

# What Faith Communities Can Do in Response to Domestic Violence

Many faith communities want to help victims of domestic violence but don't know what they can do. The answer may be simpler than most faith community members would think. Often just being supportive, providing a safe place for victims, and knowing the resources in the community are the first stepping stones for help. The following are some simple, practical ideas for faith communities wanting to make a difference in the lives of victims of domestic violence.

**Become a Safe Place.** Make your house of worship a safe place where victims of domestic violence can come for help. Display brochures and posters which include the telephone number for My Sisters House – the domestic violence program for the Charleston tri-county area - and their 24 hour hotline (843) 744-3242 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233), 800-787-3224 (TDD).

**Educate your Congregation** - Provide ways for members of your congregation to learn as much as they can about domestic and sexual violence. Routinely include information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, and in marriage preparation classes. Sponsor educational seminars on interpersonal violence in your congregation.

**Speak Out** - Encourage faith leaders to speak out about domestic violence and sexual assault from the pulpit. Faith leaders can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs.

**Hold a Ceremony** - South Carolina ranks number 8 in the nation for the number of women killed by men. (*Rankings for 2007 from the "Violence Policy Center"*). A candle light vigil would be a stirring reminder of these women who lost their lives to an intimate partner in our state.

**Lead by Example** - Volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local domestic violence/sexual assault program or attend a training to become a crisis volunteer.

**Offer Space** - Offer meeting space for educational seminars or weekly support groups or serve as a supervised visitation site when parents need to safely visit their children.

**Partner with Existing Resources** - Include your local domestic violence or sexual assault program in donations and community service projects. Adopt a shelter for which your faith community provides material support, or provide similar support to families as they rebuild their lives following a shelter stay.

**Cross referrals** - Learn about the various resources in the community to help victims of violence. If you get to know the advocates in the community, you will feel more comfortable when referring a victim for help.

**Prepare to Be a Resource** - Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to family violence and receive training from professionals in the fields of sexual and domestic violence.

**Intervene** - If you suspect violence is occurring in a relationship, educate yourself on the best way to respond & then speak to each member of the couple separately. Help the victim plan for safety. Let both individuals know of community resources. Don't attempt couples counseling.

**Support Professional training** - Encourage and support training and education for clergy and lay leaders, hospital chaplains, and seminary students to increase awareness about sexual and domestic violence.

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The following are examples of existing programs in the Charleston Community that combine the faith perspective with issues of interpersonal violence:

**Support Group** - My Sister's House & Mt. Moriah Baptist Church co-sponsor a support group for victims of domestic violence.

**Awareness** – The North Charleston Ministerial Alliance provides information to various faith groups in their alliance. They often host focus nights and domestic violence is one of their topics. They are willing to assist with local needs if possible.

**Local Missionary Groups** - The Deacons Alliance of the Baptist Church addresses interpersonal violence through Missionary Groups. These groups meet to address how to create public awareness and education about these issues and also help to respond to the needs of individual victims and their families.

**Women's Ministry** – Crossroads Community Church Offers a Women's Ministry that deals with interpersonal violence issues

**Collaboration with secular providers** – Cathedral of Praise has established a ministry for victims of domestic violence and often works with the Dorchester Alcohol and Drug Treatment program to make appropriate referrals.

**Chaplaincy** – The Coastal Crisis Chaplaincy works with victim groups by being chaplains to first responders at emergency calls. They also host victim support groups.

**Children and Domestic Violence** - Rev. Willette Scott-Ash from the People of Color Evangelistic Church volunteers for a local mentoring program and implements the "Keeping it Real" curriculum to stop the cycle of violence. Many children that are abused turn into perpetrators as adults, so this program is designed to mentor those children to prevent abuse in the future.