

# Broken Vows

Religious Perspectives  
on Domestic Violence – Parts I and II



*Study Guide for Facilitators*

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## Recommendations for the Use of this DVD Program

1. *Broken Vows*, a DVD series in two parts, is intended for clergy, congregations, religious educators, and staff of shelters and domestic violence programs. Plan to allow at least two hours for each part.
2. Arrange for a skilled facilitator to conduct the program. It is helpful to involve a community domestic violence expert in planning and implementing training sessions.
3. Be certain that trainers or discussion leaders are thoroughly familiar with the contents of this study guide and DVD prior to the presentation of the program.
4. Be aware that this topic may bring up strong emotions, and that there may be victims/survivors in the audience. Be sure that you are able to offer resources. When you arrange for a meeting room, you may want to make provision for a second, private room to create a safe atmosphere. It is also suggested that someone experienced with counseling battered women be on hand to provide assistance.
5. Order sufficient copies of the take-home brochure for viewers. It can be ordered in bulk, or camera-ready copy can be purchased from FaithTrust Institute, toll-free 877-860-2255 or 206-634-1903.

# Broken Vows

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## Religious Perspectives on Domestic Violence – Parts I and II

Study guide by Billie Sargent Hatchell

This study guide and the accompanying brochure for viewers were prepared to accompany the DVD *Broken Vows*, produced in 1994 by FaithTrust Institute, formerly the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Additional copies of the DVD, study guide or brochure may be obtained by calling or writing the publisher:



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sexual & domestic violence

Order toll free: 877-860-2255  
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# Introduction

## Program overview

*Broken Vows*, a two-part DVD program, is intended for clergy, congregations, religious educators, and staff of battered women's programs and human service agencies. Three aspects are focused upon: (1) understanding the dynamics of domestic violence; (2) supporting individuals experiencing domestic violence through the cooperation of religious and secular communities; and (3) developing programs for the prevention of domestic violence. *Broken Vows* is divided into two segments: Part I (37 minutes DVD time) addresses the various aspects of the problems and situations of battered women; Part II (22 minutes DVD time) discusses possible clergy and congregation responses to these problems. Throughout both parts, the viewpoints of formerly battered women, clergy, psychologists, and shelter workers are examined. It is recommended that there be two separate study sessions, each of two hours' duration, to allow attendees to absorb the information presented in Part I and formulate questions prior to viewing Part II.

The vocabulary in the DVD and study guide was selected to reflect a diversity of religious traditions. The phrases "clergy and lay leaders" and "religious leaders" are used throughout the materials to refer to those who act as representatives of the church or synagogue in any capacity: priest, deacon, minister, pastoral counselor, rabbi, parochial minister, pastoral associate, lay ministers or religious professionals such as those involved with youth and in religious education.

For a more extensive, half- or full-day training session, or an additional training, refer to the curriculum guide, *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers* (Marie M. Fortune, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991).

## Program objectives:

- To educate congregations about the basic dynamics of domestic violence
- To motivate congregations to be supportive of battered women and to call batterers to account
- To illustrate ways congregations can work on prevention
- To illustrate ways that secular and religious communities can work together to bring spiritual support and physical safety to women experiencing domestic violence
- To educate secular workers about spiritual issues that may arise for battered women.

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# The dynamics of domestic violence

*"A husband might beat his wife provided that the rod used is no thicker than his thumb."*

English common law

*"Scold your wife sharply, bully and terrify her...Then readily beat her..."*

Rules of Marriage, 15th Century

*"One day, Alice...POW!!! Right in the kisser!"*

Ralph Cramden to his wife Alice on television's "The  
Honeymooners", 1950's

*"He hit me and it felt like a kiss; He hit me, but it didn't hurt me"*

Song lyrics by Carole King and Gerry Goffin, 1962

A Dorchester District Court Judge denied a battered woman's request that her husband be ordered out of their apartment temporarily to ensure her safety.

*"I don't believe she was beaten, I didn't see any bruises; most women bruise pretty easily."*

The woman was wearing a winter coat during both court appearances.

*The Boston Globe*, November 13, 1986

We learn to accept domestic violence as a norm from the time we are very young. Entertainment – television, music, literature and cinema – as well as the legal system, frequently reinforces the man's right to rule over his partner with whatever force he deems necessary. Assault is illegal in every state of the U.S. and every Canadian province, but the battered wife is the only assault victim who is expected to live with her assailant, and the batterer the only assailant given the blessing: "We won't interfere; it's a family matter." In 1987, former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, "identified domestic violence as the No. 1 health problem for American women, causing more injuries than automobile accidents, muggings and rapes combined."<sup>1</sup>



Domestic violence occurs at every level of society: persons of every age, race, religion and economic standing are affected. As religious communities, we must educate ourselves about this phenomenon so that we can offer help to those in our congregations caught in its grip and teach prevention measures to our young so that the problem will cease.

## **What is domestic violence?**

Domestic violence is a pattern of abuse and control exercised by one person in an intimate relationship over another. When the word “abuse” is used here, it refers to situations or actions in which people experience coercion and/or fear for their safety or for their very lives. It consists of physical assaults, sexual assaults, psychological threats and assaults, isolation, verbal attacks, and attacks against property and pets. It may be repeated, severe beatings, or more subtle forms of abuse and control. The pattern covers a wide range of behaviors. Some are physically injurious and some are not, but all are psychologically damaging to the victim.

There is a myth that a man assaults his partner when he becomes angry and loses control, when really just the opposite is true: abusers use calculated tactics to control the other person to get something they want. Some readers may doubt this statement, believing that some beatings occur only when the husband is under the influence of alcohol. However, many abusers do not use alcohol or drugs. Alcohol is often used as an excuse for battering, but is not the cause.

Battering is not a mental illness that can be diagnosed, but a learned behavioral choice. Because battering is learned, it can be changed. However, the goal of nonviolence cannot be achieved through traditional marital or couples therapy. When couples counseling takes place, the wife, under the control of her batterer, may put herself in serious danger by telling the truth, and the batterer often avoids the truth by minimization, denial, and blame. Batterers will not change their behavior until someone holds them accountable. It is consequences that cause the batterer to change his attitudes, beliefs and behavior. A specific domestic violence intervention program works only if it is part of a larger system of holding the batterer accountable. The legal system often holds one of the keys to accountability.

## Who are the victims of battering?

Battering can occur in any intimate relationship between adult partners. However, it is still most likely that the victim of battering will be a woman in a relationship with a man.

A battered woman might be the vice president at your local bank, your child's Sunday school teacher, your beautician, your dentist or the person who clears your table at the restaurant where you eat lunch. She may be a well-educated professional or unable to read. She may be Christian, Jewish, a member of another religious group, or may have no strong religious beliefs. She may be a new immigrant with limited English skills. She may be newly wed, or have just celebrated her golden wedding anniversary. In other words, she could be anyone.

A battered woman may not be a saint. Some of her actions may give her partner reason to complain or there may be real conflict in their relationship. But none of these realities of a relationship justifies beating and abuse.

Some women use physical force to protect themselves and their children, or to retaliate against their abusers. However, it is rare that women establish a pattern of abusive control over men. The resources that most men would have in such a situation are far greater than the resources generally available to battered women: job skills, independent living skills, and financial advantages. Nevertheless, when women do batter men, it must be taken seriously.

Battering can also occur in same-gender relationships, which is an especially difficult situation because there are often no safe places to which victims can turn.

We must remember that children who experience or observe violence in their homes are also victims.

## Who are the batterers?

Men who batter come from all socioeconomic backgrounds, races, religions, and walks of life. The abuser may be a blue-collar or white-collar worker, unemployed or highly paid. He may be a drinker or non-drinker. The batterer may be a good father, a good provider, a

sober and upstanding member of the community and an active member of his religious congregation. He may be charming and gregarious. However, men who abuse often share certain common attitudes. These include jealousy and possessiveness, a tendency to minimize and deny the abuse, a belief that violence is a man's right and should not be challenged, and traditional beliefs about the roles of men and women.

### **Why do batterers choose to use violence?**

Batterers choose to use violence because it works, and because there is seldom any consequence to the batterer for using violence against family members. Through pushing, hitting, shoving – or even just intimidating looks or words which threaten – the batterer controls his partner.

### **Why do women stay?**

The battered woman stays for many reasons: she is often economically dependent on her partner, is encouraged to stay with her husband when she seeks help from family as well as friends and religious counselors, and usually has nowhere to go if she does decide to leave. She is culturally conditioned (and has personal expectations of being able) to stay and make the relationship work. Many times she stays because she feels that somehow it is her fault that he beats her, and maybe – just maybe – things will get better. Most battered women stay because of fear – fear of the escalating violence against herself and her children. A battered woman stays, quite simply, because the abuser will not let her go. If she does go, the batterer will do everything in his power to get her back. Of the women who are killed because of domestic violence, 75% of them are killed when they leave their partners.<sup>2</sup> This presents caregivers with a real dilemma. The most common reason that battered women stay with a batterer is because they are terrified.

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# Domestic violence as a religious issue

Ministers, priests and rabbis are sometimes afraid to acknowledge domestic violence for fear of being involved in situations that are beyond their capabilities, or for fear of raising issues that the community just doesn't want to hear. An illusion is often created that all is well in the church/synagogue community. People want to come to their place of worship and leave feeling good, believing that all is well with their family and their neighbor's family.

Churches/synagogues can be resources or roadblocks to those who are victims or perpetrators of battering in their congregations. Silence, lack of skills, and unwillingness to recognize the suffering of congregants create dead ends for those seeking help. Sometimes these signals force congregants to choose between the congregation and its inadequate or counter-productive advice, and their survival. Religious communities must make it known that there is nothing in Christian or Jewish teachings which justifies abuse of another person, and, although nowhere in the scriptures does God promise we will not suffer, God does promise to be with us when we suffer. The church or synagogue must be the extension of God's presence to those who are experiencing abuse.

In addition to responding to individual crises, religious leaders have the responsibility to shape community norms for family life that would preclude control, coercion and violence.

## Suffering

Often a religious woman suffering from domestic violence takes the blame upon herself to explain her situation: God is a stern judge and she is being punished for a past sin. Or perhaps she feels it is God's will that she suffer, and she must bear up to prove herself worthy. This stern, harsh, even cruel image of God runs counter to the kind, merciful and loving God found in the Bible. The distinction between voluntary and involuntary suffering is useful in these instances. An example is that Martin Luther King, Jr., chose to suffer to change unjust, racist laws. Although the abuse he experienced was not justifiable, he chose voluntary suffering as a means to an end. When a person is beaten, raped, or abused, especially in an intimate relationship, this suffering is not chosen, and it serves no good end. It is understandable for

these victims to conclude that God has abandoned them, and it is during these times they need the reinforcement of God's word that God is present and does not want them to suffer (Psalms 22 and 55; Romans 8:38-39 RSV).

## Partnership roles and marriage

Judaism views marriage as necessary for fulfillment, that marriage is part of God's plan. *Shalom Bayit*, peace in the home, includes the good and welfare of all the home's inhabitants. Sometimes, this concept is misinterpreted as encouraging the preservation of an abusive marriage, and there can be tremendous pressure on the wife to keep *Shalom Bayit*. Women can become entrapped in this idea, and think that if they can't keep peace, they've failed, but *Shalom Bayit* is everyone's responsibility. Likewise, conjugal rights are held by both Jewish men and women, and should a Jewish woman refuse sexual relations with her husband:

*"she should be questioned as to the reason...If she says, 'I have come to loathe him, and I cannot willingly submit to his intercourse,' he must be compelled to divorce her immediately, for she is not like a captive woman who must submit to a man that is hateful to her."*

Yad, Ishut. XIV-2. Yale Judaica Series, p. 87.  
(Maimonides, 12th Century)

Clearly, Jewish law reinforces the concept of equality in marriage and precludes violence and control in a relationship.

Christian teaching about marriage has traditionally focused on Paul's letters to the Ephesians, Corinthians, and Colossians. Misinterpretations of or misplaced emphasis on these texts infer that a wife must submit to her husband's control. This is often construed to mean that the husband/father is the absolute head of the household, and the family must obey him without question. This understanding has been extended to justify abuse; some clergy and counselors may rationalize domestic violence as a private matter.

The actual scriptural references reveal a different intent. Ephesians 5.21 (RSV) says *"Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."* *"Wives accommodate to your husbands, as to the Lord."* (Ephesians 5.22) *"Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it."* (Ephesians 5.25) These examples clearly indicate that both husbands and wives are to be mutually subject to one another.

*“Accommodate”* implies sensitivity, flexibility, and responsiveness, not blind obedience.

Passages from Ephesians 5.21-29 are commonly used as instruction for marriage, and contemporary interpretation often focuses only on the wives and sometimes misuses these passages to justify the abuse of wives by their husbands. In actuality, nine of these verses are directed toward the husband’s responsibilities in marriage; only three refer to wife’s responsibilities; one refers to both. While spouse abuse may occur in Christian marriages, it certainly cannot be made legitimate by scripture.

Genesis 3:16, *“Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you”* has been clarified by Pope John Paul II, who states that it does not mean that men are created to rule over women. He goes on to say that it is a sinful situation when a woman is *“the object of domination and male possession,”* and that the *“ruling over”* is a result of *“sin and broken relationships between God and humanity and among people.”*<sup>3</sup>

The covenant of marriage – whether Christian or Jewish – is intended to be a life-long commitment, and has the following elements: it is made in full knowledge of the relationship; it involves a mutual giving of self to the other; it is assumed to be lasting; it values mutual respect and equality between the two persons. A marriage vow can be violated by one or both partners. It is commonly accepted in both Jewish and Christian traditions that adultery violates the marriage covenant. Likewise, violence or abuse in a marriage violates the covenant and fractures a relationship. In both cases, the trust which was assumed between partners is shattered. In violent homes, divorce is not breaking up families; violence and abuse are breaking up families. In many cases, divorce or annulment may be a necessary intervention to generate healing and new life from a devastating and potentially deadly situation.

## **Forgiveness**

Many Christians feel that whenever one person assaults another, the victim should quickly forgive the abuser. Some quote King Lear (*“Forgive and forget.”*) as if it were scripture. In fact, quick forgiveness is not helpful for anyone involved.

No battered woman should be encouraged to forgive her abuser until the abuse has stopped and he has made efforts to repair the damage which he did to the relationship and to her and her children. If at that point she feels that she can forgive, this means that she can let go of the

pain and move on in her life. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean that she returns to the relationship nor that she renews her trust in her former partner. (For further discussion, see *Keeping the Faith* by Marie M. Fortune.)

In the Jewish tradition, it is generally accepted that there should be responsibility taken for wrong conduct and a rectification of the issues before forgiveness is bestowed. While the theme of forgiveness is especially prominent during the High Holy Days, forgiveness is a year-around activity, but not automatically granted. The victim must first feel a sense of justice before forgiveness can be bestowed.

*“For sins between a person and God, the Day of Atonement grants forgiveness. For sins between one person and another, the Day of Atonement cannot affect forgiveness until the (wronged) person is appeased.”*

Talmud, Yoma 85b

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## Suggestions for the facilitator

When scheduling an adult education session, reserve at least two hours for each segment. If planning an in-depth training session which includes religious leaders and other professionals, you may want to allot three hours. The DVD for Part II is shorter, allowing time for participants to express thoughts or to ask questions that have arisen since the first session.

### Preparing to show the DVD: Preparation checklist

Before showing the DVD, use the following checklist to determine whether sufficient preparation has been made.

- Both Part I and Part II of the DVD have been viewed in their entirety at least once.
- The study guide content is familiar and the discussion questions have been adapted as necessary.
- Community resources (shelters, hotlines, crisis centers, treatment programs) have been researched and a list prepared for attendees.
- The idea of inviting a worker from a local domestic violence program has been considered. If a guest speaker has been invited, he/she has viewed the DVD in advance, and has been given clear ideas about his/her role in the session.
- Information on local police procedures and state laws on domestic violence have been prepared in handout form.
- An adequate number of take-home brochures has been ordered and received. (Additional copies may be ordered in bulk or camera-ready copy may be purchased from FaithTrust Institute: toll-free 877-860-2255 or 206-634-1903.
- Church or synagogue position statements on domestic violence have been gathered, if applicable.
- An announcement has been posted, emphasizing the importance of participating in both sessions.
- If more than 30 people are expected, two DVD monitors have been reserved.
- A resource table has been arranged to display information.



- It is understood that the audience may include victims of domestic violence, and a quiet room has been arranged for anyone who wants to separate herself/himself from the group. Preparation has been made to carry on the discussion after such a situation occurs.
- Arrangements have been made for an experienced counselor to be on hand.
- Denial or resistance from participants is a very real possibility, and consideration has been given to responding to such occurrences and creating a safe atmosphere for discussion.

## Facilitating discussion following the DVD

*Broken Vows* is designed to illustrate the basic dynamics of domestic violence, to motivate congregations to be supportive of battered women, to offer suggestions as to how congregations can create a prevention program, and to recommend how secular workers and religious leaders can work with the religious beliefs of battered women as sources of strength and resources for healing. Part I addresses the various aspects of the problems of battered women through four women's experiences, and Part II suggests ways that the church/synagogue and secular workers can address domestic violence issues by working together, using the First Presbyterian Church in Honolulu, Hawaii, as an example. The two segments build on each other to create a whole, and the discussion questions in the following section are written in that manner. It is suggested that the facilitator read through both discussion question groups prior to the first session to get a sense of this structure before leading the group discussion.

Leave the lights out for the duration of the tape (through the credits). This will allow members of the audience extra time to compose themselves if they were upset by the content or to reflect on its implications.

Do not schedule a break immediately following the DVD, but rather start de-briefing slowly, allowing spontaneous comments to emerge before posing questions of your own. Ask general questions about feelings and reactions to the DVD first, leading gradually to a deeper analysis of the issues. (The discussion questions are written with this graduation in mind.)

Several general guidelines for facilitating discussion are listed below. You may wish to add others from your own experience of working with groups.

- Guide discussion toward the common issues among people, regardless of denomination or belief system.
- Avoid posing closed questions, such as those that must be answered “yes” or “no.”
- Whenever possible, allow other members of the group to respond to comments or questions rather than dominating the discussion with your ideas and responses.
- Recognize that there are many emotionally charged issues that may come up in group discussion, and encourage group members to listen without interrupting each other.
- Recognize that some people learn from listening and should not be pressed to express themselves before the entire group.
- If you are uncertain about a non-participating member’s desire to speak, gently ask if he or she has anything to add or a desire to speak. Accept his or her answer.
- If someone is angry about an issue brought forward in the program, be sure that you understand the point he or she is trying to make; hostility is often intensified when a discussion leader demonstrates incomplete understanding of a question or comment by a member of the group.
- If a member discloses that she/he has been battered, or that a family member experienced domestic violence, reassure her/him of your support (“I appreciate your willingness to share this experience.”), help protect her/his privacy (“If you’d rather, we can discuss this further during the break.”), and offer resources for support.
- Leave adequate time for the discussion period following the DVD; don’t introduce a subject or an idea without sufficient time to explore it and reach some resolution of the topic. It is often better to skip an exercise or topic altogether if inadequate time to complete the discussion is available.

## The people in the DVD

The people in the DVD are real, and their stories are real. Individuals appearing in both Parts I and II (in the order of their appearance):

Reverend Bob Owens, Minister, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Rabbi Julie Ringold Spitzer, Central Conference of American Rabbis

Reverend Antonio Valdivia, St. Cornelius Parish, Richmond, California

Dr. Anne L. Ganley, Psychologist, Veterans Administration Medical Center, Seattle, Washington

Victor Lewis, Oakland Men's Project, Oakland, California

Reverend Marie M. Fortune, United Church of Christ; Founding Director, FaithTrust Institute, formerly Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, Seattle, Washington

Rabbi Mark Dratch, Congregation Shaarei Shomayim (Orthodox), Toronto, Ontario

Camilla Taft, Resident Manager, UCC Transition House, Honolulu, Hawaii

Reverend Dale Sewall, Mercer Island Presbyterian Church, Mercer Island, Washington

Reverend Joseph McGowan, SJ, Seattle University, Seattle, Washington

Reverend John L. Heagle, Therapy and Renewal Associates, Seattle, Washington

Mrs. Norma Owens (Rev. Owen's wife, Part II only)

## Formerly battered women appearing in Part I:

Janet, an evangelical Christian ("A Professional Family's Secret")

Jae, a Jewish woman ("Shalom Bayit: Peace in the Home")

Bettie, former wife of a minister, Church of Christ (non-denominational) ("The Pastor's Wife")

Delia, Roman Catholic mother of five ("When No One Helps")

## Women appearing in Part II, “A Congregation’s Story”:

Julie Owens, Presbyterian Church (USA); founder: HOPE for Battered Women, Honolulu, Hawaii (daughter of Rev. and Mrs. Owens)

Jo Ann Kilar, an Evangelical Christian woman, Family Peace Center, Honolulu, Hawaii

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# Discussion questions – Part I

*It is not my enemy that taunts me...But it is you,  
my equal, my companion, my familiar friend...*

Psalm 55

These questions are designed to define domestic violence, to examine how this situation has come to be socially accepted, and to help the participants to get in touch with their feelings about it and how the church/synagogue currently reacts to it. The quotes from the DVD are used liberally here to lend objectivity to the discussion. Often it is easier to discuss situations of people and organizations not connected to us before drawing parallels to ourselves, and to our church/synagogue. The basic elements are purposely at the end of the discussion session as summation of the discussion components.

**1. How did you feel as you viewed the happiness of the wedding photographs, contrasted with the statistics about domestic violence? What were some of the statistics mentioned that surprised you?**

Domestic violence occurs in 28% of marriages<sup>4</sup>; 95% of the victims are women<sup>5</sup>.

**2. How do you think our society perpetuates the belief that the man has a dominating role in the home and that it is the woman's fault if all is not well? How did these views come out in the stories and comments we have just heard?**

*"We live in a society that accepts, on a deep level, that women are the property of men."* Mr. Lewis

*"The first time there was physical violence, I felt like it was my fault; I thought I wasn't being a good enough wife."* Janet

*"(I thought) You could make anything work if you were willing to compromise."* Jae

### 3. How did the church/synagogue react when these women came for help?

*"I just couldn't understand how my pastor and church board could send me and my small child back into a home with someone who became violently enraged." Janet*

*"They told me to go home and be a good wife." Bettie*

*"When I told the priest, he said, 'think about what you do wrong to make him mad with you.'" Delia*

### In what ways do you think the church/synagogue could have supported them?

Jae was able to find support: *"...having gone to a Jewish crisis center held at a Temple with a Jewish woman...trained to listen to me and hear more than I was saying...probably saved my life."*

### 4. In what ways did their families and friends support the belief in male dominance?

*"When my husband showed up (at my parent's) crying and begging for forgiveness...my father said (to me)...are you going to keep running away from problems...or are you going to create a family...? Go home and make it work." Jae*

*"People that I loved and respected in the church made me feel that I was doing something wrong...A lot of people turned their backs on me or openly blamed me for the abuse." Bettie*

*"I wanted to divorce my husband after the first time he hit me, but my mother told me to go back to him, that I was married to him." Delia*

### 5. Janet: *"And then he would ...forgive me and we would have a couple of weeks when life was almost bearable and he would be nice to me."* What does this quote imply?

Janet's husband, by forgiving her, made her feel responsible that he abused her. Dr. Ganley points out that *"being nice"* is actually a shift in the partner's tactics to continue to get his own way. Instead of using his fists, he uses flowers in order to control Janet and get her to comply with his demands.

**6. What were some of the comments made by the clergy in the DVD which you think might be a more supportive approach to a woman in an abusive situation?**

*"Too often we have been silent when we should have spoken out and we have been inactive when we should have been reaching out to the victims in our midst." Rev. Owens*

*"We have to retrain ourselves that Shalom Bayit (peace in the home) is everyone's responsibility." Rabbi Dratch*

*"The covenant relationship of the marriage contract presupposes mutuality, trust, respect. It should be a place where the persons feel safe and supported. When one partner brings violence to the relationship, it destroys the trust. If you can't trust your partner not to hit you, it's very hard to trust much of anything." Rev. Fortune*

*"A Jew must honor his wife more than he honors himself...If one strikes his wife, one should be punished more severely than for striking another person. For one is enjoined to honor one's wife..." Talmudic quote read by Rabbi Spitzer*

*"Marital rape is illegal. But more than that, in the religious community we need to understand that it is a gross violation of the other person." Rev. Fortune*

*"God never wants someone to suffer for its own sake." Rev. Heagle*

**7. What are the four types of domestic violence discussed in the DVD?**

Physical assaults, sexual assaults, psychological assaults, attacks against property and pets.

**What are some examples of each from the DVD?**

**Physical**

*"He always hit me where it wouldn't show" Janet*

*"He had a list of 'have you done this' and 'have you done that'...he was looking for a reason...and we kept saying 'yes...and finally he asked Jason – this was at 10 o'clock at night: 'Do you have a handkerchief in your pocket?'... and Jason didn't have a handkerchief in his pocket and he got thrown down the stairs." Jae*

## Sexual abuse

*"That was very confusing for me because ...you've consented to be in the same bed with someone and then in that bed horrible things are happening to you."* Jae

*"He started sexually molesting my daughter at the age of eight....He kept telling me that he can have my daughter sexually and he could rape her in front of me and there was nothing I could do about it."* Delia

## Psychological

a. isolation; controlling contact with friends and family;  
controlling finances:

*"I found myself tremendously isolated. He was very concerned about saving money....He didn't even want me doing the grocery shopping."*  
Janet

*"I wasn't allowed to go from one room to the other...not allowed to go to the bathroom...not allowed to turn the TV on."* Bettie

b. jealousy

*"It gets very confusing...I thought 'This man loves (and hits) me because he's very jealous.'"* Delia

c. other forms of psychological control: use of male privilege,  
minimization/denial/blame.

Attacks against property and pets

*"(He told me) 'you don't have to worry about the dog any more. I've strangled it.'"* Jae

**How did you feel as you listened to these women talk about these things?**

### 8. Bettie's husband used racism to justify his treatment of her.

**Bettie:** *"...he felt that he was oppressed as an African-American male in this society. He felt that it was...hard to get a job...and that partially it (domestic violence) was a fault of society."* What were the religious and secular responses to this claim?

*"...Living in a racist society is very hurtful but...has nothing to do with the response where a person treats any other individual without dignity, and especially if the person is close to them and hits them or misuses them in any way."* Rev. McGowan



*"You can't disempower half of your community and expect for that person to be a powerful ally on your side against racism." Mr. Lewis*

**9. What were the steps Delia took to protect herself and her children from her husband's abuse and what were the consequences?**

(1) She asked her mother for help the first time he beat her. Her mother told her to go back; that she was married.

(2) She talked to her priest, and he told her to examine what she did to make her husband so mad.

(3) She finally summoned the courage to leave him and went to a women's shelter. He searched all the alleys until he found her car and put an abusive note on the steering wheel. He threatened to kill Delia's sixty-year-old mother who was in the hospital. When Delia returned home to save her mother's life, he made the children watch as he brutally beat her.

(4) This is when she called 911. Delia's husband was taken to jail. When he got out, he called her and told her he was coming home to *"beat the shit out of her."* That's when Delia

(5) went to the judge for a restraining order. She had to endure degrading treatment from the judge, but finally got the order. When her husband came home, he said *"...do you think these papers are going to stop me?"* and proceeded to tear them up and beat Delia again. The abuse escalated, and then he began to sexually abuse their daughter.

**10. To save herself and her children from further abuse, Delia felt the only alternative left to her was the death of her husband. How did the clergy address this issue in the DVD?**

*"...We in the community failed her. We were not able to provide protection for her and her children; we were not able to support her in her effort. The tragic outcome – the last resort for her – was to use violence to stop the man who was literally endangering her life and the lives of her children...."* Rev. Fortune

*"I think we forget that the deeper violence is the systemic attitude that allows wife-battering in the first place, and this is simply a reaction to violence...self defense."* Rev. Heagle

*"...it was not a failure of Delia's moral character, it was a failure of all of us in the community that we could not provide her protection."*

Rev. Fortune

### **Note to discussion facilitator:**

This may be a difficult, controversial issue for the group. Lead them gently through the DVD's dealing of this issue, then ask several questions: **What did you think when you first learned about Delia's actions? Do you agree with Rev. Heagle's statement that she acted in self-defense? Do you think she deserved to go to prison? Do you think it was right for her to be granted clemency and released? Do you think that laws should be changed to take into account self-defense for a battered woman?** (Further information on Delia's specific situation can be found in footnote<sup>6</sup> in the appendix.)

### **11. Dr. Ganley points out that domestic violence is a means of controlling the other person to get something rather than uncontrolled anger. How did the husbands we've just heard about control their wives?**

*"If I became angry or talked back, then [the violence] would be a lot more, so I learned not to do that."* Janet

*"He gave me five rules: I was never allowed to back-talk to him, never raised my hand on him, never allowed to tell nobody (sic) that he hits me, ...I'd better never call the police, and I had better stay in the house."*  
Delia

### **12. What characteristics did these women have in common?**

Financially dependent on their husbands; when they consulted ministers/rabbis, family and friends, they were told to stay with their husbands; they didn't consider themselves *"battered women."*

### **In what ways were they different?**

Different races, religions, different stations in life, different backgrounds.

### **What conclusions can you draw from these comparisons?**

Domestic violence is inflicted on all sorts of people, many of whom you would never suspect to be victims, and perpetrators may be ministers, professionals, respected members of the church/synagogue and community. It is dangerous to think that it can't happen to "*nice people*" and that it can't happen in this church/synagogue. No one is immune. There is no single profile of the woman who could be battered.

### **13. How have your opinions about domestic violence changed after viewing this DVD?**

After a few summation remarks, mention that the second part of the DVD will be shorter, about twenty minutes, and that it addresses positive ways the religious community can respond meaningfully to domestic violence. Perhaps until that time, people should jot down questions they may have, or thoughts of their own about how communities – both secular and religious – can work together to help families experiencing domestic violence.

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## Discussion questions – Part II

Before viewing the DVD, open the floor for discussion:

- Would anyone like to share reactions to Part I of the DVD now that you've had a chance to digest some of the material?
- Did anyone read any articles or books that might be of interest to others?
- Did anyone talk to others about domestic violence who would like to share the experience?
- Has anyone changed an opinion or had a new idea they would like to share with the group?

After viewing the DVD, follow the same guidelines as after the viewing of Part I (wait until the end of the credits to turn up the lights, etc.), then start gently leading the questions. There should be a feeling of hope and enthusiasm in generating cooperation with shelters and starting different programs within the church/synagogue. Inviting several staff from domestic violence programs to this second session is highly recommended so that this energy can be shared within both communities.

**1. How do you feel now that you have seen the whole program?**

**2. Julie Owens put the statistics of battered women in an unusual way in the opening scenes of Part II: During the Viet Nam War, 58,000 Americans were killed. During that same period, 54,000<sup>7</sup> American women were murdered by their partners. What did you think when you heard these figures?**

Discussion can go several ways depending on the age of the audience. The most obvious response is that there was general social turmoil over the morality of the Viet Nam War; protests included demonstrations, burning draft cards, and people leaving the country. Yet there is only a murmur about wife-battering, the lack of sufficient laws protecting women, or concern that the guilty be held accountable. It will probably be surprising that these senseless deaths number so closely and are met with such different reactions by the public. It is recommended that you let

the discussion find its own level.

### **3. How did Julie's experience of domestic violence resemble that of women we saw in Part I?**

- a. *"No one recognized me as a battered woman because I wasn't getting hit."* Julie. (Compare with Janet)
- b. Counselors and family members tried to excuse Janet's, Delia's and Jae's husbands' actions rather than recognize that they chose to be that way. People envied Julie because of *"how much [her] husband adored"* her.
- c. When Julie left her husband, he found her, tried to use violence to make her come home, and threatened her and her family [father]. (Compare with Delia)

### **4. How did her experience differ?**

The church was shocked by the violence to her and her father. These actions happening to people they knew and loved obliterated their stereotypes that the wife must provoke the husband's violence. Rev. Owens spoke from the pulpit about the experience.

### **5. Julie tells us about marriage counseling:**

*"If they (the couple) go into marriage counseling with their pastor, they (the victim) can't tell the truth. They'll get hurt. And if they don't tell the truth, marriage counseling doesn't do any good. So now he (Rev. Owens) doesn't recommend marriage counseling."*

**What do you think about her observation?**

### **6. What are examples of scripture that are often misquoted or misinterpreted?**

Facilitator can refer to study guide chapter "Domestic violence as a religious issue", page 11. Also, discuss Rev. Owens' statement: *"People are quick to (loosely) quote scripture, Malachi for example, saying "God hates divorce." {See Malachi 2:14-16.} But God hates abuse. In fact, I think God hates abuse more!"*

*“Her faith can be used as part of her recovery and her healing.”*

Jo Ann

## **7. How can a woman’s religious beliefs serve as a roadblock to dealing with domestic violence?**

She may believe that God is testing her, she may believe that God is punishing her for a past sin, or that it is God’s will that she suffer, and she must prove herself worthy.

### **A resource?**

There is nothing in the Christian or Jewish teachings which justifies the abuse of another person. That even though we suffer, God is present and a help – refer to Delia’s statement about the *“Footprints in the Sand.”* See *“Domestic violence as a religious issue,”* page 11, and *Keeping the Faith* by Marie M. Fortune, and *When Love is Not Enough: Spousal Abuse in Rabbinic and Contemporary Judaism* by J.R. Spitzer for scriptural references and further examples of religious teachings.

*“When a man says ‘I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to hit her’...he’s trying to protect his stash...All the things he’s been trying to coerce or beat out of her will slip through his fingers somehow.”*

Mr. Lewis

## **8. Why do you think an abuser would repent?**

*“I didn’t know there was such a thing as false repentance...That man has been ‘washed in the blood’ more times than I care to recall... And I told the Pastor, ‘You and God work on his salvation without me.’”* Jo Ann

Don’t believe that just because he’s had a conversion experience, he has stopped beating his wife. It is dangerous for clergy to send a woman back to the home just because her husband says he has *“found the Lord.”* The location of a victim should never be disclosed to the batterer.

## **9. What are the steps the church/synagogue can take if a battered woman comes for help?**

See “Recommendations for church/synagogue action” page 28. Rev. Fortune also summarizes the appropriate reactions: *“First, we must protect the victims from further abuse...Second, we must stop the abuse and hold the abuser accountable ...Third, and ONLY if we have first accomplished steps one and two, we can begin our final goal, the restoration of the relationship...”* Discuss some of the things that Rev. Owens’ church did: Formed a domestic violence committee, sponsored a Domestic Violence Sunday, had love offerings for Jo Ann to pay for car insurance, established a hospitality house for women of all backgrounds and faiths, encouraged an annual memorial service for those who died because of domestic violence.

**Do you think our church/synagogue should establish such programs?**

*“My job as a priest is to tell you (the abuser) that... you have killed the marriage, and my duty as a priest to tell her to seek life and not death.”*

Rev. Valdivia

**10. Why is it so important to put the safety of the victim as primary?**

When we fail to do this, the consequences may be deadly.

**11. What can workers in shelters and domestic violence programs do to become more sensitive to spiritual issues many women have?**

Make a list of supportive religious leaders trained in domestic violence. Categorize by religion and ethnic/racial community for future reference. Visit their churches/synagogues to learn about their concerns, invite ministers/priests/rabbis to the shelter/agency to address staff members on religious issues, offer to make a presentation at a church/synagogue study session on domestic violence and ask for input as to how members of domestic violence programs can address religious issues of battered women.

**12. Now that we have had the experience of this study program, where do you think we should go from here?**

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## Recommendations for church/synagogue action – support and prevention

When an abusive situation is brought to the church's or synagogue's attention:

- Listen to the woman. Believe her when she says she is battered. Avoid victim-blaming. Let her know about a shelter or safe home or a domestic violence program that can offer protection for her and her children. (The church/synagogue sometimes has the tendency to want to believe that the wife has done something to cause the battering, and wants to forgive the husband and bring reconciliation within the family. To suggest that the wife return to her home at this point, to preserve the family unit at all costs, asks her to place herself and her children in very real danger.)
- Accept your limitations and get expert help. Refer her to local domestic violence programs/shelters and give her their telephone numbers.
- Hold the abuser accountable. It doesn't help him for you to tell him that God forgives him. The only hope for changing his behavioral pattern is that he must admit to the problem, and get long-term, professional domestic violence help. If he has been arrested, encourage the legal system to hold him accountable.
- Don't use mediation.
- Don't try to counsel the couple together. This puts the victim in danger.
- One caution to Christian leaders: Do not presume to use the crisis in the battered woman's life nor the shelter program as a means to evangelize. The battered woman needs support and understanding, not religiosity.

Lay the foundation to provide support for when victims come forward:

- Establish a committee to address domestic violence issues.



- Support special education and training of clergy and lay persons so that there will be a committee or support group which understands what domestic violence is all about. Often general counseling techniques which many clergy learned in seminary – especially marriage counseling – are inadequate and dangerous to deal with domestic violence.
- Become associated with a battered woman’s shelter. With a close relationship, the shelter can know the religious beliefs of your congregants, respect them, and take the beliefs seriously. Offer financial and volunteer support.
- Open a transitional house as a congregation project.
- Invite domestic violence professionals to make presentations at adult classes or lectures.
- Provide brochures in the church/synagogue vestibule about community services dealing with domestic violence.
- Make it clear that violence is not acceptable behavior in a family.
- Speak up when someone tells a wife-beating joke.
- Offer the local domestic violence program meeting space in your church or synagogue for a support group for victims.
- In rural communities, if no shelter is available, participate with other community leaders in establishing a safe-home network.
- Set aside a regular worship day to focus on domestic violence so that victims in the congregation can come forward.
- Ensure that the congregation’s library owns several copies of :  
*When Love Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can’t Do Anything Right*

For churches: *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*

For synagogues: *You Are Not Alone: Solace and Inspiration for Domestic Violence Survivors Based on Jewish Wisdom*

(See [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org))

## To prevent abuse from happening:

- Speak out from the pulpit against battering and for equality and mutual respect in intimate relationships. Include victims and abusers in public prayers.
- Offer pre-marriage counseling which approaches the topics of equality, conflict, violence, and control, as well as the more commonly discussed subjects of money, sexuality, and in-laws, to help clarify basic expectations between partners in advance of marriage.
- Use available teenage curricula to help prevent domestic violence. Abusive patterns formed in teenage relationships are hard to break later in adult relationships.

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## How religious and secular communities can work together

Unfortunately, in the past there has sometimes been distrust between the clergy and secular domestic violence organizations. From the secular point of view, the church/synagogue and their doctrines have at times been considered part of the problem. Religious involvement has been seen to place blame on the woman, to accept the man's plea for forgiveness, and to recommend that the woman return home. Shelter workers understand that the woman's fear is real, and they can teach her about how to be safe, how to obtain restraining orders, how to pursue legal action, and how to seek social services. On the other hand, the clergy often feel that the secular workers are striving only for separation of the partners, without consideration of the sanctity of the marriage vow or religious beliefs.

When women leave their partners, it is a spiritual as well as a physical crisis, and the team formed when the clergy and secular community join hands can be a powerful one. Roman Catholic leaders in Quebec have issued a 60-page working draft in which Auxiliary Bishop Pierre Morissette maintains that priests should work with agencies even if they do not share all tenets of church teaching. "The church today does not shun economic, social or artistic movements whose leading members may take stands that we may question or even reject," the paper says. "Why should the church shun the feminist movement to which it is indebted for awakening people to unjust and unacceptable situations and denouncing them?"<sup>8</sup> The shelter provides for physical safety when it is really needed; the clergy provide spiritual solace when it is really needed.

**To make this partnership viable, a few suggestions are offered:**

**for the staff of a shelter or domestic violence program:**

- Establish contact with clergy and religious counseling agencies (for example, Jewish Family Services, Catholic Community Services, Lutheran Social Services) in your community, and offer them training on domestic violence. (See below for recommendations for a joint training.)
- When a woman comes to your program, notice any religious references, questions or concerns.

- Take religious issues seriously, and support the woman's concerns.
- When a woman wants support discussing spiritual matters, call a priest/minister/rabbi whom you know will understand the situation. (These people should be identified in advance of the need so that you will know upon whom to call.)
- Join community organizations such as the National Council of Jewish Women, B'Nai B'Rith, and/or Church Women United to encourage understanding in the community, and to provide the opportunity for informal introductions to religious leaders.
- Invite area clergy and lay leaders to the program (if the location is not confidential), share your philosophy of empowerment, ask them to make a short presentation to staff on ways the program might help religious clients.
- Provide for a few simple religious needs, such as Shabbat candlesticks for Jewish women or a Bible for Christian women, which can provide comfort.
- Offer to make presentations for church/synagogue study groups.
- Appreciate that many clergy are trying to respond with sensitivity to difficult situations, and offer educational resources which might help them.

### for clergy and lay leaders:

- Educate yourself about domestic violence and about services in your area.
- Maintain ongoing relationships with staff of domestic violence programs so that if the occasion arises, you will know who can best help.
- Offer to talk to shelter staff, always clarifying that no religious tradition condones violence. (See below for recommendations for a joint training.)
- Invite shelter workers to make presentations at adult education sessions.
- Ask for brochures to make available in the church/synagogue vestibule for anyone seeking help.
- Provide Bibles, candles and other religious materials to shelters for their religious residents, as well as donating funds which can be used for non-religious purposes.

- Appreciate shelter workers as dedicated individuals who often make sacrifices to perform their duties, and usually have a calling of their own which inspires their work and caring.
- Offer support to shelters and domestic violence agencies in the form of testimonial letters for grants and other fund-raising projects.
- Write to legislative representatives to create laws which protect women from partner abuse.

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## Joint training for religious and secular groups

Most shelters and domestic violence programs are eager to work with religious coalitions, interfaith networks or individual congregations. At the same time, many religious communities are interested in working with secular agencies, but do not know how their proposed participation will be received. Artificial barriers can be eliminated by taking the initiative and arranging for a training session, either by the religious sector for shelter workers, the secular community for the religious community, or a cooperative training and interaction for both groups. Once an initial contact has been made and an agreement reached to share ideas through a training or educational session, the following items should be considered in developing a program:

- The leadership should be shared by a member of the religious community and a member of the secular community. If meeting in a neutral location, each should introduce the other. If presenting in either the secular or religious building, the host organization should act as emcee and introduce the visiting speaker.
- Both speakers should make remarks about how the communities can work together effectively. If there is a guest presenter to educate the audience about his or her organization, then this should be the bulk of the program time. If the audience is composed of both religious lay persons and shelter staff, and the intent is to meet and learn from each other, the time should be shared equally. A few suggestions follow.

### To the secular presenter:

- (a) When making final arrangements for the program, ask the host/hostess to provide you with position statements prepared by the church/synagogue addressing domestic violence issues (if available) so that there will be an understanding of the official position of the religious institution.
- (b) If the presenter is not of the faith where he or she will be a guest, ask for doctrine guidelines so that a basic understanding of the religious tenets may be reviewed.

## To the religious presenter:

- (a) Ask your host/hostess to provide information on how agency workers are currently instructed to handle religious concerns of people seeking help.
- (b) Ask for a mission statement or other value statements as to the purpose and philosophy of the institution you will be addressing so that this frame of reference is understood.

## To both the religious and secular presenters:

- (a) There may be resistance to some of your ideas, so approach the subject gently, and in an organized, non-threatening manner.
  - (b) When presenting your viewpoints, services and resources, present them as assistance without inferring that the service is something in which the host organization is deficient.
  - (c) Focus on how a partnership will reward both communities through making a difference in as many lives as possible.
  - (d) Open the floor for suggestions as to how both communities can work together more effectively – and take notes!
- There should be time reserved at the end of the program for questions.

*“None of us as helpers should ever put a battered woman in the position of having to choose between her safety and the support of her religious community. She needs both...and it’s up to us to provide that.”*

Reverend Marie M. Fortune

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# Resources

## Library Resources

*Abuse and Religion – When Praying Isn’t Enough.* 1988. Eds. Anne L. Horton and Judith A. Williamson. Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books.

*Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse.* Rev. Marie M. Fortune. 1987. HarperSanFrancisco, a division of HarperCollins Publishers, New York.

*Shalom Bayit – A Jewish Response to Domestic Violence.* I. Russ, S. Weber, E. Ledley et al. 1993. The Shalom Bayit Committee, 6851 Lennox Avenue, Panorama City, CA 91405.

*Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers.* Rev. Marie M. Fortune. 1991. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press.

*When Love Goes Wrong: What to do When You Can’t Do Anything Right.* Ann Jones and S. Schechter. 1992. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

*When Love is Not Enough: Spousal Abuse in Rabbinic and Contemporary Judaism.* Rabbi Julie R. Spitzer. 1991. New York: National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.

*Woman Battering.* Adams, Carol J. 1994. Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series, Mountlake Terrace, WA: Augsburg/Fortress Press.

## Organizations

For services for victims in the U.S. or Canada, look under “Abuse,” “Community Services” or “Emergency Numbers” in the front of your telephone book.

For informational material on family violence in Canada, contact:

**National Clearinghouse on Family Violence**

1-800-267-1291 (within Canada)

[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence)

For educational information in Canada:

**Education Wife Assault**

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

416-968-3422

[www.womanabuseprevention.com](http://www.womanabuseprevention.com)



For resources, policy development, training and technical assistance in the U.S.:

**National Resource Center on Domestic Violence**

Harrisburg, PA USA

1-800-537-2238

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

[www.nrcdv.org](http://www.nrcdv.org)

For technical assistance and training in the U.S.:

**Texas Council on Family Violence**

Austin, TX USA

512-794-1133

For prevention, public education, for health or justice programs in the U.S.:

**Family Violence Prevention Fund**

San Francisco, CA USA

415-252-8900

[www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)

For information on legal defense of battered women in the U.S.:

**National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women**

Philadelphia, PA USA

215-351-0010

For information about treatment and prevention of domestic violence in the Jewish community in the U.S.:

**The Family Violence Project of Jewish Family Service**

Sherman Oaks, CA

818-789-1293

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## Footnotes

1. *New York Times Magazine*, February 16, 1992.
2. Hart, B. Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1989. Statistics collected 1979-1989.
3. Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. *To live without fear: A statement on violence against women*. June 13, 1991.
4. Straus MA, Gelles RJ, and Steinmetz S. *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family*. Anchor Books, Garden City, NY. 1980.
5. *Report to the Nation on Crime & Justice*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, October 1983.
6. In actuality, Delia was charged with hiring someone to kill her husband. She was arrested and charged with Aggravated Homicide, which carries a potential sentence of death or life in prison with no chance for parole. She later pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of Second Degree Murder. She was sentenced to 10 years in prison by the Skagit County Superior Court (State of Washington) in December, 1988. Delia was granted clemency by Governor Booth Gardner and released in November 1989.
7. This is an extrapolation. The FBI estimates that 3,000 women are killed annually by partners. The Viet Nam War lasted 18 years. Therefore, in 18 years, there were 54,000 deaths. The figure 58,000 Americans killed in Viet Nam is a commonly used statistic.
8. Poronovich W. Canadian Bishops: "Church teaching abets wife abuse." *National Catholic Reporter*, Religious News Service, New York. December 22, 1989.

## Citations for statistics mentioned in the DVD and not referenced in Study Guide:

“In the U.S. and Canada, 31% of all women killed are murdered by their husbands, ex-spouses, or boyfriends.” Rose, K and Goss J. *Domestic Violence Statistics*. National Criminal Justice Reference Source, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1989, p. 12. Ministry of Supply and Services Canada, Statistics Canada, Canadian Center for Justice Statistics, 1992.

“Abuse can happen in any intimate adult relationship, but in 95% of all domestic violence cases, the assaults are committed by men against women.” *Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice*, Bureau of Justice Statistics. U.S. Department of Justice, October 1983.

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