

***Faith Leaders Helping  
Domestic Violence  
Survivors  
and Survivor Issues***

**Embracing Families in Need Conference**


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**The Ripple Effect**

***PART I:***  
***Basic Dynamics of  
Domestic Violence***

What pastors, elders, church staff and friends need to know to help effectively



# *Domestic Violence:* *An Epidemic of Terror*

**A recent global study by Johns Hopkins School of Public Health found:**

- 1 in every 3 women worldwide has been beaten, raped, or otherwise physically abused
- between 10% and 50% of women report having been physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives (1999).
- These are not isolated events, however: 60% of the women sampled had been repeatedly abused.
- physical violence was often combined with psychological and sexual abuse in 1/3 to over 1/2 of the cases.

**SOURCE:** Heise, Ellsberg & Goettemoeller, "Ending Violence Against Women." *Population Reports*, (1999).

# *Domestic Violence:* *A Survivor's Definition*

“Domestic violence is an ongoing process of physical, emotional and psychological destruction.”

--Peggie Reyna, formerly of the Board of Directors,  
Statewide California Coalition for Battered Women

# *Domestic Violence:* *Defining the problem*

DV is characterized by patterned, repetitive acts of dominance and coercion

- both the act and the intention must be taken into account (Ptacek, 1999).
- physical aggression alone does not necessarily constitute battering, if it occurs only once, and in the absence of psychological abuse or coercive behavior (Ganley, 1989; Hamberger & Barnett, 1995; Bograd & Mederos, 1999).

DV is steeped in historic patriarchal traditions of power and property (Koss, et. al, 1994).

# *Dynamics of Domestic Violence:* *The Cycle of Violence*



The cycle escalates over time, increasing both the frequency & the severity of the violence

# *Domestic Violence:*

## *Types of Abuse*

- physical abuse (pushing, choking, hitting, kicking, burning, etc).
- verbal/emotional abuse (name calling, denigration, humiliation)
- psychological abuse (destruction of property, animal abuse, mind games, kidnapping children)
- financial abuse (withholding or squandering household finances, deliberately destroying the partner's credit rating)
- sexual abuse (marital rape, incest, forced sex after beatings)
- spiritual abuse (using the victim's religious beliefs as justification for the abuse)

# *Domestic Violence:* *The Cumulative Effect of Abuse*

**“Battering is the sum of all past acts of violence, and the promise of future violence, that achieves enhanced power for the batterer.”**

--Barbara Hart

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence



# *Domestic Violence:* *Abuser's Methods of Choice*

- minimizing, denying & blaming
- using children
- exercising gender-based privilege
- isolation
- economic abuse
- intimidation
- verbal abuse
- coercion & threats

# *Domestic Violence:* *Persistent Myths*

- Battered women must really like it, or they'd just leave
- Battered women always return to their abusers (or always get into another abusive relationship)
- Battered women are bad mothers
- Battered women are helpless and weak
- The abuse ends when she leaves
- Men can't be battered
- It would never happen to me
- In the gay/lesbian community:
  - they're just two boys fighting
  - it's just a cat fight (between women)

## *Domestic Violence:*

it goes against all things sacred

“Never make a woman weep,  
because God counts her tears.”

--an ancient Jewish proverb  
often told to a bridegroom  
on his wedding night

# *Domestic Violence:*

## *Myths in the Faith Community*

- Domestic violence does not occur in Christian homes.
- **The Bible doesn't say anything about abuse.**
- Women are battered because they're not submitting to their husbands.
- **If the abuser would "just get saved" he/she would stop being abusive.**
- Victims just need to forgive. (Again and again, if necessary.)
- **It's none of my business; It's not up to me to judge.**
- Once the abuser repents, he (or she) should be forgiven, and the couple should reconcile.
- **A pastor is bound to support both parties, and should never take sides.**
- No one wants to talk about domestic violence (no interest).

# *Domestic Violence:* *Common Misperceptions*

- the belief that domestic violence is caused by:
  - anger
  - stress
  - alcohol/drugs
  - mental illness
  - unemployment
  - lack of impulse control
- the belief that domestic violence is more prevalent:
  - among certain races/cultures/ethnic groups
  - in families of lower socio-economic status

## *PART II:*

# *How to help someone who is being abused*

**Do's and Don'ts for clergy and faith leaders  
(so you can be a help, and not a hindrance)**

# *Helping abuse victims*

## **DO offer practical support**

- **Listen without judgment.**
- **Don't give advice.**
- **Honor their autonomy.**
- **Understand that there are no simple fixes.**
- **Provide referrals to appropriate and sensitive services.**
- **Remain a source of support, regardless of their decision or action.**

*The wisdom of  
“just doing something”*

*“You may never know what results  
come from your action.  
But if you do nothing,  
there will be no results.”*

*--Gandhi*



# *Helping abuse victims*

## **Pitfalls to avoid**

- Don't offer to do couples counseling to save the marriage.
- Don't just pray with her and tell her to go back.
- Don't blame her for making poor choices or insinuate that God is "testing" her.
- Don't encourage her to believe that if he "just gets saved," that the abuse will stop.
- Don't Threaten, cajole or coerce her into taking action she is not yet ready for.
- Don't offer unsolicited advice ("you should \_\_\_\_").

*Offer support, not judgment.*

# *Ministers as Shepherds*

*(regardless of our faith tradition)*

*“The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep; so when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away.*

*Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”*

*(John 10:12-13)*

# *The Shepherd and the Hireling*

Church leaders and ministers abandon members of their flock when they:

- choose to ignore the problem rather than to confront it.
- refuse to believe victims when they are told of the abuse.
- blame the victim for the abuse with comments like, “what did you do that made him mad,” or “if you would just be more submissive....”
- choose to side with the abuser, because he was wealthy or enjoyed a prestigious position.

# *The Shepherd and the Hireling*

Church leaders and ministers abandon members of their flock when they:

- condemn the victim if they consider filing for a divorce.
- are more concerned with preserving the marriage than they are concerned for the victim's safety (as well as that of the children).
- refuse to provide practical help for victims, such as food, shelter, clothing, \$ for basic bills (James 2:15, 16; 1:27).
- abandon victims and leave them completely alone and helpless in their time of desperate need.

# *Helping abuse victims*

*“Christ has no body here on earth but yours,  
No hands but your hands,  
no feet but yours.  
It is through your eyes  
that He must look out in mercy on the world.  
He needs your feet to go about doing good.  
Yours must be His hands raised to bless.”*

*--St. (Mother) Theresa*

*For more information*

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