church is the importance of the family unit. There is a sense that the family who worships together stays together. For an abuser, this is a perfect control point and ruse to hide behind, signifying a strong family unit to others. It’s hard for us in the Church community to have our radar up about potential abusive relationships, because they hide behind the very things that we lift up as good and holy in God’s sight!

This became apparent to me in a parish I was serving many years ago. One day I answered the church phone and found myself talking with the sister of one of our female members. She was calling on behalf of their whole family, begging us as pastors to intervene in a situation of domestic abuse that was victimizing their sister/daughter. On family vacations they had witnessed her husband yelling at her, demeaning her, and even physically assaulting her. They had tried several interventions to no avail. Their sister (our parishioner) was so afraid for her safety that she refused to press charges or anything else that



It's hard for us in the Church community to have our radar up about potential abusive relationships, because they hide behind the very things that we lift up as good and holy in God's sight!

would upset her abusive husband. “Could we, would we please help her?”

I agreed to check in with this woman and carefully find out if she was indeed being abused. She slowly opened up and entrusted me with the reality that her husband was abusing her. She showed me the bruises hidden under her clothing. She told me of the times he yelled and shoved her around, even as she held their baby daughter in her arms. She told me that he wouldn’t let her talk on the phone. She couldn’t drive anywhere unless he drove, so they had only one car. She had no idea what the finances were because he rarely let her have any money, never mind going out to do the grocery shopping. He called several times a day to “check in on her”. She was

a prisoner in her own home. And her children were witnesses of his abuse. Her son from a previous relationship would get in the middle, trying to protect his mother, telling this man whom he had come to call “Dad” to leave his mother alone! But he would be shoved out of the way and told to go to his room. At the time he was only 4 or 5 years old!

It’s not easy to spot a domestic abuse situation. The abuser is often quite adept at hiding their abusiveness. Hiding the bruises, controlling the finances, monitoring phone calls, are just a few of the ways an abuser works. Additionally, there are strict rules for behaving out in public for abused women. The abused ones can’t confide in anyone, lest they get assaulted later.

What I have learned is that an abusive relationship most often starts out as a very positive relationship. Trust is built up between the couple, and the abuser soon takes control of the relationship by promising to care for the person in all her needs. A dependency on the abuser develops until she is snagged. The first hint of physical violence often happens before the wedding; and yet, the partner stays and goes through with the wedding. Usually because the abuser is very apologetic and promises never to hurt her again, saying that he was just under stress. Soon she is trapped and terrified for her life. The abuser may act like a jealous spouse, accusing her of having an affair with other men, using it as another controlling measure, and putting her on the defense. There is intense threatening and mental manipulation in an abusive relationship. Fear is what keeps the abused feeling powerless and unable to voice a cry for help. What happens to an abused person is a gradual wearing down of their self-esteem, their support group, and their outside connection with the world.

That’s what I discovered with this young mother in my parish. She felt she had to be taken care of and that in order to be taken care of, she had to live with the abuse. She didn’t believe that she could safely escape the relationship with her two children. I provided a supportive relationship over several months, listening and caring. Slowly, I encouraged her to move towards taking steps for her own safety and wellbeing as well as her children’s. Gradually, she came to a point where she was able to grab a phone during one of the abusive events and dial 911. The police came, and she filed a restraining order against him. However, her home still wasn’t a safe place for her, even with the restraining order. So, with help from the YWCA’s Women’s Crisis Service, she was able to obtain a voucher for safe housing so that her husband didn’t know where she was.

It was soon after this that the husband figured out that I was involved in supporting her and came after me. Being alert to one’s own safety, I realized, is not something that is taught in seminary. He called and yelled at me over

the phone. He threw all sorts of threats at me, trying to intimidate me. One Sunday I was standing in the pulpit preaching, and noticed him sitting in the back pew with their daughter, giving me a murderous look. I felt at any moment he would stand up, pull out a gun and shoot me dead!

The parish community was unaware of what was going on. As I look back on this time, I would recommend discussing it with either the executive committee of the council or with the whole church council and obtain their support and guidance. I would have discussed strategies for intervention that would include disciplinary procedures toward this man if his threatening behavior continued. I would have discussions with the local police department around how to keep the abused safe, the congregation safe and the pastors safe. I would have also had conversations with the Women’s Crisis Service on strategies they use in supporting and aiding abused women safely and confidentially. I may have sought guidance from the church’s lawyer. In other words, I would work towards education of staff and parishioners, and I would develop with the congregation a core value and protocols within the community that discourage domestic abuse. . An interesting insight is that pastors, chaplains, and other church workers are not mandated reporters for spousal abuse; only for abuse of children and elders!

I remember meeting a woman who was facing the end of her life. During my spiritual assessment, she shared that she had been abused by her husband forty years until she finally had the courage to divorce him. Now, as she faced

One Sunday I was standing in the pulpit preaching, and noticed him sitting in the back pew with their daughter, giving me a murderous look.

her final journey, she shared that he was coming to visit her every day and offering to take her home with him and to care for her. She was agreeing because she found herself powerless. Her friend circle had never recovered. She got out of the marriage by the skin of her teeth and had no finances to support herself except Social Security. She was depressed and felt, “Well I’m going to die anyway; so, why not go back to the familiar?” I was able to work with the social worker and alert her that going home with her ex-husband would not be a safe discharge and would not honor the courage and strength it had taken her to leave him after forty years. As a result, she was discharged to a safer place.

Another time I entered a hospital floor and was greeted by nurses who asked me to visit a woman who had just been diagnosed with cancer and was refusing cancer treatment. I entered the room and discovered a petite, short, elderly woman who put the sheet over her head to hide when I entered. Her daughter was sitting with her and helped her to tell her story. She confessed that, for forty-seven years, her husband had abused her and her children and would regularly march her and their children out into the woods at shotgun point threatening to kill them all. As she faced the nearing of the end of her life, she said she was going to have control of her dying. She chose to move into hospice care, rather than seek treatment for her terminal cancer. What a strong and insightful woman!

In another instance, I met a female who had married after her first husband had died. Her second marriage was to a man who sought to control her and abused her emotionally, verbally, and somewhat physically. He didn't allow her to take trips with her sisters, even though it was something she had always enjoyed.. He harassed her best friend so extensively one day in the grocery store, that she filed a restraining order against him. As a result this woman could no longer visit with her friend. And, since her friend went to the same church service that this woman and her husband went to, the woman was no longer able to go to church, even though it had always been a source of strength for her to attend. When she came under our care, she finally felt it was safe to say she didn't want her husband to visit her or even be in the building. She invited all her family to come. They did, surround-

ing her with love and support. As Chaplain, I was able to arrange for her to be reconciled with her church and her best friend. She requested daily Eucharist. I found out her friend was a Eucharistic Minister and, in collaboration with her priest, we reunited the two. What a joyful and tearful reunion they had together. Her spiritual suffering was turned into spiritual fulfillment as she embraced those most important to her sense of well-being.

Giving women the opportunity to tell their stories and to stand with them in solidarity as they find the strength within themselves to move from victim to empowered is a high calling. It is a sacred privilege to hear the stories of so many women who have found themselves in relationships of abuse; and to walk with them as they move to claim their value, escape from bondage, and discover hope as they find a way through. As providers of spiritual care, we need to educate ourselves to recognize the signs of abuse in persons and family systems. And we need to develop a plan of action that protects the abused as well as one that keeps us safe even as we venture into harms way.

Reverend Theresa A. Bianchi is a Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains. She lives and works in New Hampshire with her husband, Steve. They have two young adult children, two cats, and several fish. Her interests include advocacy, female empowerment, spiritual direction, writing creative non-fiction, learning something new each day, nurturing relationships with family and friends and living in the joy of God's love and grace.

RESOURCES, ANNOUNCEMENTS, EVENTS

“Christus in Mundo” Awards

At the Zion XV gathering, held this past fall at Lutheridge Conference Center in Asheville, NC, four esteemed colleagues received the most prestigious award offered by the Inter-Lutheran MCPCCCE community -- in recognition of their faithful service and excellence in pastoral ministry. CONGRATULATIONS to these four colleagues, who represent the entire spectrum of Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling, and Clinical Education!

Pictured below from left to right: Art Schmidt, ELCA; Claude Deal, ELCA; Chuck Weinrich, LCMS, and Dale Kuhn, LCMS

SPECIAL “ZION XV” Issue of Caring Connections

We are pleased to announce that the next issue of Caring Connections will feature presentations and workshop materials from the October 24-27 Zion XV Conference. This special compendium issue will include presentations from the keynote speaker, Dr. Leonard M. Hummel, Pro-

fessor of Pastoral Theology and Care at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, and Bible Study presentations from Dr. Erik H. Hermann, Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Materials from the seven workshops will also be included.

Advance Directives

The second issue of Caring Connections in 2014 will focus on advance directives and their growing significance for self-determination in healthcare and end-of-life decision-making. We are still welcoming authors for this issue. If interested, please contact Chuck Weinrich or Don Stiger.

LCMS Educational Event/Retreat

Since the new LCMS specialized pastoral care endorsement standards require 20 contact hours of continuing education each year, LCMS SPM is committed to providing opportunities for specialized pastoral ministers to acquire their hours as inexpensively as possible. These



events are regional, and there are two events planned for 2014, both with the theme, “Pastoral Care in a Pluralistic Context: Moving Past Fear to Focus on the Individual.”

The first is scheduled for February 24-26 in St. Louis, Missouri at Mercy Retreat Center. The second is June 10-12, 2014 (likely location in Pennsylvania). SPM will cover program, meals and lodging expenses for these two events. More information about the program and registration will follow. Or, feel free to contact the LCMS SPM office in St. Louis.

Important Dates

Feb. 5-8: ACPE Racial and Ethnic Minorities (“REM”) Conf., Charlotte, NC
www.acpe.edu

Feb. 24-26: LCMS SPM Educational Event/Retreat, St. Louis, MO

April 3-5: AAPC Annual Conf., St. Louis, MO
www.aapc.org

April 29- May 1: LSA Conf., Omaha, NE
www.lutheranservices.org

May 7-10: ACPE Annual Conf., Austin, TX
www.acpe.edu

June 10-12: LCMS SPM Educational Event/Retreat, TBD (PA)

June 18-22: APC Annual Conf., Anaheim, CA
www.professionalchaplains.org

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Subscribers to future issues of *Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling* will be notified by e-mail when each issue is published.

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Caring Connections: An inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling welcomes your submission of news germane to specialized ministries as well as announcements of forthcoming events. You may send news items and announcements to one of the *Caring Connections* news editors: John Fale at John.Fale@lcms.org or Judith Simonson at jsimonson@pennswoods.net.