

Creating Partnerships with Faith Communities to End Sexual Violence



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by Cynthia Okayama Dopke
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Table of Contents

Introduction.	1
Why this Resource?.	2
What is Sexual Violence?	3
Sexual Violence Prevention	7
Changing Cultures of Violence	9
Why Partner with Faith Communities?	11
Creative Partnerships with Faith Communities.	13
An Example from Practice: One advocate, one faith community.	14
An Example from Practice: One agency, many communities of faith	16
An Example from Practice: Interfaith Dialogue	18
Getting Started	20
Accepting the Challenge	25
The Role of the Facilitator/Organizer.	26
Questions to Examine Your Readiness.	27
Managing Conflict.	30
Reflections on Faith, Community and Ending Sexual Violence	33
Rabbi Cindy G. Enger	35
Carmen Español	39
Farhiya Mohamed	45
Nancy Murphy	47
Bettie Williams-Watson	49
Conclusion	52
Resources	53

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Creating Partnerships with Faith Communities to Prevent Sexual Violence

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in creating partnerships with faith communities to prevent sexual violence. Faith communities represent important community institutions that can play a key role in helping to prevent and



raise awareness about sexual violence. We also know that faith communities are not immune to the effects of sexual violence. They represent institutions that need to be held accountable along with every other community institution. We also know that some survivors of sexual violence go to their faith communities and religious leaders for support and

healing. Because of the unique role that faith communities have in people's lives and in the life of a community, there is much potential for effective and powerful partnerships to engage in prevention strategies that will make a difference.

This guide is about exploring the many ways that we can work with faith communities to promote the well-being of all. It includes practical educational and organizing resources available to help you continue this path as well as spaces for you to take notes in the side bars to encourage you to write down your ideas.

Why This Resource?

This resource is written to help you think about new ways to partner with faith communities to prevent sexual violence, whether you are interested in working within your own faith community, or in building a partnership between community-based organizations and faith communities.



The idea grew out of a series of interfaith dialogue sessions in the Seattle area that the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs convened in collaboration with FaithTrust Institute. The dialogues focused on naming sexual violence from a faith perspective, community accountability and the role of the faith community in prevention. The reflections included in this resource are from women who participated in the dialogue series. Through a recent community assessment process, Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs also learned that many people go to faith communities and religious leaders in times of crisis and need, especially within some communities that have been marginalized by mainstream society.

As the author, I feel it is also important to name my own social location, which illustrates the framework from which I write as well as the tool's limitations. I come to this task as an Asian American Protestant Christian woman who has participated in Christian churches that have an orientation toward social justice ministries. As Prevention Services Coordinator at Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, I also bring the lens of community-based rape crisis advocacy and the task of sexual assault prevention through community development and social change. I recognize that the suggestions in this tool will not apply to all religious traditions or all communities, though efforts were made to make them applicable in a wide variety of settings.

What is Sexual Violence?

Sexual violence is a form of violence and dehumanization in our society perpetrated by those with power over others who use sex or sexuality to dominate and control. Sexual violence is physical, emotional, social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and/or political acts and/or behaviors that use sex and/or sexuality as tools of violence and oppression (through the misuse of power and control) against children, youth, women and men.¹ Sexual violence is a symptom of social conditions that maintain the imbalance of power and societal privilege. It connects with other oppressions based on physical and/or mental ability, age, race, class and other factors in which people experience systematic oppression by those with more privilege in society. Sexual violence manifests itself through behaviors, attitudes and beliefs that serve to reinforce the imbalance of power.

Sexual violence is physical, emotional, social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and/or political acts and/or behaviors that use sex and/or sexuality as tools of violence and oppression (through the misuse of power and control) against children, youth, women and men.

Washington State Sexual
Assault Prevention
Advisory Committee, 1997

Sexual Violence Identified

Sexual violence can include behaviors such as sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, rape, sexual assault, and sexual exploitation as well as demeaning comments, jokes or name-calling based on one's gender identity or sexual orientation. Sexual violence can be understood as a continuum of behaviors and actions that reinforce harmful attitudes.

As you talk with religious communities, they may seek a religious understanding of sexual violence. Each tradition will have its own interpretation of sexual violence. For example, theologian Dr. Toinette Eugene writes that a “womanist-informed definition of sexual abuse is constructed in terms of the experiences of African-American women

¹ This definition was written by the Washington State Sexual Assault Prevention Advisory Committee, 1997.

within a historical context, and in terms of ethical, religious, and psychological issues regarding sexual violation.” She defines sexual violence from the context of African American women’s faith and lived experiences. She continues, “[t]herefore, the elements of sexual abuse are the violation of one’s bodily integrity by force and/or threat of physical violence. It is the violation of the ethic of mutuality and care in relationships of domination. It is a violation of one’s psycho-spiritual-sexual integrity by using sexual abuse to control and express violence. Sexual abuse is the violation of God incarnate in each of us.”²

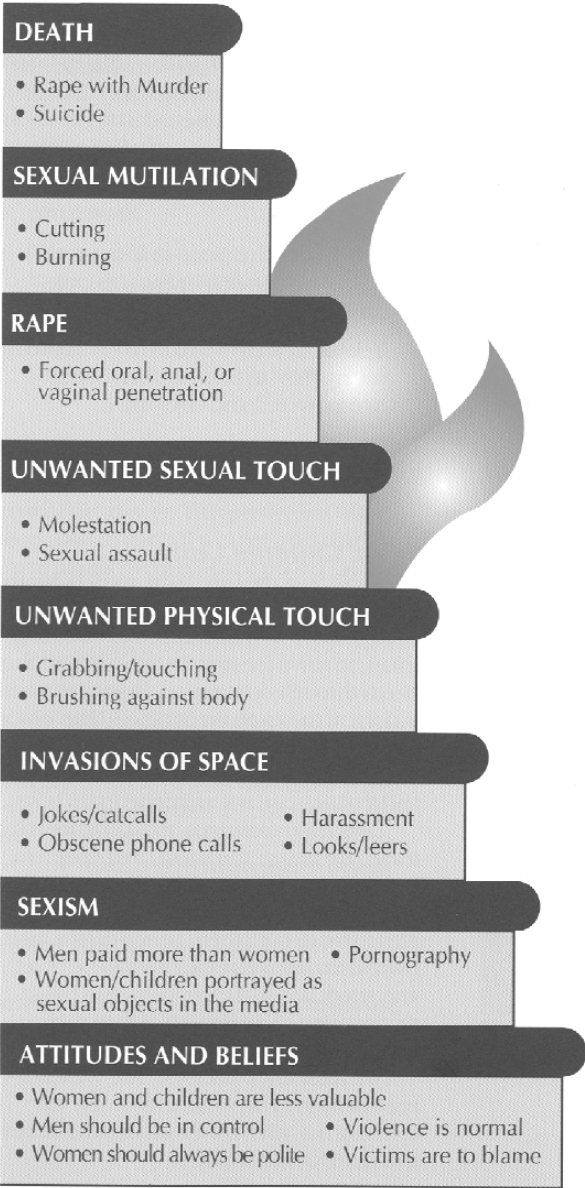
The faith reflections and resources listed at the end of this resource can assist you or you can collaborate with religious leaders to develop a faith-based understanding of sexual violence.

For the Washington State legal definitions of sexual assault crimes, see RCW Chapter 9.44. A link can be found at the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs web site at www.wcsap.org, or call *Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs* for more information at (360) 754-7583.

² Toinette M. Eugene, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!: A Womanist Ethical Response to Sexual Violence and Abuse” in *Violence Against Women and Children*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995), pages 186-187.

This continuum depicts the relationship of behaviors that have been defined as sexual violence.

The Sexual Violence Continuum



The Sexual Violence Continuum was created for the 1994 *Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs* Sexual Assault Awareness Week Campaign

Write in your own words how you define sexual violence:

As you review the sexual violence continuum, can you think of how you might use it as a resource with faith communities?

What challenges come to mind when you think about defining sexual violence in a faith community?

Sexual Violence Prevention

“Prevention of sexual violence requires addressing the root causes of the problem. Sexual violence is not an occasional, isolated incident experienced by individuals in an extraordinary situation. Sexual violence is a widespread problem taking place in a broad social context which allows and even encourages it to occur. Rape and child sexual abuse are life-threatening by-products of a violent, sexist and racist society. Our society accepts violence as normative and inevitable.”

Rev. Marie Marshall Fortune
*Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*³

How do we prevent sexual violence? As Rev. Fortune suggests above, prevention “*requires addressing the root causes of the problem.*” It requires that we ask the question, “what is happening in our culture that allows sexual violence to be tolerated?” Once we begin to answer this question and identify root causes and conditions, we can start to work toward positive change to end sexual violence. Rev. Fortune continues, “[w]e encourage sex role differences which accentuate masculine aggression and feminine passivity. We confuse sexual activity with sexual violence to the extent of equating the two. We tend to blame the victim or blame God instead of holding the offender responsible for his acts. Until we begin to address these attitudes and practices in our society, we will not see a significant decrease in the incidence of sexual violence. The prevalence of these attitudes and practices creates a climate of tolerance of sexual violence in our society.”⁴

The task of engaging in sexual violence prevention with faith communities is to facilitate community members in identifying these harmful attitudes and behaviors and to create a vision of a healthy and safe community—a community without sexual violence. Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs proposes a community development approach to this challenge.

Sexual Violence Prevention means promoting attitudes, behaviors, and social conditions that reduce and ultimately eliminate factors that cause or contribute to sexual violence.

Washington
State Sexual
Assault
Prevention
Advisory
Committee,
1997

³ Marie Marshall Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), page 230.

⁴ Ibid.

What is your understanding of how to prevent sexual violence?

What community partnerships have you facilitated to prevent sexual violence? How might they be similar or different than working with the faith community?

Changing Cultures of Violence

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs' sexual violence prevention strategy uses community development work to change aspects of culture that support sexual violence. The model has been adapted from the prevention theories of William Lofquist.⁵ The practices and principles of community development focus on promoting the attitudes, practices and beliefs that contribute to the well-being of that community.

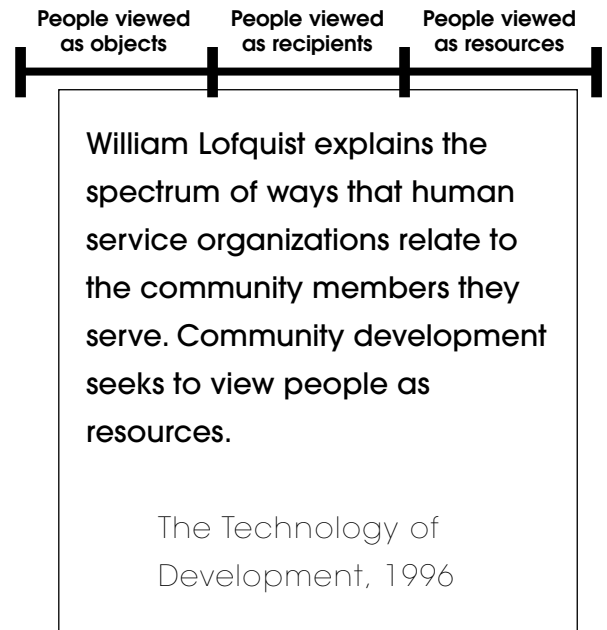
Gayle M. Stringer, Prevention Services Director at Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, has developed several resources to assist communities in creating a community development prevention strategy.⁶

Instead of making all of the method and content decisions ourselves, our community helps us, participates as resources and partners in our prevention planning and implementation process.

Gayle M. Stringer,
Washington Coalition of
Sexual Assault Programs

Ms. Stringer explains community development this way:

This fundamentally different approach views community members, stakeholders, as resources and partners in prevention. The focus is on addressing the underlying conditions that support sexual violence. Instead of relying on what we think the community knows and believes and experiences about sexual assault, we engage in dialogue about it. They help us to do an assessment of their own particular needs and strengths. Instead of making all of the method and content decisions ourselves, our community helps us, participates as resources and partners in our prevention planning and implementation process. Participation, commitment



⁵ William Lofquist has written several books on prevention, which are available from Development Publications, PO Box 36748, Tucson, AZ 85740, (520) 575-7047.

⁶ See the resource list at the end of this guide for more information about these resources.

An often over-looked collaborative partner is the faith community. Whether it is a church, synagogue, temple, or other place of worship, our religious entity shapes our ethics and behaviors. It is also an area where people might be more likely to divulge information about past experiences, i.e. sexual assaults.

Sexual
Assault
Awareness
Month
Information
Packet
2002,
Minnesota
Coalition
Against
Sexual
Assault

and potential for sustainability often increase as a result of the community involvement fostered by community development.⁷

This approach allows communities to take initiative in identifying underlying conditions and implementing their own vision of a culture free from sexual violence. Underlying conditions can be understood as the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that contribute to a culture of sexual violence.

Community development sets a framework that involves community participation at every level, which fosters local leadership and sustains prevention strategies for the long term.

⁷ Gayle M. Stringer, *Community Development and Sexual Violence Prevention: Creating Partnerships for Social Change* (Olympia, WA: Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, 1999), 17-18. This resource can be downloaded from the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs web site at www.wcsap.org or obtained at Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs by contacting Prevention Services at (360) 754-7583.

Why Partner with Faith Communities?

Religious communities often provide a moral and ethical framework for their participants that offer ways to understand the world we live in, as well as guidance for daily living and interactions with others. In identifying the deep immoral and unethical behaviors that sexual violence exhibits, a religious community can be instrumental in challenging those behaviors and promoting a vision for a culture free of conditions that promote sexual violence. Religious communities can offer a framework for social justice, and you may find common ground in the quest for a more equitable society that seeks the community's well-being.

The fact that you are reading this resource means that perhaps you have already thought of reasons why it would benefit your community to partner with faith communities in your area. If this idea is new to you, this section presents just a few reasons why your community may benefit from a meaningful partnership with faith communities.

- * Faith communities are important community institutions that can **effect positive change** and make a difference in people's lives.
- * Faith communities often **provide local leadership** on social issues. Ending sexual violence and promoting the well-being of, and justice for, all women, children and men may be a part of their mission.
- * Faith communities typically represent a cross-section of the community and can **provide a wide range of perspectives**, ages, and life experiences.
- * The organizational structures of faith communities are often **conducive to establishing a partnership**. Faith communities often have identifiable leaders, committees and groups with which you can partner.
- * Religious leaders are often trusted members of the community and a partnership can **strengthen counseling skills** when they learn about survivor issues related to sexual abuse.

Long before there were community action organizations, congregations played that role. In more recent years, religious and non-religious activists have functioned in separate worlds, although many of their concerns are the same. As organizers, we need to bridge these worlds and help the religious and progressive communities work together more closely.

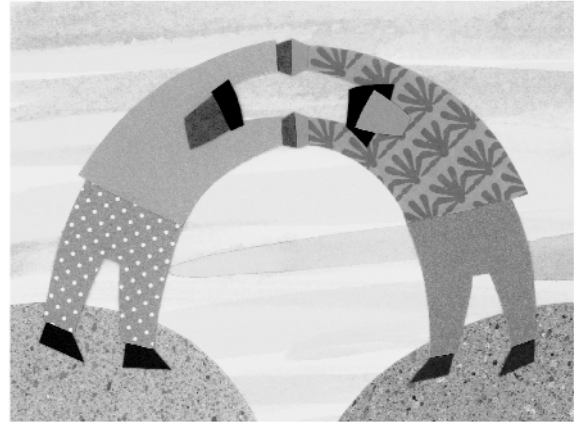
Organizing for Social Change,
Midwest Academy
Manual for Activists, 2001

[illegible]

Creative Partnerships with Faith Communities

When we suggest creating partnerships, it can sometimes be difficult to imagine. And for good reason. There are a multitude of possibilities in creating a partnership. A successful sexual violence prevention partnership will be unique to your own community and ideally be tailored to meet the needs of the faith community as well as yours and will be responsive to the community's vision and goals.

This section gives some examples of how partnerships with faith communities have been formed. Each is very unique to the participants. Also in this section you will find suggestions on how to begin a partnership in your community.



One thing to remember is that partnerships do not form overnight. It can take months or years for individuals and agencies to build relationships of mutual respect and trust that are strong enough to develop into a tangible partnership. Laying the groundwork is an important step in the process and there is no substitute for the time, flexibility and patience it requires to nurture a new relationship.

An Example from Practice: One advocate, one faith community

After reading the first example, are you aware of such collaborative efforts in your community?

What other similar partnerships are you aware of between faith communities and sexual assault services?

If you are not aware of any such collaborations, can you name any faith communities whom you might approach for support?

This example shows how one faith community supports sexual assault and domestic violence advocacy through the connection with an advocate.

An advocate shared with her pastor and congregation her advocacy work with survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. Having developed a trusting relationship with the pastor, she is able to turn to the church for help when she has exhausted all other support services. The advocate can call the pastor who is authorized to provide financial support for survivors in crisis with no questions asked. The church also offers food vouchers and warm clothing available for people in need that the advocate can access for survivors if the resources are not available at her agency or elsewhere. The pastor understands the work of her organization and respects issues of confidentiality and does not require information about the survivor before assistance is given.

While this partnership focuses on support for crisis intervention, much groundwork has been laid for possible prevention partnerships.

This next example shows a faith community supporting dialogue on community safety, which presents an opportunity to discuss sexual violence.

In the same community, a local church is hosting a public safety meeting for members of the community. The sexual assault and domestic violence advocate sees opportunities to address issues of sexual assault and domestic violence in the larger context of community safety and will participate in planning meetings to ensure that this happens. Some of the topics of concern at the forum include: youth, education, economic development, housing, and community empowerment. This safety forum will include participation by public safety officials, politicians, the Red Cross, other religious communities and a representative from the sexual assault and domestic violence agency.

Faith communities that engage in the emergent issues of their surrounding community, such as violence, may be willing to address sexual violence as a social concern.

This next example illustrates how one agency used the community development model to engage in a partnership with local faith communities.

Do the religious communities in your area participate in discussions about community safety? If so, take note of which communities participate for future collaborations:

What are other ways you can envision faith communities participating in community dialogues on safety, accountability and sexual violence prevention?

An Example from Practice: One agency, many communities of faith



Community Development in One Faith Community⁸

The Yakima Sexual Assault Unit, a division of Central Washington Comprehensive Mental Health, initiated a project in the faith community in Yakima. As a part of their planning process they determined which faith groups were located in their community in order to invite as many representatives as possible. They provided information to other community agencies about their plan and suggested the possibility that those agencies may receive referrals as a result of the information received by the faith community participants. They elicited from churches what services were being provided to victims of sexual assault in their community. And they formed a clear idea within their agency about what they wanted to pursue with the project.

Invitations were sent to all faith-based groups listed in the yellow pages of the telephone directory. Twenty-three persons participated in the initial meeting and as time went on they were joined by another six. Many different faith groups were represented. The initial meeting was planned around mealtime and food was provided.

At the first meeting this focus group brainstormed ideas and concerns around sexual violence. Participants suggested that there was a need for education in the congregations. The focus group expressed a need to be heard, for someone to listen to the concerns of the clergy. A need for accurate and complete referral resources was expressed. The group asked the sexual assault unit to share their expertise and answer questions. The group determined that they would like to meet monthly.

⁸ Excerpted from *Community Development and Sexual Violence Prevention: Creating Partnerships for Social Change*, by Gayle M. Stringer, M.A., pages 51-54.

There are already some substantial successes in their project. Congregations are a natural network. This network is now speaking about sexual violence. This community has broken the silence around sexual violence and seems committed to continuing that trend. There is comfort and trust within the group of stakeholders and a growing sense of trust and familiarity with the sexual assault unit. One church has invited the sexual assault unit to host a support group in their church, creating a new way to work together. Several churches are willing to advertise the services of the agency. Other groups in the community are becoming aware of the working group of stakeholders. They are interested in becoming connected, sharing with and learning from this group.

There are substantial challenges as well. Examining disparate denominational beliefs and attitudes about the issue of sexual assault is one issue. Challenging to both the sexual assault unit and the group is the desire for biblical referencing of violence, forgiveness and related issues. It will require collaboration with stakeholders to decide what might be done to incorporate faith/scripture issues.

The community development work in Yakima shows how a partnership can be formed with several faith communities in one region.

Would this work in your community?
Why or why not?

What ideas from the Yakima example do you think you might consider for your partnership with faith communities?

How might you prepare to meet the challenges that the Yakima Sexual Assault Unit faced?

An Example from Practice: Interfaith Dialogue



Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs and FaithTrust Institute convened 10 individuals from four faith traditions: Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Baha'i, to discuss issues of sexual violence from these various faith perspectives. There was an initial agreement to meet three times.

Each meeting began with a meal and a chance to get to know one another. Because the participants were coming from different religious and cultural perspectives, dialogue began with reflecting on how sexual violence is understood from the various faith perspectives. Participants identified issues that they consider contributing to sexual violence, such as: the lesser role of women and children in some traditions, how forgiveness has been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and the subjective nature of interpreting religious scripture.

The goal was to identify how the participants understood sexual violence within their traditions and to examine some common themes among the various faiths while recognizing the uniqueness of each perspective.

Subsequent dialogues focused on community accountability. Examples emerged as to how communities do or do not respond to sexual and domestic violence, including: how one church decided to allow a registered sex offender to join the worshipping community and the challenges that posed, how women of faith in the Philippines took action to stop violence against women in their community, and how clergy with a history of sexual misconduct are not held accountable by their peers and the challenges of bringing charges of misconduct against respected leaders.

Participants are now planning ways they can work together to prevent sexual violence in partnership with each other and their respective faith communities. (To learn more about interfaith work, see page 25 for a list of interfaith web sites.)

What experience with interfaith collaboration, events or organizing do you have?

What religious traditions and denominations are represented in your community?



How knowledgeable are you about the various traditions and faiths?

Getting Started

There are many things that can be done, but it all starts with sitting down and meeting one another face-to-face and having a dialogue.

Carmen
Español,
Interfaith
dialogue
participant.
See pages
39-44.

There are many ways that you can begin to establish a working relationship with faith communities to prevent sexual violence. First, if you are at a community agency, discuss with your colleagues their willingness to lend agency support for this partnership. Once that is established, you can begin to reach out to the community.

Two underlying goals would be to: 1) establish some level of trust and 2) cultivate the spirit of working together in partnership. The first step would be to “take an inventory” of your current relationships with faith communities. List all of the individuals you know who are connected with a community of faith in your area.

If you do not have any relationships in the faith community, ask your friends, family or colleagues if they know members of faith communities who may be willing to talk with you about your ideas. *Be cautious about asking personal information of your colleagues. Discussing issues of religion in the workplace may not be acceptable.* Be clear about the kind of information you are seeking and talk with your supervisor and other agency leaders to make it clear what you are interested in learning. Consider asking for information in a staff meeting or a group setting, so that you do not single out individuals and be sure to emphasize that this is optional information that people can choose to share with you. It is important not to pressure anyone to talk about their religious beliefs, practices or experiences.

Cold Calls

If you don't have any contacts, you may need to make “cold calls.” Try to set up visits with faith leaders or interested groups to share information about yourself, your work and your vision for a potential partnership. This is an opportunity for you to learn about how each faith community has been involved in the community.

Face-to-Face Meetings

One of the most effective ways to build relationships with people is to spend time with them in person. As you sort through your list of potential partners, start to contact faith community representatives and schedule some face-to-face time with them if possible. If you are meeting with the spiritual leader, this may be an opportunity to talk about the services available in the community for survivors of rape and childhood sexual abuse. For example, if a survivor goes to her pastor for support, the pastor may be able to refer her to your agency for additional support services. Religious leaders often have a lot of influence with their faith communities, so building a strong relationship with religious leaders could benefit your long-term goals for a lasting partnership. Even if the primary spiritual leader or leaders are not directly involved in your efforts, it will be to your advantage to establish and maintain a relationship with them.

Sometimes, you might find a faith community that is ready to begin immediately to address sexual violence issues, and others will be hesitant and need much more information and decision-making time. The video, *Bless Our Children, Preventing Sexual Abuse*⁹, shows how one resistant Christian congregation took the time to discuss the issues that arose when the Education Director wanted to begin teaching a sexual abuse prevention curriculum.

List the names of representatives from faith communities and faith-based organizations with whom you have worked.

Describe how you and/or your organizations worked together.

⁹ See Resource List at the back of this guide for more information on this video.

The following text is a sample notice you can request to have placed in religious newsletters or bulletins.

Community Rape Crisis Services

Community Rape Crisis Services is a community-based agency that provides confidential advocacy and support services to adult and child victims of sexual assault.

For more information about the services we provide, please contact our office at: 555-1234.

If you are in crisis, please call our confidential 24- hour crisis line at 555-4321.

CRCS is a non-profit organization that relies on financial and volunteer contributions of members of the community. If you would like to make a financial contribution or learn more about volunteer opportunities, please contact Jane Doe at 555-1235.

A few suggestions for beginning stages of relationship-building include:

- * Offer educational programs on sexual violence.
- * Ask a leader in the faith community to co-facilitate such an event to interpret the issues through a religious lens or to talk about existing sexual harassment or misconduct policies specific to the institution.
- * Ask to advertise your agency and services in the faith community newsletter.
- * Ask about using the religious community's building for meeting space or for hosting support groups.
- * Meet with leaders and participants of the faith community to engage in conversation. Learn what their issues and concerns are and just offer to engage in dialogue about various issues. Let them get to know you and the work of your organization.

Sexual Violence Awareness

As Bettie Williams-Watson points out in her reflection (pages 49-51), faith communities often do not openly discuss sexual violence.

Communities who are in denial that sexual violence is an issue may need basic information and awareness. Sexual Assault Awareness Week/Month (April) can be a good time to do awareness-raising activities with faith communities.

The Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault¹⁰ put together the following list as suggestions for activities that faith communities can do to raise awareness and support survivors of sexual assault. Share this list with your potential prevention partners in the faith community.

¹⁰ Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault, (612) 313-2799, www.mncasa.org

* **Become a safe place.** Make the church, temple, mosque, or synagogue a safe place for victims of violence. Display materials that include local, state and national hotlines for these victims.

* **Educate the congregation.** Routinely include instructional information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, and in marriage preparation classes and sponsor educational seminars on sexual assault.

* **Speak out.** Speak out about sexual assault from the pulpit. A faith leader can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs and his or her leadership is important, particularly on public policy issues such as funding and changes in criminal laws.

* **Lead by example.** Volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local sexual assault program or train to become a crisis volunteer.



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

* **Partner with existing resources.** Include a local sexual assault program in donations and community service projects.

* **Prepare to be a resource.** Seek out training from experienced trainers on sexual assault, dating violence and stalking. Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to sexual assault. Encourage and support training and education for all clergy and lay leaders, chaplains, and seminary students to increase their awareness about sexual assault.¹¹

¹¹ FaithTrust Institute provides training for clergy and laity on sexual abuse issues. Contact them at (206) 634-1903, or visit their website at: www.faithtrustinstitute.org.



Clergy or Ministerial Associations

Many communities have clergy or ministerial associations that bring leaders together who are of the same faith but from different communities. As you begin making your connections with local religious groups, find out if there are such associations in your community. This may be another opportunity for you to build key relationships.

Interfaith Organizations

Many communities have interfaith organizations or councils that meet regularly. If you are interested in an interfaith approach to working with faith communities, find out if such an organization exists. Inquire about the types of issues they discuss and find out if they have ever discussed issues of violence against women or sexual violence. Some interfaith organizations focus on social issues specifically, while others may make efforts to avoid topics that could be considered “too controversial” or political. The best way to find out is to talk with as many participants as possible to get an idea if you would be able to create a partnership with such a group.

You could also convene a new multi-faith group to discuss issues of sexual violence prevention. While this may be more work, you have the advantage of starting fresh and shaping the purpose of a new social change effort.

Accepting the Challenge

Challenge yourself to learn about all of the religious communities and organizations in your area. As communities become more diverse, our prevention efforts will also need to become multicultural in order to respond to changing communities. Creating partnerships with faith communities to prevent sexual violence can help build cultural bridges that can strengthen your community.

Interfaith Resources

To learn more about interfaith efforts, check out these web sites.

North American Interfaith Network:
www.nain.org

Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions:
www.cpwr.org

World Interfaith Congress:
www.interfaithcongress.org

Seattle Area interfaith groups include:

The Interfaith Council of Washington:
www.interfaithcouncil.com

The Church Council of Greater Seattle:
www.churchcouncilseattle.org

The Role of the Facilitator/Organizer

Write down any biases toward religious communities you have as you prepare to work together:

What will be the most personally challenging for you in a partnership with faith communities?

As you prepare for community development work with faith communities, it will be helpful to make sure that you are prepared to deal with the challenges and tasks ahead of you. You will need to be able to organize and facilitate meetings and engage in a variety of conversations on issues of faith and sexual violence. The following questions can help you reflect upon your readiness to engage in this process.

Personal Inventory

One of the biggest barriers to a successful partnership with faith communities can be unexamined biases against religious organizations and people. We know that many people have had negative or hurtful experiences in the context of religion, and many of the dominant culture religious institutions are responsible for upholding harmful and oppressive belief systems, behaviors and attitudes. There are, however, many religious communities and religious leaders who strive to change those aspects of their tradition. It is important for you to be aware of your own perspectives, feelings and biases toward religious institutions and evaluate your ability to work effectively in partnership with such communities. What are your own experiences and feelings about religion? Will any of your own history or bias hinder your work in the community?

Questions to Examine Your Readiness to Facilitate a Community Development Prevention Initiative¹²:

Personal:

Use the space below to write down your responses to the questions. Use additional paper if needed.

- * Are you comfortable working with groups and able to negotiate complex group interactions? Are you willing to do the dynamic group work with individuals from a variety of groups?
- * Do you like the challenge of being a leader who can encourage others to take on leadership as well? Do you have experience or training in facilitative leadership?
- * Are you able to guide groups toward compromise by identifying points of agreement?
- * How open are you to ambiguity and learning as you go?
- * Are you excited about starting something totally new?
- * Are you willing to master the material and be self-disclosing and engaging in your leadership approach?
- * Can you lead individuals through the unfolding of the transformational experience, support them when it creates personal problems, and also take care of yourself?

[illegible]

¹² The readiness questions are adapted from the resource: *Transforming Communities: Creating Safety and Justice for Women and Girls*, by Cathy Ruth. Published by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence in Harrisburg, PA: 1999.

[illegible]

- * How open is your organization to letting volunteers set goals and directions for an aspect of programming?
- * Is your organization willing to live with the tension that could possibly arise when the stakeholder group begins to challenge social institutions?
- * Is your organization willing to shift resources toward community change work that may not directly and immediately benefit your direct services program?
- * How big is your volunteer pool? Can your organization afford to let those who may be interested in activism move their energy to this new opportunity for involvement?
- * Are there staff members interested in and available to lead an interfaith stakeholder group?

Faith Community:

Use the space below to write down your responses to the questions. Use additional paper if needed.

- * Can you identify community members who care about the issue of sexual violence and would welcome an opportunity to address the issues in their community?
- * Do you feel comfortable determining the readiness of these individuals to embrace a community development project which potentially may create backlash factors for them?

As you answer these questions, you can identify areas where you may need assistance or skills. This can also help you identify where you can ask for leadership from your colleagues and from the faith community. Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs has several library resources on group dynamics, facilitation and leadership to assist you in this work.

[illegible]

Managing Conflict

Faith community stakeholders who volunteer to work with you probably agree that sexual violence is wrong and should be prevented. However, you may find that there are underlying values that you and your agency hold that are different from the faith community stakeholders. It will be important to prepare yourself for discussions about potentially controversial yet relevant topics about which faith communities often have strong convictions, such as sexuality, gender roles or abortion. Recognize that faith communities and advocacy communities may have varying opinions about the identification of oppression as the underlying cause of sexual violence.



As facilitator, it will be helpful for you to prepare yourself to address such issues when they arise. You may want to “test the waters” and have those conversations as you talk one-on-one with potential stakeholders. It would be helpful to be upfront about your own values and beliefs in order to identify where there are differences and think about how opposing beliefs and values may complicate or hinder a prevention initiative.

Also realize that identifying such differences can allow you to move forward together for the sake of the community despite such differences. Ultimately, a partnership is not designed to persuade the others to change to be more like you, but rather to honor a respectful co-existence of different communities, cultures and values. Think about how you will identify issues that you can work on together and how you evaluate the importance of areas of disagreement.

Talk with others in your organization, too. It is important that your organization support you in your community development initiative.

Faith communities run the gamut of perspectives, political persuasions and theologies. You will discover through conversations what comfort level you have with various belief systems or ideas. If you are not comfortable facilitating a group with completely opposing values, then do not pursue it. Give yourself time to develop that relationship until you feel able to handle it.

When values conflicts come up in discussions or at meetings, think about how you will address them. Think about what it means to organize a successful prevention initiative with a community that holds a different value system without compromising your own beliefs.

Remember that you are not alone, either. If you feel unable to handle these discussions on your own, ask for assistance from a colleague or contact one of the resource organizations for ideas on how to handle the situation. The facilitation resources at the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs library may be helpful.

The questions to the right reflect some potential areas of conflict between the advocacy community and some faith communities. How would you respond?

Would you partner with a faith community who has taken a public moral stance against homosexuality? Why or why not?

Would you partner with a faith community that rejected a woman's right to choose abortion, even if she was impregnated as a result of rape or incest? Why or why not?

Would you partner with a faith community that taught sexual abstinence until marriage? Why or why not?

Reflections On Faith, Community and Ending Sexual Violence



Introduction

The following reflections are the voices of women of faith from the Seattle area who participated in the interfaith dialogue on sexual violence. Our dialogue sessions focused on naming sexual violence in a faith context, and defining community accountability in religious communities. Five participants accepted an invitation to write some of their reflections to accompany this guide.

Rabbi Cindy G. Enger is the Director of the Jewish Program at the FaithTrust Institute.

I write these reflections as a woman and as a Jew. I am a rabbi and received my rabbinical education and ordination at Hebrew Union College– Jewish Institute of Religion, the seminary for the Reform Movement of Judaism. I have a deep appreciation of the richness of Judaism’s texts and traditions – for the dynamic tension between continuity and change, for the myriad interpretations and transformations that have taken place within the tradition itself and for Judaism’s deep belief in and commitment to the possibility of healing and wholeness in our world.

Regarding Scripture, the Mishnah teaches: “Turn it and turn it again; you will find everything in it.” (Avot 5:24). I believe that healing and wholeness will come when we, as readers of sacred text and as both inheritors and transmitters of religious tradition, turn the text, the tradition, as well as our own eyes and the landscape before us in such a way that we really do see everything that is in Scripture – including the reality of sexual violence and the presence of women who are written as voiceless in the text. To sit with this painful silence is not easy. Yet this is both our challenge and our sacred obligation. From out of the silence, sound will emerge. It may be the voice of our ancestral mothers; it may be our own. This is the path towards healing. It is in this spirit and with this commitment that I reflect and write at this time.

Sexual Violence from a Religious Perspective

Judaism teaches that all human beings are created with a spark of the divine in us. In the Torah we read, “Then God created the human being in God’s image; in the image of the divine, God created it. Male and female God created them.”¹ (Gen. 1:27). Not only is human life precious but “every individual is equally significant before God.”² This teaches us that



¹ Translation from the Hebrew is my own.

² Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereshit (Genesis)*, (Jerusalem: Hemed Press 1972)



whoever destroys one life is regarded by the Torah as if he had destroyed a whole world and whoever saves one life is as one who has saved an entire world. (Mishnah Sanhedrin 37a).

A person who perpetrates sexual violence utterly disregards the divine spark in another human being. A person who perpetrates sexual violence treats another human being not as an individual of equal significance before God but as an object. Sexual violence destroys lives. It destroys entire worlds. Sexual violence diminishes God's presence in our world. Sexual violence is a sin.

Notwithstanding the clarity with which Scripture speaks about both male and female human beings' creation *b'tzelem elohim*, in God's image, the biblical text at the same time contains within it numerous examples of gender inequity, which reflect institutions and a culture in which men and women are not regarded as equally significant before God. In chapter two of the book of Genesis, for example, we read:

God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." ... So God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and while he slept, God took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And God fashioned the rib that God had taken from the man into a woman; and God brought her to the man. (Gen. 2:18, 21-22).³

This version of human creation is quite different than that of Genesis chapter one, which states that "God created the human being in God's image; in the image of the divine, God created it. Male and female God created them." (Gen. 1:27). Some biblical commentators have attempted to harmonize the two versions.

And yet, these two versions of human creation – the first a model of human equality and the second of gender hierarchy and nonmutuality – highlight a tension which exists throughout the biblical text. We might be inclined to ignore or deny this tension. Or we may wish to abandon the text altogether. But there is great wisdom in the text. And it is our inheritance.

³ Adapted from the translation of *JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

The biblical text teaches us of the awesomeness of creation, of God's abundant love for humanity – female and male – and of the possibility of liberation. The same document contains within it stories of rape and murder, oppression and disenfranchisement, suffering and silence.⁴ These stories are painful. But we can learn from them. Perhaps more importantly, we can teach from them as well.

In our teaching of text, we contribute our voices to the tradition. So many of our ancestral sisters were rendered voiceless by the biblical author. We honor them when we offer our voices. What will we say? What will you say?



Defining Community Accountability

We often view participation in the life of a religious community as a sacred obligation. “Do not separate yourself from the community,” the Mishnah teaches. (Avot 2:5). Community is of central importance in Judaism. And yet, affiliation with and participation in community is also a privilege, which comes with certain responsibilities.

In order for our communities to be safe and healthy, we must hold each other accountable for ethical and legal transgressions. This requires us to take a stand, to remember that we cannot look on as neutral bystanders, that we must not stand by idly and watch our neighbor bleed. (Lev. 19:16). “*Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof*,” the Torah implores us to actively pursue justice. (Deut. 16:20). In the context of sexual violence, justice requires that perpetrators be held accountable for their actions and that we participate in the process of accountability.

The Jewish tradition recognizes situations in which, for all sorts of reasons, a person must separate himself from the community, temporarily dwelling *hutz l'mahaneh*, “outside the camp.” For example, in the book of Leviticus, we read in great detail of the process of examination and treatment of a wide variety of skin ailments. The priest would examine a patient and make a diagnosis, not for the purpose of medical treatment, but to distinguish *tzara'at*, which we often translate as leprosy, from all other skin ailments.

⁴ With regard to sexual violence, see, e.g., Genesis 19, Genesis 34, Judges 19 and Hosea 2.



In no way should we suggest that perpetrating sexual violence is analogous or even comparable to a skin ailment. Nor should we isolate or ostracize individuals with bodily ailments. But *tzara'at*, for our ancestors, was not simply a skin ailment or leprosy; it may not have been leprosy at all. Rather, the biblical text recognizes *tzara'at* as a spiritual affliction, perhaps as a punishment for a breach of ethics. Recognizing that such a condition threatened the welfare of the larger community, the person afflicted with *tzara'at* needed to remain *hutz l'mahaneh*, “outside the camp,” for as long as he was so afflicted.

We can learn from the biblical text. The perpetration of sexual violence threatens the welfare of the entire community. We act with commitment to the health of our community when we hold perpetrators accountable. If an arrest has been made, we can encourage the legal system to follow through with prosecution and to hold the perpetrator accountable. We can refuse to honor a perpetrator with *aliyot*, being called to the Torah, or with other honors and positions of synagogue and other communal leadership.

Rabbi Hillel taught, “If I am not for myself who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?” (Avot 1:14). In our religious communities, we gather together in order to be more than only ourselves. If we do not hold each other accountable, what are we? And, if not now, when?

Carmen Español: I am a native Seattleite. I was born at Fort Lawton, which is now Discovery Park, on a blustery winter day before it was decommissioned. I am a second generation Filipino American and cradle Catholic. I was named after my beloved Lola (grandmother) Carmen Navarro Porcincula and am the youngest of five children. I attended Catholic school from first grade through completion of high school. In 2001 I completed on foot, a personal pilgrimage that took me on a journey to my colonial and religious roots across Spain. The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, known as the Camino, is a thousand year old trail and spans 500 miles. I currently am a member of St. Therese parish where I participate as a member of the Social Justice Commission, Simbang Gabi Committee, and a lector. I am a former board member of Seattle Rape Relief and the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. I served as Conference Consultant for the first Filipino Leadership Conference on Domestic Violence for the Asian & Pacific Islander Women & Family Safety Center.



I came to the Interfaith/Intercultural Dialogues this summer to learn and share. I came to find out about bridging gaps, learning how to work and organize within a faith community, and finding common ground with other faith community members. I felt ill prepared to take an intellectual approach to the discussion since I was looking for practical solutions for getting information to the “joe schmoe” everyday person. I am sharing my reflections of our discussions this summer and adding my own critical perspective of my personal experience.

The first thing that struck me was the fact that much of our dialogue intertwined the two issues (Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence) many



times. So, it was strange to me that there was not an “official” member representing Domestic Violence. Our hosts were the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs and FaithTrust Institute. Their presence (domestic violence community) at the discussion table was a void that was missing to me. It seemed a lost opportunity to work with this group that addresses similar issues. The timing is right for domestic violence and sexual assault groups to come together. For those present though, there was a sense of shared community and fellowship to be able to talk openly about addressing faith issues.

From a Catholic perspective and looking through the lens of my Filipino American background, sex is not something that people talk about openly. Especially since it is only supposed to happen within the sanctity of marriage and that children are a blessing of that sexual union. But as a person of a religious, faith, or other cultural community, if you don’t know what “good sex” or “bad sex” is because it’s not talked about, how do you know when it’s abuse? In this regard, I believe we mirror the mainstream. To advocates, forced or unwanted sex, even within the confines of marriage, is rape or sexual violence and to me goes under the heading: “bad” sex. But if you don’t talk about it, it doesn’t exist in your community, right? Little wonder that sexual or domestic violence and prevention are not topics of wide interest and open discussion in a regular parish community. You could say there is denial about these issues in our faith community.

However, the current situation of what is widely seen by the media as the “Catholic Crisis” with the clergy scandals of misconduct has led to questions, doubt, introspection and evaluation about what to do. Sexual assault and domestic violence are issues that have long been neglected and can no longer be denied. Here in the Northwest, there is a certain amount of willingness on behalf of our Catholic leadership to speak about these issues. I won’t say that it is true of all parishes; I can only speak regarding my own experience. My parish delivered homilies that were thought-provoking and indeed called upon our faith teachings to think about these issues. We were also given copies of the policies, programs, and guidelines on sexual abuse and misconduct by clergy, prepared and reviewed by a Blue Ribbon Committee, that includes community professionals and

Archdiocesan leadership. It was a first for me to see what the policies were, as I am sure it was a first for other Catholics. They are well-written policies and I am glad that it was shared and distributed to all who attended that particular Sunday service.

Having good solid policies for the ministry, however, does not speak to what is being done to prevent these things from happening at a pro-active level nor is there a plan to implement prevention to the wider Catholic audience. It does not speak to the average “joe schmoe” churchgoer about what they should do, what their rights are, or how to prevent this in our larger community. A good policy that sits in a book isn’t worth a nickel if no one knows about it and there is no education or awareness about the topic to the rest of the community. And what if you happened to not attend that particular Sunday service? How would you know?

In this policy we learned that clergy must attend training. FaithTrust Institute has been providing excellent training for the past 25 years to religious leadership. But if our Catholic leadership has received this training, why is it that the message has not been brought to the larger community? We want our leadership to be trained on issues and how to deal with victims and perpetrators and how to deliver the message. Then something is very wrong after 25 years if the message has not gotten out to the masses. Organizing at the bottom as well as from the top is another priority and this could be the new priority for Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, the FaithTrust Institute, and faith communities.

So there lies the dilemma for Catholics and sexual assault and domestic violence advocates — how do you let a faith community know of the resources available? How do you work with Catholics and other faith communities? For me, it begins with building relationships and awareness education or training. It is important regardless of what faith community a person belongs to. Each faith community has a wealth and network of resources and services it already provides. For instance, within the Catholic community there are agencies like St. Vincent de Paul Society and Catholic Community Services (CCS) providing a wide variety of social services that many advocates probably refer clients to. Whether it is for housing or





rental assistance, food, utility assistance, childcare, and many other services. What if sexual assault or domestic violence agencies or advocates came up with ways they can be a resource to the CCS & St. Vincent? Like assisting with support groups that cater to Catholics, providing brochures and posters, or just meeting members and dialoguing on cross referral and information sharing, or providing training, etc. Another idea is to start a collaboration between FaithTrust Institute, Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, and the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence to address faith issues in a unified front and do outreach or a public awareness campaign.

There are many things that can be done, but it all starts with sitting down and meeting one another face-to-face and having a dialogue. It is certainly not about proselytizing but about filling the gaps that exist between the two groups. This is also a time for Catholics in the community to ask questions of their faith leadership and ask for a dialogue, information, and awareness. It's time for training lay leadership and pastoral leadership so they can understand how to deal with these issues when confronted. And I'm not just talking about how to deal with victims, but perpetrators as well. Faith leadership can make a big difference in the justice process of healing for these individuals so that they can take responsibility for their actions, get professional help, and move forward instead of backward in their lives. They can move beyond the quick, cheap and hollow forgiveness of "three Hail Mary's and three Our Father's" and have a positive growing experience. Faith leadership providing the spiritual counseling necessary to perpetrators can help break the cycle of violence by supporting perpetrators on the long journey toward responsibility, accountability, healing and justice.

Unfortunately, I know of Catholic women who were counseled incorrectly by their pastors. It led to their eventual distancing from their parish if not a total lack of confidence and confusion in their beliefs and faith and overall feeling of betrayal. These Catholic women that were sexual assault or domestic violence victims who went to their pastors for counseling received either no referrals, or scriptural passages for comfort, prayer, nothing that brought healing or justice for their spiritual or physical safety.

For them, there were suicidal thoughts in the aftermath. There are Catholic women that I know who are dead because they did not have a lifeline to safety. Many pastors are simply not trained enough in how to deal with these cases. It is unfortunate and it should signal a demand for justice, for healing, for prevention. These are the issues that are important for me as a Catholic woman. I challenge both the advocate and faith leadership communities to come together and bridge the gaps that exist.



Lessons in community organizing can be learned from other cultural communities trying to break the barriers of silence. The current situation of sexual misconduct can be looked at against what has happened to the Asian Pacific Islander, in particular the Filipino community. In 1993 Tessie Guzman died in a murder/suicide by her husband. This was shocking since Ms. Guzman was a high profile Filipino Community member and member of then Mayor Norm Rice's Cabinet. At this time, the Filipino Community refused the notion of "domestic violence." It was too shameful, and the community preferred to describe it as a "crime of passion."

Fast forward a few years and Timothy Blackwell murders his wife Susanna Blackwell, 8-1/2 months pregnant, and her two friends, Phoebe Dizon and Veronica Laureta in the King County Courthouse in 1995. The community could not deny that domestic violence was a problem that existed in the community and that this was not another "crime of passion." The additional murders of innocent friends shocked the community to respond. The media generated by this horrific event galvanized a community to ask questions and seek help about resources.

Community volunteer advocates working to address these issues seized the opportunity to work with community leaders to provide informational and awareness workshops. The Asian Pacific Islander Women and Family Safety Center has taken on educating the API community using community organizing as a strategy for outreach.

Widespread concern led to an eventual Leadership Conference on Domestic Violence in the Filipino Community. The result was the education of community leaders and smashing the silence that protects abusers. Within the Filipino American community, the message that it's not



okay to use abuse is a message that is taken seriously and many elders and community leaders know how to link victims to services. At the Annual Vigil each March in remembrance of the Blackwell murders and all victims, you'll see a large contingent of Filipino elderly from the International Drop-In Center proudly marching.

At Seattle University, I once observed a presentation on outreach to Filipino American college students. One student spoke up about her experience with dating violence. She remarked that her *barkada* (friendship circle) had many members that attended a workshop on dating violence previously by the same facilitator. She reported that her friend confided in her that her boyfriend had been abusive to her. She told the group and once it was known, the *barkada* told the boyfriend it was not cool, his behavior was not acceptable to the group. He was shamed into changing his behavior and also, he knew that he was being monitored. The abuse stopped. This anecdote speaks to the power of information to everyday people. I would love to hear stories like this happening in our faith communities. I believe we can learn from using a community organizing strategy.

Farhiya Mohamed is a Domestic Violence Advocate for the Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA). From Somalia, Farhiya works at ReWA as an advocate for Somali women. The Refugee Women's Alliance is a nonprofit, community-based agency with the mission of helping refugee and immigrant women achieve self-sufficiency by providing networking, educational, and support services.



The nature of my work makes me interested in all cultures thus I do have respect for all cultures and religions. Every culture has something unique to offer, as does every faith, I believe. But, in this particular essay, I am not going to write about all these beautiful cultures that I have come across because of my work. Instead I will reflect on my own belief about sexual violence. Of course, my belief has its own route to a culture that I belong to personally -Somali. Even though I am not a religious person, I will state what I know about my religion—Islam—in regards to this subject of sexual violence.

Sex is an intimate relation between two parties. In my culture, one may feel awkward to talk about it publicly, even in good faith. Some other names are used when addressing sex. In my culture it is also even worse again, when this particular relation turns to be a violent one. Rape is a common word that means forceful demand for sex. In my culture we have a word for rape but no one would ever dare to utter it among decent community. Instead, the word rape is framed around so that it is understood. Imagine committing the rape itself!!! Cultures like the one of the United States have broad services to offer victims of various crises, in comparison to my culture.

In this respect, my culture must have realized the impact of such an act on the victims and reserved a very harsh punishment for anyone who commits sexual violence. The punishment for sex offenders may be as high as life imprisonment or the death penalty. One may think it is hard on the offenders but what about the trauma caused during the act? The victims of these crimes have to bear traumatic life-long conditions.



It is my observation that women are the majority of those who suffer the most from sexual violence. This is true in many cases. I cannot understand why women are so vulnerable or victimized. Education is always a good tool to use for the prevention of sexual assault. In this case not only women but men of every community should be educated about what it means to be a victim of sexual violence and the consequences if one commits sexual violence.

Nancy Murphy was born and raised on the rugged West Coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. She moved to Seattle, Washington in 1989. She is personally committed to living life in a way that fosters character and integrity. She believes in a living God, and in the sacredness of every day life. She is the Executive Director of the Northwest Family Life Learning and Counseling Center in Seattle, a treatment facility offering intervention for perpetrators and advocacy for adult and child survivors.



A young woman came to my office; her eyes scanned the windows and exits before she chose a chair with its back to the wall. Her arms clutched a knapsack to her chest as she sank into the furniture; she held it there as if it were a shield. When I asked why she came, she said she couldn't sleep. The dark shadows on her face had already told me that. Then she continued to say how her sister thought maybe I could help her because she had "sort of been raped." I leaned toward her and spoke softly to her. Over the next hour I heard her familiar, unique, tragic story of violation, humiliation and the haunting fear that she would never be safe again. It was all about rape.

Her story, and the stories of countless other rape victims like her, fuel my own outrage and anger about that crime. I am angry with the rapists who commit their crimes against humanity. I am outraged that their victims are left with damage that lingers after their physical wounds heal. Rape is an assault that reaches to the core of what we are as human beings. It is a crime against God's creation and God himself.

As a follower of Jesus, I believe our bodies are God's temple reserved for the Holy Spirit's habitation. In the Bible's Gospel According to John, Jesus promised us that his Holy Spirit would be with us and in us so that we can really know God and live the way Jesus did. Furthermore, Jesus' apostle Paul, in a letter to the Church in Corinth recorded in the New Testament, adamantly chastised the church to be wary of sexual immorality, because



of the unique role their bodies serve as the temple of God [6 th Chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians]. As Christians, we are advised to be holy as God is holy and not to join our bodies with others in impurity. With these admonitions, rape becomes an even more reprehensible vandalism of God's intended home within us as it wreaks havoc on its victims' self-worth, confidence and safety.

Over and over, the Bible tells us God loves us; we are God's children who do not need to be afraid, but need to love each other. A rapist's assault spreads fear and devalues a fellow human being. It is not an act of love. The followers of Jesus want to love. They want to see injured people healed the way Jesus heals them by binding up their broken hearts as they follow him. It is the aim of love to nurture and build others up in the church community.

"We love because he first loved us," is a New Testament motto for Christian behavior and service. It is a necessary guide for working gently with the woman in my office. She did not choose her circumstances. They were not ordained for her by God or part of a sadistic plan to get her attention. God does not send rapists to ravage us or cause us harm; but when bad things happen, God is available to help, comfort and heal. He uses his followers' skills and abilities to wage war against fear and restore wounded souls. He expects his own people to bring love to devastated humans.

The woman in my office lived in a world of fear and uncertainty. She could not begin to see hope again until she walked through the pain and cruel reality of her experience. My opportunity to help her take steps toward hope happened when she sat in my office and whispered the truth about what "sort of" happened to her. That little piece of truth, received in love, started a healing work in her life. Our connection that day helped me refer her to a healing community where she could work through her loss, anger and grief. Her story became part of my resolve to continue to work against violent evils and their legacy of fear in our world. I want to replace that fear with hope and love.

Bettie Williams-Watson is the Founder/Executive Director of the award winning Project M.I.C. (Multi-Level Interfaith Communities). The Project focuses on addressing issues of Domestic, Youth, and Sexual Violence, as well as chemical dependency in predominantly African American as well as other faith communities. Bettie has been a member of the Church of Christ. She is a community organizer, counselor, trainer, speaker, and has worked both with victim/survivors of violence and perpetrators for the past 17 years. She is also featured in the award-winning videos produced by FaithTrust Institute, *“Broken Vows”* and *“Wings Like A Dove.”*



I think before we define or “name” sexual violence, it needs to be recognized that in my faith community, as well as other faith communities, especially communities of color, the naming of sexual violence is largely invisible. But it goes much deeper than that. The whole topic of sex and sexuality makes people uncomfortable when it is brought up—whether it is with the whole congregation or a special group within the congregation, including all women’s or men’s groups. I think the very topic of sexual violence can be frightening for women, because it goes outside the scope of how women may be defining sexual violence. Bringing up the topic of sexual violence may inadvertently be forcing some women to take a deeper look at and name their past experiences with those closest to them, including trusted persons in positions of power who may have crossed the line. For example, one woman said, “I get uncomfortable when you bring this topic (sexual violence) up. I get knots in the pit of my stomach, and I want to call a halt to the discussion. It’s very hard to take a look at some of my past experiences both in childhood and adulthood.” In a sense you are asking people to rename their experiences which may have involved being victimized by sexual violence, and other inappropriate behaviors which led up to sexual violence. It’s like asking someone to open a dark closet and step into it, without knowing what all is in the closet, or what may jump out at you.



It is also important to note that there are multiple layers of shame surrounding sexual violence in the church, and it is even harder in faith communities of color. There is more minimization and denial, which can lead to blaming the victim. An example of victim-blaming would be, “Shame on the victim for bringing the issue up. Shame on you for bringing shame to the church, and shame on you for bringing shame to your family, the perpetrator, and the perpetrator’s family.”

Multiple layers of shame exist for women and children, who are statistically more likely to be victims of sexual violence. However, in predominantly African American faith communities, male victimization is also hardly ever a topic of discussion. It does not compute that men can be victims, in spite of the overkill in the press about the Catholic Church. We need to shine the light everywhere, in all of the dark corners of faith communities and say, “Yes, it has happened here also, and will continue to happen, unless we do something about it. That something includes helping men to heal from sexual abuse.” A preacher’s wife told me recently, “If (the sexual abuse of men) is going to come out, then our churches need to be more equipped to deal with this.” Yet, today, there are no healing classes for men. Who would go, anyway? No one wants to be labeled or stigmatized and further victimized because of their pain and suffering.

These are some of the issues that emerge for me when reflecting on “naming and defining sexual violence,” because I feel that a legal or clinical definition of sexual violence doesn’t necessarily contribute to an understanding by predominantly African American faith communities of what sexual violence is. We must first take a look at, and work towards removing, the layers of shame that exist before we can name the violence effectively.

What is Accountability?

I define accountability as holding the perpetrators, or those at risk of becoming perpetrators, accountable from the beginning. That is why protocols are so important. Not just steps that are written on paper, but actively-practiced, ongoing protocols that define roles and responsibilities of the key “accountants” at every step of the way. Leadership needs to demonstrate a zero tolerance for sexual violence, as well as those behaviors that are on the continuum of sexual violence, such as dirty jokes about women, leering, inappropriate touching, etc. We need to hold perpetrators lovingly accountable and responsible for the violence.

Examples of who the accountants might be include leaders within the immediate congregation, as well as in other churches within the same faith community. Perpetrators or those at risk of becoming perpetrators, should be given a strong reinforced message that they are accountable and responsible to their own congregation, as well as to other churches within the same faith community, so that perpetrators don’t simply hop from one church to the other, when the heat gets turned up, so to speak. I think levels of accountability within predominantly African American churches is a real problem, and in spite of all the progress that has supposedly been made, we still have a long way to go to develop a unified, effective response that holds perpetrators accountable on an immediate and long term basis. I think the whole issue of accountability needs to be further examined. It is so varied as to who perpetrators feel accountable to in a faith community. I question whether people perpetrating sexual violence even feel accountable to themselves.



Conclusion



In these reflections, we hear the voices of people of faith who engage in the questions of sexual violence in the context of their respective religious traditions. Each brings a different cultural and religious lens through which to examine questions of violence and community responsibility. As advocates, they speak to the challenge of creating ways in which our faith communities can be instruments of healing for those who are victimized by sexual violence and how faith communities can engage in the challenges of social change to prevent sexual violence for future generations.

As advocates and social change agents, our task is to find allies from all walks of life so that we keep the mission and vision of preventing sexual violence at the forefront of our community's minds and hearts. We must strive to keep the dialogue going and the strategies moving forward so that many facets of our community are engaged in this work. There is no one strategy that will end the violence. We will not do it alone.

For the sake of survivors of sexual violence in every community, I encourage you to reach out to faith communities as institutions that have the capacity to influence many people's lives. This resource is an invitation to do just that. As with any community development work, it will not be simple, but the potential for effecting change makes the challenge worthwhile.

All these resources are available at the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs' library. Resources marked with an asterisk may be purchased from FaithTrust Institute: www.faithtrustinstitute.org, (206) 634-1903.

VIDEOS

***Bless Our Children: Preventing Sexual Abuse**

Written and directed by Maria Gargiulo

FaithTrust Institute: Seattle, © 1993, 40 minutes

This video and accompanying study guide are intended for Christian clergy, lay leaders, religious educators and teachers who are interested in implementing a personal safety curriculum to help prevent child sexual abuse.

***The Healing Years: A Documentary About Surviving Incest and Child Sexual Abuse**

Directed by Kathy Barbini

Produced by KB Films © 2001, and distributed by FaithTrust Institute

This video profiles three women through their journey of pain and despair from incest, and their incredible process of recovery as they finally work to end the cycle of incest and child sexual abuse for generations ahead. The video is accompanied by a study guide developed by FaithTrust Institute which addresses religious issues.

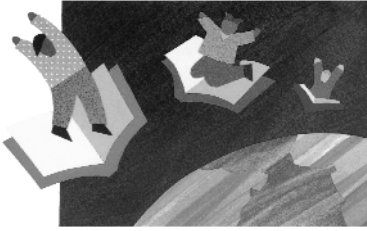
***Hear Their Cries: Religious Responses to Child Abuse**

Written and directed by Maria Gargiulo

FaithTrust Institute: Seattle, © 1992, 48 minutes

This video, along with a companion study guide for discussion leaders, is intended for use in training sessions for clergy and lay leaders on recognizing and responding to child abuse. The goal of the videotape and study guide is to raise awareness among clergy and lay leaders of the vulnerability of children and the need to intervene at times on their behalf.





***Love—All That and More: A Resource on Healthy Relationships for Youth and Young Adults**

FaithTrust Institute: Seattle, © 2000

This educational video resource is comprised of three videos and a curriculum of six sessions to open dialogue with youth about healthy relationships. Additional curricula for facilitating groups with Jewish and Christian youth are also included in the package.

***Not in My Church**

Written and directed by Maria Gargiulo

FaithTrust Institute: Seattle, © 1991, 42 minutes

This video depicts a docudrama that portrays the dilemma of one faith community when faced with sexual abuse by its minister. It is intended to help people deal with the problem of clergy misconduct involving sexual abuse in the ministerial relationship. Comes with a study guide for discussion leaders.

***Not In My Congregation**

Written and directed by Maria Gargiulo

FaithTrust Institute: Seattle, © 1991, 45 minutes

This video depicts a docudrama that portrays the dilemma of one faith community when faced with sexual abuse by its minister. It is intended to help people deal with the problem of clergy misconduct involving sexual abuse in the ministerial relationship. Comes with a study guide for discussion leaders that includes additional questions specifically for a Jewish audience.

***Once You Cross the Line**

Written and directed by Maria Gargiulo

FaithTrust Institute: Seattle, © 1991, 50 minutes

This training tape on preventing clergy misconduct contains three segments that deal with: appropriate boundaries, power and vulnerability, and justice-making. It offers an analysis of the issue as it affects both Jewish and Christian communities.

CURRICULA

Child Sexual Abuse: A Teaching Manual for Clergy and Other Christian Leaders

By D. Mitchell Whitman

Christian Counseling and Consultation International: Bellingham, WA, © 1988

Comprised of an overview, four chapters, and several appendices, this manual seeks to help church leaders understand the issues related to child sexual abuse, and offers practical suggestions on how to work with victims, offenders and the religious community.



***Training Curriculum on Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship**

By Rev. Marie M. Fortune, et. al.

FaithTrust Institute: Seattle, © 1992, 1997

This is a comprehensive training curriculum designed to instruct leaders on how to conduct a two-day training event on the issue of sexual abuse in the ministerial relationship. Topics addressed include background and scope of the problem, factors in crossing boundaries, ethical analysis of the issues, and prevention and intervention strategies.

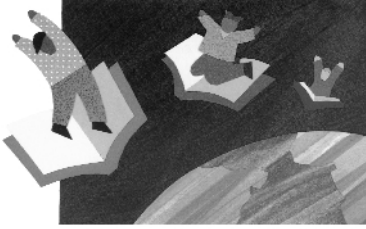
The curriculum consists of the two videos described above (*Not In My Church* and *Once You Cross the Line*), a detailed trainer's notebook with clear directions for presenting a training, and extensive background materials, as well as a participant's manual.

***Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: A Curriculum for Children Ages 9-12**

By Kathryn Goering Reid with Marie M. Fortune,

United Church Press, New York, © 1989

Designed for use in a Christian setting. This course provides religious education teachers with information about sexual abuse and prevention that can be presented to children between the ages of nine and twelve.



The thirteen sessions fit into a typical Sunday morning church school program, but can also be used for summer vacation church school, after school programs, camping programs and a variety of other children's group events. Curricula are also available for use with children ages 5-8 and for teenagers.

BOOKS

Abuse and Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough

Edited by Anne L. Horton and Judith A. Williamson
Lexington Books: Lexington, MA, © 1988

In this handbook, experts on family violence, religious leaders and members of families that have suffered abuse offer practical, "how-to" insights on every significant aspect of the needs of victims of domestic and sexual violence from religious communities.

Activism That Makes Sense: Congregations and Community Organization

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
ACTA Publications: Chicago, © 1984

This book offers an explanation of the principles of community organization as they apply to church and synagogue congregations in order to work for progressive social change.

Community Development and Sexual Violence Prevention: Creating Partnerships for Social Change

By Gayle M. Stringer, M.A.
Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs: Olympia, WA, © 1999

A 100-page booklet that both illustrates using community development to prevent sexual assault and offers tools for organizing a prevention initiative in your community.

Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue

By Edwin H. Friedman

The Guilford Press: New York, © 1985

In this volume, Friedman applies the concepts of systemic family therapy, along with his unique experience as rabbi and practicing therapist, to the emotional life of congregations and their leaders.



Helping Victims of Sexual Abuse: A Sensitive, Biblical Guide for Counselors, Victims and Families

By Lynn Heitritter and Jeanette Vought

Bethany House Publishers: Minneapolis, © 1989

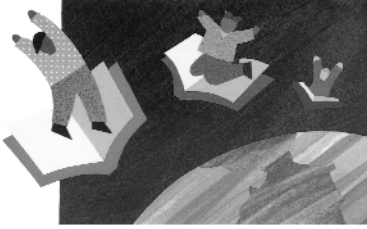
This book addresses three areas of concern: 1) understanding the abused child, 2) understanding the abusive family and 3) helping the adult victim, with additional information about the Christian BECOMERS sexual abuse support group program, which focuses on emotional and spiritual healing from childhood sexual abuse.

***Is Nothing Sacred?: When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship**

By Marie M. Fortune

Harper & Row Publishers, San Francisco, © 1989

This is a case study of a church as an institution, as a community of faith, and as a family. It is the story of a pastor, six women who risked a great deal to come forward and tell the secrets of their relationships with him, of the many players who knew and did nothing or who knew and did something, and of a congregation that was broken apart by the actions of its pastor. It is a story about ordinary, decent, well-meaning people faced with extraordinary circumstances.



It Should Never Happen Here

By Ernest J. Zarra, III

Baker Books: Grand Rapids MI, © 1997

Zarra suggests steps for churches, schools, and daycare centers to follow, including how to form a screening committee, how to run a background check, and how to provide appropriate staff training. These steps help ensure that what should never happen in Christian ministries never does. Appendices include useful forms for photocopying.

***Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us**

By Marie M. Fortune

Continuum: New York © 1995

Rev. Fortune discusses the process of ethical decision-making in intimate relationships. Starting with the premise that “love does no harm,” the author offers a set of guidelines that can assist people of all ages in making sexual choices.

Organizing for Social Change

By Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall and Steve Max

Seven Locks Press: Santa Ana, CA, © 1991, 1996, 2001

This organizing manual has lots of good information for community organizing campaigns. Chapter 17 is entitled *Working with Religious Organizations* and gives very helpful guidelines for working with faith communities.

Rebuilding the Garden: Healing the Spiritual Wounds of Childhood Sexual Assault

By Karla McLaren

Laughing Tree Press, Columbia, CA, © 1997

Rebuilding the Garden addresses the sexual, psychological, and spiritual wounds of childhood sexual assault.

***Sexual Violence, The Unmentionable Sin: An Ethical and Pastoral Perspective**

By Marie M. Fortune

The Pilgrim Press, New York, © 1983

Part One examines the social and religious roots of sexual violence, and the consequences of silence. Fortune reflects on the lack of ethical attention to the problem, then focuses on the development of an ethical stance. Part Two provides a pastoral perspective, providing information useful to anyone attempting to respond to victim or offender. She discusses the role of counselor and minister, offering pastoral tools for practical response. Fortune concludes with a strong argument to examine sexual violence in a broader context, moving beyond the initial response to individual victimization.



A Silence To Be Broken: Hope For Those Caught in the Web of Incest

By Earl D. Wilson

Multnomah Press: Portland, OR, © 1986

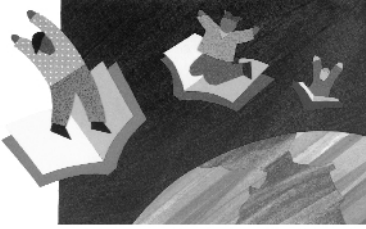
The author writes about the realities of incest within Christian families and how to understand the roots of sexual abuse and its impact. Also included are chapters on how to meet a victim's as well as an offender's needs, and how professionals, nonprofessionals and the church can help.

Telling Our Stories: Learning From Our Experience

By Gayle M. Stringer, M.A.

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs: Olympia, WA, 2001

This book, which is accompanied by audio, video and CD-ROM, documents various sexual assault prevention initiatives in Washington State. It focuses specifically on those communities that implemented the Lofquist model of community development.



***Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook**

Edited by: Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune

Continuum: New York, © 1996

Adams and Fortune assert the need for a comprehensive examination of sexual and domestic violence within Christian theological education. The primary aim of this volume is to prepare more adequately those who minister directly with victims and perpetrators.

Weaving the Visions

Edited by Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ

HarperSan Francisco, © 1989

The sequel to *Womanspirit Rising*, Plaskow and Christ have selected key writings in feminist spirituality, focusing on constructive elements in the feminist approach to religion in North America and the great diversity of women's experience.

Many of the resources in this list are produced and/or distributed by **FaithTrust Institute**. FaithTrust Institute also has several brochures and resources available for purchase for religious communities. You can call them or visit them on the web at:



FaithTrust Institute
2400 N 45th Street, Suite 10
Seattle, WA 98103
(206) 634-1903
www.faithtrustinstitute.org

The Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs' library lends resources to any member or supporting member in Washington State. For information on membership or to check out any of these resources from the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs' library, please contact Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs at:

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs
2415 Pacific Avenue, SE
Olympia, WA 98501
(360) 754-7583
library@wcsap.org

Additional sexual assault prevention resources can be downloaded from the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs web site at:

www.wcsap.org

