

# HEALING THE --- HEALERS

## **Series 2: Domestic Violence**

Encouraging and Preparing Faith Leaders to Respond

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Expert Resource Guide

A PROJECT FROM

**ODYSSEYIMPACT!**

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Working together to end  
sexual & domestic violence

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# Project Description

*As 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men experience domestic or intimate partner violence, statistics suggest this crisis affects EVERY congregation and faith community.*

Faith leaders are often the first point of contact for a victim reaching out for help. Faith communities should be places of safety, hope and healing.

When someone comes to you, will you know what to do to save that person's life?

The series provides insights and strategies for care, along with practical tools to building a strong network of support in your faith communities. The series can be used for self-learning, workshops, trainings, as well as in the classroom and community. Series 2 includes 4 episodes and an expert written guide that sensitively navigate the complex issue of domestic violence to encourage and support faith leaders in creating safe and trusted communities for victims and survivors. Hosted by Rev. Tawana Davis, a survivor and Co-Founder of Soul 2 Soul Sisters, other featured faith leaders include survivors of domestic violence and leaders who have bravely worked through this complex issue with those affected and their broader community.

Through this filmed series of intimate peer to peer conversations, faith leaders explore how to provide better care and support for victims, survivors and families so that they are prepared to respond with a plan to build trust, ensure safety, refer to local advocates and trained professionals, and provide spiritual guidance and healing for victims and survivors.

*"It takes clarity and courage to speak about the trauma and harm of domestic violence. We may feel unprepared or pretend DV is not an issue in our contexts, so we stay silent. Now is the time to move beyond excuses. The variety of resources brought together in Healing the Healers: Domestic Violence series is a treasure trove for theological education, chaplaincy training, and faith communities. The videos provide an entryway into the lives of victim/survivors and examples of pastoral ministries modeled on truth-telling, accountability, and theological depth. This series and the accompanying resources should be required engagement by denominations and seminaries."*

– **Kate Ott, PhD**; Associate Professor of Christian Social Ethics,  
Drew Theological School, Madison, NJ

# Reflection

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## *The Naked Sparrow*

**Rev. Tawana Davis**

Co-Founder and Consultant, Soul 2 Soul Sisters, and Series Host

*Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from God's will.*  
(Matthew 10:29, The New Testament of the Christian Scriptures)

*Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.* (Luke 12:6, The New Testament of the Christian Scriptures)

It was Sunday morning. Time to prepare for church. I didn't particularly feel like going. I was up late embroiled in an emotional battle with my (then) husband. He had bipolar disorder. He was abusive. We had good days but more bad days, and Saturday night was one of those rough nights. I put on my Sunday best, all black, which is the attire for a licensed preacher. I felt as dark as the color I was wearing. But I had to be in place by 10:45 am to march in with the Stewards and sit in my rightful place.

I drove to church with tears in my eyes, trying to "release" before I walked through the doors of the church. I felt like I weighed 300 pounds due to the layers draped on me – the issues, stress, hurt, pain... the drama. My vision was blurred by tears. My mind was clouded with the replay of my husband's tirade. My ears were on mute because all I could hear was yelling and screaming. And as Howard Thurman was fond of saying, I had the smell of life heavy on me.

I walked into the church, pasted on a smile, made sure the one dimple showed, and began to serve. The worship experience was over, and I bid peace and blessings to fellow congregants. As I walked toward the door, I found I had 500 pounds of garments draped on me, and the status of all of my other senses had not changed. I got in the car, knowing I had to go home and deal with my husband, who may or may not have been in a good mood.

In one of his many profound reflections, Howard Thurman wrote about garments, rebirth, and the act of surrendering in and during the religious experience. Thurman used garments to depict life, the life we carry with us to church, in church, and possibly when we leave the church. I wanted to be free like the sparrow. I wanted someone to see me. I wanted to be affirmed, safe, and healed. I desired to be ministered to without judgment like Chaplain Jennie. She meets victims and survivors with unconditional positive regard, not knowing if she will ever see them again. I wanted to be seen and sincerely listened to like Imam Magid. Imam avails himself to victims, survivors, and faith leaders, honoring and galvanizing them all through talks, sermons, guidance, and unapologetic advocacy. I wanted to be in love with the G-d of faith, hope, trust, and courage like Reverends Bonita and Regina, both survivors of domestic violence who live daily their call to ordained ministry.

They lead and serve others with grace. I wanted to be liberated from being sexualized and dehumanized through scriptures and toxic masculinity, particularly by faith leaders who were men. I longed to turn my pain into purpose like Rev. Cary.

Through his own childhood domestic violence experience, he is committed to being an advocate and never lay hands on a woman. I wanted to be sustained by the sacred text, and the people called to revere the sacred text that liberates, not oppress. I wanted this and so much more during my abusive relationship.

I followed the rules. Made a safety plan. Relocated to another state. Received a protective order. I missed family functions in New York, including my daughter's baby shower. Then I was re-victimized by the justice system. The re-victimization almost cost me my life. After receiving my protective order, a copy was sent to my abuser who waited in jail. He was sentenced to one year for terroristic threats and harassment. The copy of the order did not remove my address. I received a letter from my abuser stating he would be released in a week, and he was coming to see me.

My seminary classmates miraculously packed my things, and I was in a new place within a week. I never received a call from VINE, the victim notification service, telling me that he was released. As only G-d could do, he ended up spending an extra two weeks in jail for non-payment of child support, although he does not have children. This is the justice system.

Today, I take deep breaths and no longer smell the stench of life; the smell has become fragrant, causing an air of peace. The naked sparrow – free to love, free to worship, free to grow, learn, give, and receive. The sparrow represents empowerment, care, compassion, persistence, community, joy, and protection.

May faith leaders rise up and raise awareness about domestic violence through advocacy, prayer, dignity, honor, and knowledge. May faith leaders lead like the sparrow who is never forgotten by G-d or fallen from grace. May faith leaders serve victims, survivors, and all those impacted by domestic violence with patience, active listening, and affirmation. May faith leaders garner the courage to delve into this series on domestic violence, to lead in ways that obliterate the violence happening within our congregations, and to dismantle binary gender roles that degrade, demean, and disregard those experiencing domestic, sexual, childhood, and intimate partner violence.

I hope this series will be a healing companion for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, for faith leaders and congregants, for the family and friends of the many victim-survivors whose lives are changed by violence.

*Healing begins when someone bears witness – I see you – I believe you.*  
(Olivia Benson, Law and Order SVU)

# Reflection

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## *A Matter of Life and Death: Domestic Violence and the Healing Power of Faith*

**Rev. Amy C. Gopp**

President, Faith Trust Institute, and Co-Founder, We Will Speak Out U.S.

I was raised to believe that there are two sacred places in one's life: home and church. Knowing that I could count on the safe haven of my family at home and my community at church instilled in me a sense of security and confidence. Little did I know what a gift it was in those tender, young years of my life to be able to take my safety and security for granted.

If only this were the case for the 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men who experience domestic violence in the United States—many of them victims of severe abuse by their intimate partners. If only this were the case for the “1 in 2 female murder victims and 1 in 13 male murder victims [who] are killed by intimate partners.”<sup>1</sup> **Far too many even die.**

Domestic violence is a matter of life and death. Yet it remains a disturbingly “invisible” plight, a taboo topic most avoid discussing or acknowledging, even in faith communities espousing truth, nonviolence, peace, and love. Long considered a private family matter, there is perhaps no more egregious form of betrayal and trauma a person can endure, as the perpetrator is often the one you committed to love and who vowed to love you. Of the overwhelmingly large number of persons suffering from this heinous violence, a majority of them also claim to be people of faith.

**According to the Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, 53% of adults in the U.S. say religion is very important to them.<sup>2</sup> Faith is integral—if not foundational—to our identity, culture, and worldview, providing a moral and ethical framework for the living of our lives.** At their best, faith and religion also offer a vibrant spiritual support system. But when a victim-survivor of domestic violence seeks help from a faith leader and that leader is not equipped to respond, not only has the home become a danger zone, so has the only other sacred place most of us grew up trusting would protect us.

*Healing the Healers* explores faith's ability to accompany and empower victim-survivors of domestic violence and intimate partner violence along the journey of restoring hope and wholeness. These honest and courageous conversations call leaders of all faith traditions to open their eyes to the violence inevitably happening in their own congregations so that it is no longer invisible. The personal stories of the faith leaders featured, some of whom are survivors and former perpetrators, narrate how all faith leaders can create safe and brave spaces in which to break the silence of what is a private family matter no more.

<sup>1</sup> National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (2020). *Domestic violence*. Retrieved from [https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/domestic\\_violence-2020080709350855.pdf?1596828650457](https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/domestic_violence-2020080709350855.pdf?1596828650457)

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center. (n.d.). Importance of religion in one's life. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/importance-of-religion-in-ones-life/>

When violence of any kind touches a community of faith, it becomes the responsibility of the faith leader and community to confront it, to hold perpetrators accountable, to ensure victims are believed and provided a safe space, and to make the proper referrals to professionals who can most appropriately assist in the recovery process.<sup>3</sup> Making the proper referrals is indeed one of the most critical tasks of clergy and other faith leaders in response to domestic violence. This series highlights the importance of faith leaders understanding their specific role not as domestic violence experts themselves, but as those who need to be prepared and aware of their community assets and resources so they can make the right referrals to domestic violence advocates and other professional providers.

Make no mistake: domestic violence can cause physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and/or spiritual trauma.<sup>4</sup> Victims of domestic violence experience such horrific infidelity and disruption in the relationship with their abuser(s) that even their connection with the Divine may be questioned. *How in the world could an almighty and ever-loving God have allowed this to happen?* For even the most devout among us, surviving domestic abuse can shake our sense of the sacred, shatter our faith, and bring us to our knees—or worst of all, we succumb to despair, shame, and the further violence of being or feeling silenced.

The *Broken Silence: A Call for Churches to Speak Out* report found that **75% of the 1,000 Protestant clergy surveyed underestimated the level of domestic violence within their own congregations.**<sup>5</sup> Moreover, spiritual leaders rarely preach or speak out against such violence. If faith is a key cultural competency and healing resource for victims and survivors but clergy do not have an understanding of the complexity of needs and issues surrounding domestic violence—including how to recognize its signs and prevent it from happening—they run the grave risk of being more harmful than helpful. The good news is that 81% of clergy surveyed shared an earnest desire to take appropriate action and offer pastoral care to victim-survivors of violence if they had the training and resources to do so.<sup>6</sup> Thus, *Healing the Healers*.

If we understand our faith traditions as deep wells of rich resources from which we can draw upon to restore our hope and work toward healing, they have the power to transform us. While certain religious practices and misinterpretations of sacred texts can also serve as a hindrance to healing, obstacles to overcoming the violence we have endured and entrenching us in our shame and silence, the witness of the faith leaders in this series speaks to the power of faith as liberating and life-giving—even in the face of the most intimate and traumatizing forms of violence.<sup>7</sup>

These courageous testimonies and enlightening theological yet practical conversations from multi-faith and intergenerational perspectives offer a model for how faith leaders might most effectively respond to domestic abuse and intimate partner violence.

<sup>3</sup> APC Competencies PIC6 Advocate for the persons in one's care and OL2: Establish and maintain professional and interdisciplinary relationships.

<sup>4</sup> APC Competency ITP2: Incorporate a working knowledge of psychological and sociological disciplines and religious beliefs and practices in the provision of spiritual care.

<sup>5</sup> Sojourners and IMA World Health. (2014). *Broken silence: A call for churches to speak out*. <https://sojo.net/sites/default/files/Broken%20Silence%20Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> APC Competency PIC5: Use one's professional authority as a spiritual care provider appropriately.

<sup>7</sup> ACEP Outcome L2.3. demonstrate a range of pastoral skills, including listening/attending, empathic reflection, conflict resolution/transformation, confrontation, crisis management, and appropriate use of religious/spiritual resources

Listening with compassion and believing the victim's story; breaking the silence of shame and stigma; denouncing the violence as sinful and not of God; utilizing tools to help victims locate themselves and understand more fully the behaviors of power and control employed by their perpetrators; helping boys and men transform hegemonic masculinities into healthy expressions and relationships; making the right professional referrals; and serving as a constant and stabilizing force of faithfulness in victims' and survivors' lives are the loving, life-giving responses explored in these heartbreakingly authentic and ultimately hope-filled exchanges. We trust that you will see the significance of faith in the beauty of healing that eventually emerges out of the trauma of broken vows, broken bodies, broken homes, and broken lives in this series.

Sacred traditions have the power to provide new ways of relating, safe and brave spaces in which to heal, and the liberating love of the Divine. Imagine if faith leaders and communities across this country took seriously the all-too-often invisible and silent scourge of domestic violence and committed to preventing it, speaking out against it, effectively responding to it, and accompanying victim-survivors along their healing journeys. We hope against hope that *Healing the Healers* inspires you and your faith community to listen, learn, and act; for in so doing we would not only save lives, we would also usher in the holy healing the world so desperately needs now.

# Episode 1 Reflection

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## *Supporting the Journey from Victim to Survivor*

**Salma Abugideiri**

Advisory Board Member & Director of Training, Peaceful Families Project

“Domestic violence doesn’t mean the end...we’ve survived. It made us stronger.” Rev. Bonita Darby, Rev. Tawana Davis, and Rev. Regina Groff are thriving and testifying about their healing journeys. Yet each of them, like many victim-survivors of domestic violence, experienced a level of violence in their homes that was lethal.<sup>8</sup> Of the 87,000 women and girls killed worldwide in 2017, almost 60% were victims of family violence.<sup>9,10</sup> We are blessed that the women in this film survived to tell their stories and to teach us how to better protect victims of domestic violence.

## Finding Courage to Speak Out

What does a victim of abuse look like? As we hear in Episodes 2 and 3, victims and survivors may look like anyone else in your congregation, but they are suffering due to both the abuse itself and the communal and societal silence around domestic violence. The invisibility that is perpetuated by the silence in many faith communities on the issue of domestic violence adds another layer of trauma. As Rev. Darby and Rev. Groff noted, not being seen or heard is extremely painful, alienating, and isolating. Feeling that the faith community is not a place where leaders and community members are even interested in hearing from domestic violence victims leads to a feeling of betrayal. Unfortunately, many victim-survivors of abuse experience significant spiritual crises, questioning their relationship with God, and sometimes leaving their faith altogether. Remarkably, the women in this film all found their way back to the church and they maintained their relationship with God.

## When Faith Communities Fail

It is often after years of suffering from violence and abuse that a person finds the courage to seek help. In that moment of extreme vulnerability, it is critical that faith leaders know how to respond appropriately. The experiences shared by Rev. Darby in which she was told that her husband had the right to hit her as the head of the household reflect a complete misuse of scripture, which is a form of spiritual abuse. Misusing spiritual texts to encourage people to stay in abusive relationships and to blame the victim rather than the perpetrator violates Jewish, Christian, and Islamic teachings that value mutuality, respect, and the equality of both partners.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> ACPE Outcome L1.2. identify and discuss major life events, relationships, social location, cultural contexts, and social realities that impact personal identity as expressed in pastoral functioning.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Office on Drug & Crimes. (2018). *Global study on homicide: Gender-related killing of women and girls*. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18\\_Gender-related\\_killing\\_of\\_women\\_and\\_girls.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18_Gender-related_killing_of_women_and_girls.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> For state-by-state statistics on domestic violence, see the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. <https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS>

<sup>11</sup> Fortune, M., Abugideiri, S., & Dratch, M. (2010). *A commentary on religion & abuse*. <https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/Commentary.pdf>

The abuse is what destroys the marriage, not the disclosure of abuse nor the steps taken to seek safety. When faith leaders use sacred texts against the victim of abuse, they add yet another layer of abuse and contribute to feelings of betrayal.<sup>12</sup>

There are additional ways in which faith leaders may take advantage of the vulnerability of victim-survivors or prey on them. Rev. Bonita's experience of having the presiding elder's abuse minimized ("He's just like that; don't worry about it.") is yet another layer of re-victimizing and blaming the victim, rather than holding the perpetrator accountable. These behaviors are serious boundary violations that can create significant psychological and spiritual harm, which for many victim-survivors takes years to repair.

It is inexcusable for religious leaders to compound the abuse experienced by victim-survivors. Because people trust their faith leaders to guide them and offer healing, this type of abuse can be even more painful than the abuse sustained at home. As Rev. Bonita said, "Being hurt by the church was the worst part for me."

Faith leaders may not realize the impact they have on others by virtue of the power and authority inherent in their role, or the necessity of maintaining proper boundaries to protect both the congregant and themselves. When faith leaders take on "more than they can handle," and are not practicing self-care, they are more likely to relax appropriate boundaries, and they become more at risk for sliding into spiritual abuse.<sup>13</sup>

When faith leaders do respond appropriately to community members experiencing abuse, they not only facilitate spiritual healing, they can literally save lives.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is your faith community already doing to support victim-survivors of domestic violence?
2. What changes might need to be made in order to create a space that can facilitate safety and healing?
3. What are the ways that you are aware of sacred texts being misused to further oppress people in abusive relationships?
4. What can you as a faith leader do to pay more attention to the children, women, and men who may feel invisible and who may be suffering silently as a result of domestic violence?
5. What sacred texts might you use to support victims of abuse as they navigate abusive relationships and seek safety and healing?
6. Having heard Rev. Bonita's and Rev. Tawana's stories of abuse by faith leaders, what boundaries might you establish or maintain better in order to create a safer community?

<sup>12</sup> ACPE Outcome L2.3. demonstrate a range of pastoral skills, including listening/attending, empathic reflection, conflict resolution/transformation, confrontation, crisis management, and appropriate use of religious/spiritual resources

<sup>13</sup> APC Competency PIC4: Function in a manner that respects the physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual boundaries of others.

## 10 THINGS A SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY CAN DO TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE IN FAMILIES

*Faith communities can provide a safe haven for victim/survivors in need. In addition, they can exhort society to offer compassion and comfort to those experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or child abuse. The actions identified below for faith communities can create a unified response to abuse and violence in families.*

### ACTION

#### Become a Safe Place

Make your church, temple, sangha, mosque, or synagogue a safe place where survivors of violence can come for help.

- ✓ Establish a Safe Sanctuary Policy and adopt procedures to protect vulnerable members.
- ✓ Display brochures and posters which include the telephone number of the domestic violence and sexual assault programs in your area.
- ✓ Publicize the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (7233), 800-787-3224 (TDD), local shelter information, and the National Child Abuse Hotline: 800-422-4453.
- ✓ Adopt the Spiritual Community Declaration Against Domestic Violence and Abuse

#### Educate the Congregation

Provide ways for members of the congregation to learn about domestic violence, sexual violence, and child abuse.

- ✓ Routinely include information in monthly newsletters, on bulletin boards, in youth education, and in marriage preparation classes.
- ✓ Create an environment of awareness.
- ✓ Sponsor educational events in your congregation on violence in families.
- ✓ Include healthy relationships education in your youth programs.

#### Prepare to Be a Resource

Do the theological and scriptural homework necessary to better understand and respond to violence in families and receive training from professionals in the field. Learn about the organizations that offer assistance to victims/survivors in your community.

- ✓ Study sacred text that is problematic for victims and survivors, as well as that which can be a resource to the victimized and vulnerable.
- ✓ Examine the Equality Wheel and the Power & Control Wheel.
- ✓ Participate in Pastoral Care Training related to assisting victims/survivors of domestic violence.
- ✓ Attend trainings and webinars sponsored by organizations that specialize in addressing domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse, and elder abuse.
- ✓ Know where to refer someone for help– get to know your community resources.

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## Speak Out

Speak out about domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. As a spiritual leader, you can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs.

- ✓ Use the annual awareness months as an opportunity to speak to your community.
  - April – Child Abuse Awareness
  - April – Sexual Assault Awareness
  - June – Elder Abuse Awareness
  - October – Domestic Violence Awareness
- ✓ Study liturgy offerings, sermons, meditations, and prayers written to promote the healing and safety of victims and survivors.
- ✓ Offer an annual remembrance/healing service for all victims and survivors of violence and abuse.
- ✓ Normalize the conversation about abuse and center abuse prevention in your conversations.

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## Respond

The way you respond to a victim of abuse can offer help and healing, and can save their life. A disclosure is an act of deep trust, and must be received with respect and strict confidentiality.

**Safety for the victim and their family is always the #1 priority.**

- ✓ If you suspect an adult is being abused, speak to them privately. If someone discloses their abuse to you, do not discuss it with others.
  - Let survivors know of the community resources available to assist them.
  - Work with DV advocates to help plan for safety.
  - Maintain strict confidentiality; it saves lives.
  - Do not attempt couples counseling.
  - If the suspected abuse involves a child, report to law enforcement immediately.
- ✓ Offer pastoral care and support. Address the spiritual questions that may be disempowering the victim/survivor.

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## Partner with Existing Resources

Create and sustain partnerships with survivor-focused organizations in your community.

- ✓ Invite advocacy organizations to attend celebrations and public events. Knowing the faith community is a partner may lead a survivor to seek help.
  - ✓ Include your local domestic violence or sexual assault program in donations and community service projects.
  - ✓ Adopt a shelter that your church, temple, sangha, mosque, or synagogue supports with material and/or in-kind contributions.
  - ✓ Provide support to families as they rebuild their lives following a shelter stay.
-

## Lead by Example

Use the power of your spiritual community to support movements against violence and the oppression of the vulnerable.

- ✓ Volunteer to serve on the board of directors at the local domestic violence/sexual assault program or attend a training to become a crisis volunteer.
- ✓ Model non-violent behaviors and healthy relationships in your home, congregation, and community.
- ✓ Publicly support awareness efforts and public policy that benefit victims/survivors.

## Offer Space

Your worship or practice space can provide a calm, safe place for victims and their supporters.

- ✓ Offer safe, welcoming, and confidential meeting space for educational seminars or weekly support groups for abuse survivors and advocates.
- ✓ Allow advocates to meet with survivors in a meeting room if they aren't able to visit the organization's office.
- ✓ If you run programs that support the vulnerable—food kitchens, homeless shelters, addiction recovery, or other services—include resources and information related to family violence for these folks. Food insecurity, poverty, homelessness, and addiction are rooted in trauma, especially domestic and sexual violence and child abuse.

## Support Professional Training

Clergy, lay leaders, hospital chaplains, and seminary students need specialized training about sexual abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse.

- ✓ Encourage pastoral care training related to domestic and sexual violence for clergy and chaplains, to prepare to respond to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of victims/survivors.
- ✓ Participate in Community Ally Training with your local domestic violence center
- ✓ Read and share "[A Commentary on Religion and Domestic Violence](#)."

## Address Policy Issues

Encourage efforts by religious institutions to develop and implement safe sanctuary policies.

Advocate for public policies that support the needs of victims/survivors.

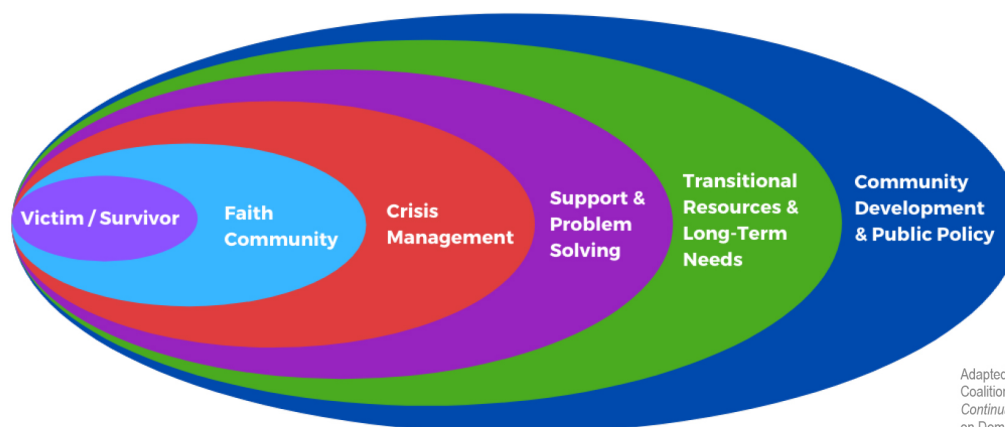
Support anti-violence and anti-oppression initiatives.

- ✓ If your spiritual community is part of a national or international organization, check the website for policy information & resources. Often national organizations are able to create resources and offer assistance that local congregations can use and adapt.
- ✓ Review and update your community safety policies and procedures on an annual basis.
- ✓ Make sure your policies address the potential of abuse by clergy or lay leaders.
- ✓ Advocate for laws and public policies and services that provide resources for those experiencing domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR ADDRESSING & ENDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### MAP OF COMMUNITY-BASED RESOURCES FOR VICTIMS

Ensuring that victims and survivors have the resources, help, and information they need to move forward, requires a network of community resources. Faith communities need to understand their special role and work with community partners. The map below shows the resources that may be needed by a victim/survivor. As the faith community, your role is to offer support, comfort, and healing to the victim/survivor and their family while walking alongside them through the painful process of recovery and finding safety and stability.



Adapted from *The Community Audit*, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (1997) and *Continuum of Caring* distributed by National Center on Domestic Violence (2006).

#### Faith Community – Early Assistance & Ongoing Support

- Recognize the signs of abuse
- Offer spiritual support
- Safety First: Connect with DV advocates
- Act as a trusted friend/confidante
- Trust the victim's decisions
- Hold their confidence

#### Crisis Management – Where to Turn in a Crisis or Emergency

- Domestic Violence Hotlines
- Local Domestic Violence Shelters
- DV Advocates
- Emergency Medical Services
- Law Enforcement
- Criminal Justice
- Civil Justice
- Emergency Housing

#### Support and Problem Solving – Resources to Access after a Crisis

- Basic Needs – housing, food, clothing
- Counseling and Support Groups
- Financial Aid
- Medical Assistance
- Children's Services
- Attorneys and Legal Services

#### Transitional Resources and Long-Term Needs – Rebuilding and Healing

- Education
- Job Training
- Affordable Housing
- Counseling & Support
- Child Care
- Legal Assistance

#### Community Development and Public Policy – Creating Social Change

- Civic Planning Groups
- Legislation
- Human Services Councils
- Coalitions
- Task Forces
- National Resources

## WHY FAITH COMMUNITIES ARE ESSENTIAL

Spiritual communities play a unique and important role in addressing domestic violence and abuse, including:

- Offering a safe place to disclose abuse and ask for assistance.
- Providing spiritual support to victims – recognizing that the trauma of abuse often results in a spiritual crisis that can challenge a survivor's foundational beliefs.
- Supporting victims and their family in the process of recovery and rebuilding.
- Providing referrals to advocacy resources, and working toward systemic change.

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO ASSIST SURVIVORS

It's important to remember that the role of the faith community is to provide essential spiritual support and comfort, and ensure that the spiritual community is a safe place for the survivor and their family. For many survivors, there are religious beliefs that may act as roadblocks to them seeking help.

A spiritual leader can address problematic interpretations of religious texts, rituals, and practices that may keep someone in an abusive situation. Pastoral care for victims/survivors must be centered on supporting them to find safety and healing. Strict confidentiality is essential for ensuring safety, as is respecting the survivor's decisions; the [most dangerous time](#) for a victim is when the abuser learns that the victim is leaving or planning to leave.

Relying on the expertise of domestic violence advocates, working with them as partners, allows a faith community to focus on offering spiritual care and support for the survivor's healing.

### Affirm

A victim's courageous act of speaking about the abuse should be affirmed. You can say:

- I believe you
- I care about you
- You are not alone
- It's not your fault
- No one deserves abuse or violence

### Assess

Support a survivor's need to implement their safety plan.

Assess how you and your faith community can assist:

- Financially?
- Emotionally?
- Spiritually?
- With other practical needs?

### SAFETY is Always the #1 Priority

Assure the victim that their safety is important to you and the community.

Review your safe sanctuary policy and procedures with them. Address concerns and ask for feedback. See if there are ways to support their safety plans.

### Refer

**Domestic violence advocates are experts at creating a detailed safety plan with survivors.**

Certain aspects of safety planning can be addressed by faith leaders, but **most aspects must be left to the experts.**

Explain that an advocate can help them develop a plan for emotional, physical, and sexual safety for themselves and their family.

## Additional Readings

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Day, J. H., Vermilyea, E., Wilderson, J., Giller, E. (2006). *Risking connection in faith communities: A training curriculum for faith leaders supporting trauma survivors*. Derwood: Sidran Institute Press.

Fortune, M., Abugideiri, S., & Dratch, M. (2010). *A Commentary on Religion & Abuse*.  
<https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/Commentary.pdf>

Lipsky, L. (2009). *Trauma Stewardship. An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others*. Barrett-Koehler Publishers.

Peaceful Families Project. (2020). *Imam & Chaplain Toolkit*,  
<https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/imam-toolkit.html>

Peterson, M. R. (1992). *At personal risk. Boundary violations in professional-client relationships*. New York: Norton & Company.

## Resources & Training

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Catholics for Family Peace.  
<http://www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org/>

Domestic Violence Training for Faith Communities.  
<https://vawnet.org/sc/training-faith-communities>

FaithTrust Institute (Multifaith).  
<https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/>

Jewish Women International Clergy Taskforce.  
<https://www.jwi.org/clergy>

Peaceful Families Project (Muslim).  
<https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/>

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse.  
<https://www.interfaithpartners.org/>

## SUPPORTING THE JOURNEY FROM VICTIM TO SURVIVOR



### *Episode 1 Theme Timecodes*

Each Episode is structured by key themes that emerge in the filmed conversation. Through our expert partners and scholars, we've learned the value of aiding the use of themed clips from the Episodes in classrooms, curriculums and workshops. Please reference the Theme Timecode list below to find them in the video:

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Finding Courage to Speak Out	Timecode: 1:56 (4 minutes)
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Surviving Trauma with Children	Timecode: 5:52 (6 minutes)
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Shattered Trust	Timecode: 11:40 (6 minutes)
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Facing Danger and Finding the Strength to Leave	Timecode: 17:11 (2 minutes)
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Noticing the Signs of Trauma and Abuse	Timecode: 19:29 (2 minutes)
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Self Care for Survivors and Faith Leaders	Timecode: 21:10 (2 minutes)
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Forgiveness as a Stage of Healing	Timecode: 23:10 (3 minutes)
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Reclaiming Strength and Power	Timecode: 26:26 (3 minutes)
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# Episode 2 Reflection

HEALING  
THE  
HEALERS



## *Spiritual Care for Survivors: Tools and Resources*

**Rev. Anne Marie Hunter, Ph.D**

**Director, Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse**

When I took charge of a small church in New England, one of the older congregants was already in a long-term coma due to dementia. I visited him in the hospital, but could not really get to know him. After he passed away, I went to the home of his widow with the usual condolences on my lips, prepared to be comforting in the midst of grief. But before I could get a single word out, Theresa greeted me with, “Thank God he’s dead!” She then spoke, for the first time ever, of the anguish and abuse she had endured in her marriage.

Sixty years of silence shattered with a palpable and traumatic force in that moment. The shock waves sent her adult daughters reeling. One supported Theresa with, “He always was a jerk,” while the second pushed back, crying, “How can you talk about dear daddy like that?”

It was hard to know what to do. Responding to the trauma of intimate partner violence can be overwhelming, re-traumatizing, and downright dangerous. In the face of 60 years of abuse, any response seemed puny, any emotions seemed too small, and any words seemed inadequate. At the same time, I had to recognize that it was here, in a trusting relationship with a faith leader, that Theresa was finally able to speak her truth. Chaplain Jennie Wachowski-Estes recognizes the sacrality of this moment of disclosure as she speaks to “how important the ongoing relationships of faith leaders and faith communities are for people [experiencing abuse], how important it is for [faith] community leaders to be ready to meet people when they have their moment.”<sup>14</sup>

So, here were Theresa and I, in that moment of disclosure. I had to put my feelings of inadequacy behind me and open my heart to learning instead. And that’s how I learned the power of just being there. By being present and attentive, by listening with my heart as well as my head, and by hearing while Theresa told her own story in her own words, I was able to let her know that, despite the years of abuse, she was important, valued, and respected. By believing her, I was able to let her know that someone was on her side. By taking in all she said without judgment or blame, I was able to bear witness to the pain and help her carry its weight. This is a ministry of presence.<sup>15</sup>

I learned too that it is not my job to have all the answers, but rather to hear the questions. At 82-years-old, Theresa was an expert in the complexities of her own life.

<sup>14</sup> APC Competencies PIC4: Function in a manner that respects the physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual boundaries of others and PIC5: Use one’s professional authority as a spiritual care provider appropriately.

<sup>15</sup> ACPE Outcomes L2.2. provide pastoral ministry with diverse people, taking into consideration multiple elements of cultural and ethnic differences, social conditions, systems, justice and applied clinical ethics issues without imposing one’s own perspectives and L2.3. demonstrate a range of pastoral skills, including listening/attending, empathic reflection, conflict resolution/ transformation, confrontation, crisis management, and appropriate use of religious/spiritual resources

because she had lived the situation, and she did not need me to problem-solve, jump in with a glib “quick fix,” or offer time-worn religious platitudes. If there had been an easy answer, Theresa would have thought of it long ago. She knew how to survive this pain because she had been surviving this pain. To have her own agency and expertise respected was a direct antidote to what she had heard from her husband: “You’re stupid. You’re ugly. You don’t know anything.” To know that God was with her was a much-needed reversal of what her husband had claimed so often: “Not even God can love you!”

In supporting Theresa, I also knew that I was not alone. There are lots of community services and agencies that I referred Theresa to, from the Council on Aging to the local domestic violence services agency. I was enabled to do what I do best (spiritual care and support), while advocates in the community provided domestic violence expertise, safety planning, counseling, support groups, and many other services. Theresa had been manipulated and controlled in her marriage, but now the message was the opposite: “There are options. You can choose. Your church will support your choices. We believe in you.”

Domestic violence advocates were an important part of my response to Theresa, and partnerships with them are ideally developed before someone is in crisis. In Theresa’s case, I was able to refer to my local domestic violence agency by name, and even had the card of one of the advocates to give her. Chaplain Wachowski-Estes comments: “I want to tell faith leaders to know what you are an expert in and what you are not an expert in and to delegate to the people [advocates] who are going to safety plan and do all those sorts of things. But don’t delegate to the point of abandonment. Stick with it!” In Theresa’s case, I tag-teamed with a domestic violence advocate, which meant that Theresa’s spiritual as well as physical and emotional needs could be addressed.<sup>16</sup>

For Theresa, who had been deeply involved in her church all her life, it meant everything to finally be able to talk about the abuse with those she most cared about and trusted: her faith community. She deeply deserved the support and love she received, and in the light of that love she blossomed. The relief of finally being able to talk about it, of being heard, and of being believed, was evident in Theresa’s demeanor. It was as though a heavy weight had been lifted from her shoulders. In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou said, “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” Theresa’s story was no longer untold.

In my faith tradition, the Exodus story is a touchstone of meaning and identity. As I walked the journey of naming, mourning, and healing with Theresa, it felt as though I were accompanying her through the desert on her way from a place of abuse and sadness to a place “flowing with milk and honey.” Like the oppressed peoples of long ago, God heard her cries, comforted her, and brought her to a better place. God moved in her life in a very real way. Along the way, we wrestled with the same questions the Israelites asked on their journey: “Where is God in all this? Where is the Promised Land? Is this journey really worth it?”

God hears the cries of the oppressed and moves in human history to end oppression. It is an act of resistance to speak of this God, to renounce oppression, and to speak prophetically against all forms of abuse and the racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of oppression that fuel abuse. By speaking, preaching, and praying from this desert place, and by walking this journey with survivors of abuse, we bring healing, wholeness, and blessing to survivors, to ourselves, to our families and communities, and to coming generations.

<sup>16</sup> APC Competency PIC6 Advocate for the persons in one’s care.

## Discussion Questions

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1. Think of a time when someone offered you a “ministry of presence.” What effect did this have upon you? What aspects of this encounter inform your ministry today?
2. How do you theologically understand the act of listening and bearing witness? Where is God in such practices?
3. What prior training have you had on domestic and sexual violence? What resources and training would be helpful?
4. How do you/will you respond when victims or victim-survivors of abuse turn to you for help?
5. Where do you see yourself engaged in a desert ministry – a ministry with and for those experiencing abuse?
6. Faith leaders care for perpetrators and victim-survivors of domestic violence. How can you, through caring confrontation, hold those who abuse accountable and simultaneously comfort and support those who are abused?

## Resources

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Safe Havens uses the power and control wheel developed by The Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, home of the Duluth model ), and has developed “Faith Community Response Wheels” for the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and multi-religious communities. Also, we have a Spiritual Abuse Wheel. Here is the link to all the wheels in both English and Spanish.

<https://www.interfaithpartners.org/power-control-and-response-wheels>

Dating Violence and Faith resource:

<https://www.interfaithpartners.org/supporting-victims-of-dating-violence>

Stalking and Faith: <https://www.interfaithpartners.org/supporting-victims-of-stalking>

What is Domestic Violence? <https://www.interfaithpartners.org/dvfaith>

Resources for faith leaders and communities:

<https://www.interfaithpartners.org/for-faith-leaders>

Role of Faith Leaders and Laity in Domestic Violence Prevention and Intervention:

<https://vawnet.org/sc/role-faith-leaders-and-laity-domestic-violence-prevention-and-intervention>

Your Silence Will Not Protect You Essays by Audre Lorde

[https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/18486.Audre\\_Lorde](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/18486.Audre_Lorde)

Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (DAIP) Equality Wheel:

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Equality.pdf>



### Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs

202 East Superior Street

Duluth, MN 55802

218-722-2781

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

## DOS AND DON'TS GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERS ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### Remember the Goals:

1. **SAFETY** for the victim and their family
2. **ACCOUNTABILITY** for the person who is abusive
3. **RESTORATION** of individuals and, if possible, relationships  
Or **MOURNING** the loss of the relationships

### Dos and Don'ts: Working with People Experiencing Abuse

1. Do believe them. Their description of the abuse is only the tip of the iceberg.
2. Do reassure them that this is not their fault, they don't deserve this treatment, it is not God's will.
3. Do give referral information; primary resources are domestic violence services or shelters and the National Hotline: **1-800-799-SAFE (7233), 1-800-787-3224 (TDD)**
4. Do support and respect their choices. Even if they are aware of the risks and choose initially to return to the abuser, it is their choice. They are the experts of their lives, and have the most information about how to survive.
5. Do encourage them to work with a DV advocate to create a safety plan. Safety planning is an ongoing process and focuses on safety for the victim, their children, other vulnerable family members, even pets. It will include their workplace, school, children's school, nursery/daycare, and possibly their place of worship/spiritual practice. The safety plan may include: setting aside some money; making copies of important papers to leave with a friend or family member; keeping a change of clothes hidden or in care of a friend if they decide to go to a shelter; planning how to exit the home the next time the abuser is violent; planning what to do about the children if they are at school or if they are asleep, etc. Safety planning is practical and it helps the victim stay in touch with the reality of the abuser's violence.
6. Do protect confidentiality. Don't give information about the victim or their whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass information on to the abuser. Do not discuss it with the others in the congregation who might inadvertently pass information on to the abuser, including staff or lay leaders/volunteers.
7. Do help with any religious concerns. The spiritual crisis that arises from abuse can shake the foundations of belief and practice. If the abused is a Christian woman, give her a copy of *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*, by Marie M. Fortune (Harper, San Francisco). Refer to [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org) for other helpful info.
8. Do emphasize that a marriage covenant is broken by violence and abuse. Do assure them of God's love and presence, and of your commitment to walk with them through this difficult time.

9. Do help them see that God does not want them to remain in a situation where their life and the lives of their children are in danger.
10. If they decide to separate and divorce, do support them and help them mourn the loss, for themselves and their children.
11. Do pray with them. Ask God to give them the strength and courage they need.
12. Don't minimize the danger. You can be a reality check. "From what you have told me, I am very concerned for your safety . . ."
13. Don't tell them what to do. Give information and support.
14. Don't react with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what they tell you. But don't react passively either. Let them know that you are concerned and that what the abuser has done is wrong and is not deserved.
15. Don't blame them for the violence. If they express self-blame, try to reframe it: "I don't care if you have supper late or forget to water the lawn, that is no reason for violence or abuse against you. This is not your fault."
16. Don't recommend couples counseling or approach the abuser and ask for "his side of the story." These actions will endanger the victim.
17. Don't recommend "marriage enrichment," "mediation," or a "communications workshop." None of these will address the goals listed above.
18. Don't send them home with just a prayer and directive to submit to their partner. Don't suggest that bringing the abusive partner to religious services/spiritual practice will "fix" the problem.
19. Don't encourage them to forgive the abuse and take back the abusive partner.
20. Do not encourage their dependence on you or become emotionally or sexually involved with them.
21. Don't "do nothing."
22. Do consult with colleagues in the wider community who may have expertise and be able to assist you in your response. Refer to [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org) for resources.

### **Dos and Don'ts: Working with Those Who Abuse**

1. If they have been arrested, do approach them and express your concern and support for them to be accountable and to deal with their violence.
2. Don't meet with them alone and in private. Meet in a public place or in the religious center with several other people around.
3. Don't approach them or let them know that you know about their violence unless a) you have the victim's permission, b) the victim is aware that you plan to talk to them and c) you are certain that the victim is safely separated from the abuser.
4. Do address any religious rationalizations they may offer or questions they may have. Don't allow them to use religious excuses for their behavior.

5. Do name the violence as their problem, not the victim's. Tell them that only they can stop it, and you are willing to help.
6. Do refer them to a program which specifically addresses abusers.
7. Do assess them for suicide or threats of homicide. Do warn the victim if they makes specific threats towards the victim, the children, or other family members.
8. Don't pursue couples' counseling with them and their partner if you are aware that there is violence in the relationship.
9. Don't go to them to confirm the victim's story.
10. Don't give them any information about their partner, including location or whereabouts.
11. Don't be taken in by minimization, denial, or lying about their violence. Don't accept blame directed at the victim or other rationalizations for abusive behavior.
12. Don't be taken in by a "conversion" experience. If it is genuine, it will be a tremendous resource as they proceed with accountability. If it is phony, it is only another way to manipulate you and the system while maintaining control of the process to avoid accountability.
13. Don't advocate for the abuser to avoid the legal consequences of their abusive behavior.
14. Don't provide a character witness for this purpose in any legal proceedings.
15. Don't forgive an abuser quickly and easily. Don't confuse remorse with true repentance.
16. Don't send them home with just a prayer. Work with others in the community to hold them accountable.
17. Do pray with them. Ask God to help them stop the abuse and violence, repent, and find a new way. Do assure them of your support in this endeavor.
18. Do find ways to collaborate with community agencies and law enforcement to hold the abuser accountable.

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**Valuable resources:**

[Pastoral Care for Domestic Violence: Case Studies for Clergy Training](#)

A video-based training curriculum from FaithTrust Institute

[Garments for One Another: Ending Domestic Violence in Muslim Families](#)

A video-based training curriculum from FaithTrust Institute

## SPIRITUAL CARE FOR SURVIVORS: TOOLS AND RESOURCES



### *Episode 2 Theme Timecodes*

Each Episode is structured by key themes that emerge in the filmed conversation. Through our expert partners and scholars, we've learned the value of aiding the use of themed clips from the Episodes in classrooms, curriculums and workshops. Please reference the Theme Timecode list below to find them in the video:

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Beginning the Journey From Victim to Survivor	Timecode: 3:26 (5 minutes)
The Power and Control Wheel and Patterns of Abuse	Timecode: 8:40 (4 minutes)
The Role of Faith Leaders and Faith Communities	Timecode: 12:42 (3 minutes)
Silence + Shame	Timecode: 15:34 (3 minutes)
Wrestling With Forgiveness	Timecode: 18:30 (3 minutes)
Navigating Family Systems and Cycles of Abuse	Timecode: 21:02 (3 minutes)
Overcoming Betrayal and Regaining Trust	Timecode: 24:07 (3 minutes)
Supporting Survivors in Finding Strength and Courage	Timecode: 27:11 (3.5 minutes)

# Episode 3 Reflection

HEALING  
THE  
HEALERS



## *From Harmful to Helpful: Religion and Masculinity*

**Rev. Danjuma Gibson, Ph.D**

Associate Professor of Pastoral Care, Calvin Theological Seminary

In my own scholarship and research, I have come to define domestic violence as the oppression that occurs in any intimate relationship where one person, in order to get their needs met or enhance their sense of self-worth and identity, seeks to subjugate and control their partner/lover through the use of violence and domination. Domestic violence is not about arguments that have gone bad or poor conflict management skills. Domestic violence is about control and subjugation through the use of violence and domination.

The conversation between Imam Magid and Rev. Tawana Davis on domestic violence raises several important issues including: (1) the communal nature of domestic violence, (2) the ease with which religious symbols can be employed to cloak and perpetuate domestic abuse, and (3) the nature of healing from domestic violence.

## **The Community and Domestic Violence**

Several years ago, I lectured on domestic violence in a graduate level introductory course on pastoral care. Generally, when I teach about domestic violence, I focus on how this form of oppression manifests itself in the church. While it is clear that domestic violence is a global issue that infects all aspects of society, in the seminary classroom, I tend to focus my attention on the church. If not, I find that it is easy for students to uncritically assume that domestic violence is a function of *unfaith*, and that if people simply *had faith*, then domestic violence would disappear. Nothing could be further from the truth. During the lecture I showed a film that highlighted several women being abused. I disclosed statistics that outlined the number of women who are killed each year because of domestic violence. Toward the end of the class, I queried the students for their reactions. A common and disconcerting response is generally one of disbelief, as if such violence could not possibly happen in communities of faith. But in addition to a reaction of disbelief, several of the male students—in more than one class—expressed outrage and offered up comments like “I am so mad” and “I am just angry” and “I feel like I could hit someone.” These comments were in response to the testimonies in the video of women being physically abused. Their response surprised me. After the class, I found myself troubled, but I couldn’t locate the source of my angst. Surely they had a right to be angry about what they had witnessed, right? The reaction seemed to be one of righteous indignation, almost chivalrous. Yet, *I couldn’t shake the feeling that their reaction of wanting to hit someone (presumably the men in the video who abused their wives) missed a deeper point, a point which I obviously failed to make clear in the lesson. But what was it?*

On another occasion, I was invited to facilitate several seminars. I approached the leadership and suggested that domestic violence be included as a topic. I was told that domestic violence was not a problem in the community and did not need to be addressed. Nevertheless, I included spoke about domestic violence.

Before and after the seminar, several women approached me to share stories of abuse and some stated they felt the community was ignoring them and supporting their abusers. *How do we account for the disconnect between the leaders who believe their community is immune from domestic violence and the community members experiencing abuse?*

One final example. A pastor shared with me her experience at a denominational conference. During the conference, people witnessed a man become physically violent with his wife. The pastor witnessed this from a distance. To this pastor's dismay, the people who were standing around were noticeably slow in reacting to stop this husband from physically abusing his wife in public (and we can only imagine what happens at home). And even when several people responded, this pastor was of the impression that the response was very measured, almost as if not to offend the perpetrator. As the pastor disclosed this story to me, she ended by suggesting that if anyone had dared put a hand on one of the male bishops of the denomination, the response would have been quick, decisive, and unequivocal: No one touches a bishop. *How do we account for this seeming disparity of responses?*

*I use these three anecdotes to suggest that domestic violence is almost never perpetuated in isolation, but in a system where culture, social contract, and bystanders, all collude to make domestic abuse and intimate partner violence possible and permissible.<sup>17</sup>*

Rev. Tawana Davis and Imam Magid speak about communities—and in this case, religious communities—that enable violence. Yes, there are situations where there are isolated incidents of domestic violence that represent an exception. But as a former pastor of a church in Chicago, and now professor, scholar, and licensed psychotherapist, both my experience and the research literature has borne out that when dealing with matters related to domestic abuse, a person or group in the larger community almost always is aware that the abuse is happening or has happened.

Domestic violence happens in communities. In the first case where I mentioned the response of the males in the course that I taught, I finally concluded that my anxiety stemmed from the fact that by the time you witness physical violence in a relationship, it generally represents the final destination on a long journey of malignant forms of sexism and misogyny that are often ignored, hidden in the unspoken social contract of a community, sacralized in death-dealing theologies, or simply rationalized away. In the second case where leadership denied the existence of domestic violence in the community, the need to preserve a façade of institutional innocence and grandeur seemed to upend the needs and realities of the victimized in the community. In the last case, there seemed to be a valuing of bodies wherein a higher value was placed on the male body of a bishop and a lower value was placed on the female body of a wife. In all of these cases, the able-bodied, cis-gendered, middle-class male imago is highly valued as a symbol of individual and communal identity, and group continuity. It is also in these communities that much domestic abuse goes unnamed and unnoticed.

Domestic violence is the sin of a community. It is the failure of a community and not just the criminality of a single perpetrator. Narratives of sexism and misogyny are normalized, sacralized, and incubated into the psychic space of the community where it slowly renders the violence of the perpetrator banal and silences the voices and protests of the abused.

<sup>17</sup> ACPE Outcome L2.2. provide pastoral ministry with diverse people, taking into consideration multiple elements of cultural and ethnic differences, social conditions, systems, justice and applied clinical ethics issues without imposing one's own perspectives

Rev. Davis hints at this when she talks about the destructive tropes of the strong Black woman and the need to redefine how we understand strength. Left unchecked, the silence of the abused can be mistaken for quiet strength—a harmful stereotype that has been imposed on Black women and that has wreaked havoc in religious communities for generations. Imam Magid speaks to this when he highlights the notion of toxic masculinity, where images of what defines a man are ensconced in domination, conquest, and power. Simply put, communities cannot be in solidarity with the abused if they, consciously or unconsciously, act as coconspirators with abusive oppressors.

## Using Religious Symbols and Texts to Perpetuate Domestic Violence

Rev. Tawana Davis shared a powerful story of a fellow clergywoman admonishing her not to allow the Bible to be the belt that beats her during her personal battle with domestic abuse. According to Imam Magid, using sacred symbols and texts to oppress is the mark of a cult: “manipulating people, using power, justifying oppressions, in the name of God” are indications of cultic religion. How can religious symbols and texts be so easily coopted by systems of oppression to condone and support domestic violence? Too often religion is viewed as a ready-made solution to the issue of abuse when, in fact, it can be the primary problem.

I have witnessed the Bible and other sacred texts being used in a fundamentalist-like manner. By fundamentalism, I refer to a very literal reading of the text through which the world is then viewed. At its core, fundamentalism is not about what a person believes, but how they believe what they believe. A key psychological feature of any fundamentalist reading of a text is the inability to tolerate mystery or ambiguity as they lead to emotional discomfort and cognitive dissonance. Removing mystery, ambiguity, and even the ugly side of our humanity from sacred texts resolves any emotional discomfort or cognitive dissonance. But what happens when one comes across problematic passages of women being abused in the Bible? If the conscious or unconscious goal is to pacify any discomfort with the text, the resulting interpretation can yield violence. What happens when a woman is being abused, but the religious community says domestic violence is not a biblically acceptable reason for divorce? Quite often, the community sends the woman away to deal with the abuser by herself. Or, in another example, I have witnessed countless instances where King David’s actions towards Bathsheba, as depicted in the Hebrew Scriptures, were interpreted as fornication or a simple moral lapse instead of calling it for what it is: the rape of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband to cover it up. Religious symbols and texts are too often used to condone individual acts of abuse and to create community cultures wherein abuse is enabled and ignored.

## Healing from Domestic Violence

Both Imam Magid and Rev. Davis talk about the danger of premature forgiveness in the healing process. Their warning cannot be overstated. Domestic violence is inherently traumatizing as it robs the victim of relational safety and security. Moreover, domestic violence is often perpetrated by someone who was supposed to be a trusted partner. Imam Magid rightfully observes that “nothing makes you more vulnerable in life than marriage,” and such vulnerability and potential for trauma are arguably found in any intimate relationship to which one is committed.<sup>18</sup> Healing from domestic violence cannot be rushed because faith communities need a fairy tale ending. Many victim-survivors of domestic violence are traumatized by violent relationships, but that trauma is often compounded by religious communities that fail to understand what true healing work entails. Healing takes time. It can take years.

<sup>18</sup> ACPE Outcome L2.4. assess the strengths and needs of those served, grounded in theology and using an understanding of the behavioral sciences

Healing must be on the victim-survivor's terms and timetable, and not that of the abuser. In trauma recovery, the safety of the victim is always the first step.<sup>19</sup> The notion of forgiveness that is postulated in many religious communities is dangerous, as in many cases, it reflects the psychic need of the group to repress painful stories that disrupt the sense of innocence and religious identity. But Rev. Davis states it best when she claims that for her, forgiveness was not about her abuser or the broader community. It was about her own personal healing and freedom so that she would not live the rest of her life being mad at the world, but live in a way where she could begin to embrace the goodness of life again.

## Discussion Questions

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1. In your own community or context, what practices have you observed that could unintentionally contribute to domestic abuse or compel people to turn a blind eye to domestic violence?
2. Are there certain sacred texts or passages that make you uncomfortable because of their portrayal of or reference to women and women's treatment? If so, what traditional vs. alternative interpretations have you read or heard? How might you reexamine the text in a way that is liberating vs. oppressive?
3. Can you identify examples of when a religious community represented a safe space and refuge for victim-survivors of domestic violence?<sup>20</sup> Can you identify examples of when a religious community was not a safe space for victim-survivors of domestic violence?
4. How can you work to identify, name, and then eradicate cultures, policies, and practices in your faith community that enable or support domestic violence?

## Resources

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Neuger, Christine (2001). *Counseling Women: A Narrative, pastoral approach*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

Everhart, Ruth (2016). *Ruined: A Memoir*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers.

Everhart, Ruth (2020). *The #MeToo Reckoning: Facing the Church's Complicity in Sexual Abuse and Misconduct*. Westmont: IVP Books

Cooper-White, Pamela (2019). *Gender, Violence, and Justice: Collected Essays on Violence Against Women*. Eugene: Cascade Books

Cooper-White, Pamela (2012). *The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church's Response*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press

<sup>19</sup> APC Competency PPS 9: Facilitate group processes, such as family meetings, post trauma, staff debriefing, and support groups.

<sup>20</sup> ACPE Outcome L2.6. demonstrate competent use of self in ministry and administrative function which includes: emotional availability, cultural humility, appropriate self-disclosure, positive use of power and authority, a non-anxious and non-judgmental presence, and clear and responsible boundaries

## FAITH COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ACTION CHECKLIST

*In addition to offering care to families experiencing domestic violence, faith/community leaders are also responsible for speaking out and breaking the silence in our congregations. It is our role to teach about domestic violence, and to support education about healthy relationships starting at the earliest grades in our religious education programs. In this way, we can play an important part in ending domestic violence in all our communities.*

### Education:

- ☐ Have you adopted and posted a faith community declaration speaking against domestic violence and committing to care for those experiencing abuse as well as accountability for perpetrators?
- ☐ Do you ask your faith leaders to speak about domestic and family violence in sermons, prayers, and study groups?
- ☐ Do you provide hotlines and phone numbers for domestic violence prevention programs on bulletin boards and in all public restrooms?
- ☐ Does the library in your faith facility have books on domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and sexual assault?
- ☐ Do you subscribe to newsletters of local and national programs that work to end violence, including the publications of FaithTrust Institute?
- ☐ Do you designate a time (at regular intervals) for educating and activating the faith community about domestic violence?
- ☐ Have you invited speakers from secular organizations, such as domestic violence prevention and/or victim services programs, child protective services, and rape crisis centers to speak to your faith community?
- ☐ Are the staff and volunteers in your faith community trained on the issue of abusive behavior?
- ☐ Do you train youth ministry and leadership to educate young people about the dynamics, impact, and prevention of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking?
- ☐ Do you educate about the particular vulnerabilities of older people and people with disabilities who may be dependent on abusive partners or caregivers?
- ☐ Do you speak up? Offering bystander intervention training can help community members constructively confront bullying, harassment, and language/actions that are demeaning or shaming to others.
- ☐ Do you incorporate teachings about loving and healthy relationships into your faith community presentations and community gatherings year round, including specific resources for teens on dating violence?
- ☐ Do you incorporate teachings about gender equality and non-violent conflict resolution?
- ☐ Do you have an action plan in place if an abuser or sex offender wants to participate in religious services or other community events?
- ☐ Do you conduct background checks for all volunteers and staff, particularly those who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults, to ensure that they have not been perpetrators of physical or sexual violence?
- ☐ Do you have policies for responding to misconduct or abuse by spiritual leaders or clergy to ensure that action is taken to protect congregants and that appropriate cases of clergy misconduct are referred to law enforcement agencies?
- ☐ Do you support continuing education programs on domestic violence for faith leaders, including theory- & practice-oriented course work such as counseling or pastoral care?
- ☐ Do you support your denominational seminary or religious institution to teach ordained and lay leaders how to address sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking?

## **Outreach - Providing Material & Community Support**

- ☐ Do you have a fund to pay emergency expenses for survivors of domestic violence?
- ☐ Do you have a fund to help make a survivor's home safer (changing locks, installing deadbolts, etc.)?
- ☐ Do you collect items for the nearest shelter for victims escaping violent partners?
- ☐ Do you offer meeting space in your facility to the local domestic violence program?
- ☐ Do you maintain an ongoing relationship with staff of domestic violence programs?
- ☐ Do faith community members serve as volunteers at a local domestic violence shelter?
- ☐ Do you know community members who may be able to offer in-kind support to victims/survivors in need (for example: lawyers, car mechanics, child care providers, etc.)?

## **Pastoral Care for Individuals and Families**

- ☐ Do you seek theologically-based materials that emphasize a victim's right to safety and support and a perpetrator's personal responsibility for ending the violence?
- ☐ Do you create opportunities for spiritual support and healing for survivors?
- ☐ Do you know how to refer to a hotline/shelter?
- ☐ Do you know how to discuss a safety plan & encourage a survivor to create a safety plan with a domestic violence advocate?
- ☐ Do you screen for signs of violence before engaging in couples counseling, with the knowledge that in instances of violence, it is counterproductive and dangerous to offer this type of counseling?
- ☐ Do you create a safe and welcoming space for survivors of abuse in same-sex relationships to approach you for help?
- ☐ Do you offer premarital counseling dealing with equality, conflict, violence, and control?
- ☐ Do you know your state's mandatory reporting laws?
- ☐ Do you know how to make a referral to your state's Department of Protective Services, in the case of abuse of a child, elder, or vulnerable adult?
- ☐ Do you offer pastoral care & support to the staff/volunteers of your local domestic violence shelter? These people are often "first responders" to family violence; their work requires daily crisis and trauma management.
- ☐ Do your policy protocols support a victim's continued inclusion in the community of her choice if the perpetrator is from the same community, including respecting emotional and physical safety considerations and no-contact orders?
- ☐ Do your response protocols address the emotional and physical safety of victims and any dependents affected by victimization, including elderly relatives and children?
- ☐ Do you know where to seek appropriate training and legal assistance before advising refugee or immigrant victims, so as to avoid potentially compromising their citizenship status?
- ☐ Do you create opportunities for survivors to discuss their experiences and needs? Collaborate with local sexual assault and domestic violence programs to form support groups for survivors who desire faith- or spirituality-based healing.

## Community Collaboration and Partnerships:

- ☐ Do you network with victim service and advocacy programs to strengthen relationships between religious and secular allies on the local, regional, state, and national levels?
- ☐ Do you partner with secular advocacy and direct service programs for consultation, support, and joint programming?
- ☐ Do you develop your policies, protocols, and educational materials utilizing the information and resources from sexual assault and domestic violence victim advocacy organizations?
- ☐ Do you know about local and state laws and protocols for handling disclosures of sexual assault, child abuse, and intimate partner violence?
- ☐ Do you know where to make appropriate and informed referrals to local secular programs that have the expertise to help victims or perpetrators, including the legal community, health care system, and child welfare system?
- ☐ Do you collaborate with perpetrator treatment programs to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence?
- ☐ Do you encourage congregants to donate time, money, and other material resources to support local advocacy programs that provide services to victims and survivors?
- ☐ Do you encourage members and leaders of churches, synagogues, mosques, and other spiritual or faith-based groups to seek training on victim and survivor experiences, including spiritual support to help restore and heal the victim?
- ☐ Do you seek to include members of specific ethnic and cultural groups in community efforts addressing domestic violence?
- ☐ Do you know where to find advice, training, and legal assistance for refugee and immigrant victims, to avoid potentially compromising their citizenship or immigration status?
- ☐ Do you work with other spiritual and religious groups to address violence and abuse in your larger community?
- ☐ Do you lend your voice to outreach and education efforts sponsored by advocacy and victim services organizations?
- ☐ Do you contact and write letters to legislative leaders about domestic violence legislation and policies that affect your community?

## RESOURCES AND ROADBLOCKS: HOW RELIGION CAN IMPACT SURVIVORS

The sacred texts, rituals, teachings, traditions, prayers, and practices of any religious or spiritual tradition can act as a resource or a roadblock for victims/survivors. It's important to recognize that spiritual traditions will offer both. For example, while one text, prayer, or ritual may be harmful, another may provide tremendous solace.

### RESOURCE

- Is a source of comfort and connection
- Supports the end of violence and oppression
- Encourages healing and prioritizes safety
- Empowers survivors
- Recognizes that mutuality, trust, and respect are the true foundation for relationships
- Seeks accountability for those who harm others
- Provides guidance and direction
- Stands on the side of justice with those who have been harmed

### ROADBLOCK

- Justifies, minimizes, or excuses abusive behavior or oppression
- Silences or subjugates the less powerful
- Prioritizes forgiveness over the safety and healing of the survivor
- Perpetuates silence and shame
- Seeks to preserve and protect the institution and/or community at the expense of the well-being of those who are harmed

### Common roadblocks for survivors, across many spiritual traditions:

- Traditional gender role expectations and power (submission, headship)
- Ideas of family structure (parenting rights and obligations, beliefs about divorce)
- The definition and purpose of suffering (God's will, punishment for imperfection)
- Expectations for forgiveness and reconciliation
- Ideas of accountability and justice that don't center or support survivors
- Silence and/or lack of public discourse about violence within families
- Lack of acceptance and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people
- Ideas of obedience which result in holding the survivor responsible for the abuse, rather than focusing on the harm done to them.

The following pages outline common resources and roadblocks in the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions. We hope this will encourage you to examine the ways that your spiritual tradition's beliefs and practices may impact survivors.

*"None of us... should ever put survivors in the position of having to choose between safety and the support of their faith community. They need both, and it's up to us to provide that."* –Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune, Founder of FaithTrust Institute

## Potential Christian Roadblocks and Resources for Ending Domestic Violence

Christian Concepts	Roadblocks	Resources
<b>The Meaning of Suffering</b>	Example: Survivor believes her suffering is God's will, that she is being punished for something she did in the past, that she should suffer just as Jesus did on the cross.	Example: Survivor is told that in suffering on the Cross, Jesus took upon himself all undeserved suffering; difference between voluntary and involuntary meaning of resurrection.
<b>Forgiveness</b>	Example: Survivor is told to forgive the abuser and to keep the relationship. She is told that she is not being a good Christian if she does not forgive her abuser.	Example: Survivor is reminded that forgiveness is a process that takes time, and that holding the abuser accountable may facilitate the process of forgiveness. Forgiveness is for her to be able to move on and not let the victimization burden her life. And this can occur even if she decides to leave the relationship.
<b>Headship, Submission, and Ephesians 5</b>	Example: Survivor believes that in Christian relationships it is her duty to submit to her partner because he is the head of the household.	Example: Survivor is told that a healthy relationship is about submitting to one another in mutuality and equality; being the head of the household does not mean being abusive.
<b>"You are God's temple."</b>	Example: Survivor is told that leaving the relationship will be a destruction of God's temple.	Example: Survivor comes to know that she is the dwelling place of God, that it is God's spirit living in her that makes her holy; prioritizing safety is being a good steward of God's temple.
<b>Abandonment by God – Psalm 22</b>	Example: Survivor believes that God has abandoned her and has been absent during her time of greatest need.	Example: Survivor is told that God is made present by others who become God's hands; and that God draws near to those who suffer.
<b>The Covenant of Marriage</b>	Example: Survivor is told that nothing can break the marriage covenant and that divorce is sinful and shameful. She feels she must protect the sanctity of marriage.	Example: Survivor comes to understand that it is violence that breaks the covenant of marriage and that she is not the one who has broken the covenant.
<b>Repentance</b>	Example: Survivor feels she must believe her partner and give him another chance when he says he is sorry, even though his behavior does not change.	Example: Survivor learns that true repentance includes change of behavior and not repeating the offense; she understands that he alone is responsible for repairing what has been broken.

## Potential Jewish Roadblocks and Resources for Ending Domestic Violence

*Created by Alison Iser*

Jewish Concepts	Roadblocks	Resources
<b><i>Sh'lom Bayit</i> (Peace in the home)</b>	Example: Survivor is told by the abusive partner and others that it is solely up to them to maintain peace in the home.	Example: Survivor is told that the abusive partner is responsible for the lack of <i>sh'lom bayit</i> . The victim is told they deserves <i>sh'lom bayit</i> .
<b><i>Shanda</i> (Shame)</b>	Example: Survivor is persuaded that speaking about the abuse and/or violence will bring shame on their family and their community.	Example: The community sends a clear message that the only person who should feel shame about domestic violence is the person who is perpetrating it.
<b><i>Pikuach Nefesh</i> (Saving a life)</b>	Example: Non-physical tactics of power and control are viewed as not dangerous and the survivor believes that this form of abuse does not fall within the parameters of <i>pikuach nefesh</i> .	Example: The survivor is assured that they can take steps to ensure their safety and the wellbeing of their children, even violating <i>Shabbat</i> , in order to preserve their lives.
<b><i>Lashon Hara</i> (Evil speech)</b>	Example: The community keeps silent about the behavior of the abusive partner because they do not want to engage in <i>lashon hara</i> . The abusive behavior goes unchallenged; the survivor feels no one cares.	Example: The rabbi gives a sermon about the difference between gossiping about someone for the purpose of defaming them versus speaking out about oppression for the purpose of seeking help or preventing further harm.
<b><i>Teshuvah</i> (Return)</b>	Example: The need for <i>teshuvah</i> is ignored or an abusive person is forgiven for their actions because they have given lip service to the idea of <i>teshuvah</i> .	Example: An abusive person is encouraged to complete all the steps of <i>teshuvah</i> , is assisted in the process, and is held accountable if <i>teshuvah</i> is not done.

## Potential Muslim Roadblocks and Resources for Ending Domestic Violence

Muslim Concepts	Roadblocks	Resources
<b><i>Sabr</i> (Patience)</b>	Example: Survivor is told to go back to the abusive partner and be patient, accepting further abuse.	Example: Survivor is reminded that <i>sabr</i> means to be strong by seeking solutions and not giving up; it does not mean to passively accept an oppressive situation.
<b><i>'Afu</i> (Forgiveness)</b>	Example: Survivor is told to forgive the abuser and hold on to the marriage, tolerating abusive behavior from their partner.	Example: Survivor is told that forgiveness is a process that takes time, and that holding the abuser accountable may facilitate the process of forgiveness. Also, forgiveness does not necessarily mean staying in the marriage; forgiveness can occur even if the survivor decides to leave.
<b><i>Dhanb</i> (Sin)</b>	Example: Survivor is told that leaving the marriage is a sin because Allah (God) hates divorce, even though Allah allows it.	Example: The survivor is reminded that oppression is a sin, and that abuse is one form of oppression. The Prophet (pbuh) encouraged his followers to help both the abused and the abuser by preventing further oppression, in this case, ending the abuse. Divorce is viewed as a peaceful alternative to enduring continued oppression.
<b><i>Ta'ah</i> (Obedience)</b>	Example: Survivor is told to obey her husband in order to be a good Muslim wife.	Example: Survivor is reminded that Muslims should not obey any human in disobedience of Allah (God). Allah prohibits all forms of oppression and commands us to be just, including to ourselves.

### *Episode 3 Theme Timecodes*

Each Episode is structured by key themes that emerge in the filmed conversation. Through our expert partners and scholars, we've learned the value of aiding the use of themed clips from the Episodes in classrooms, curriculums and workshops. Please reference the Theme Timecode list below to find them in the video:

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Reconciling Sacred Texts and Beliefs	Timecode: 5:31 (4 minutes)
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Speaking Out and Building Safe Faith Communities	Timecode: 9:12 (4 minutes)
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Complexities Around Forgiveness and Shame	Timecode: 13:23 (6 minutes)
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Redefining Strength	Timecode: 19:20 (3.5 minutes)
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Power and Masculinity	Timecode: 22:51 (8 minutes)
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# Episode 4 Reflection

HEALING  
THE  
HEALERS



## *Men Speaking Out: Theology, Power and Violence*

**Ron Clark, D.Min**

Executive Director, Kairos Church Planting Support

"You're just a damn jock," my dad told me. "I bet you'd pass up screwin' a girl just to lift weights," he growled. My father told me this after a Friday night touch football game with my friends. I guess he was disappointed in me because I was not doing what he felt a healthy young male should be doing. My senior year of high school, when my girlfriend and I had broken up, he told me I needed to find a freshman girl. "She'll let you do what you want to her."

In my dad's own way, he was probably trying to teach me to be a "real man," at least one he considered to be "real." As odd as this sounds, I felt bad that I disappointed him and spent many years believing and acting as if this might be real masculinity. However, I am thankful for some of my male teammates who were Christian, often reminding me that this is not the way guys should be, and that we did not use females as a conquest. My mom as well taught me this, but sometimes younger males tend to listen most to other males.

After hearing my colleague Rev. Cary James share his painful story, my heart broke for him. While the messages my father told me were minimal compared to how his father treated him and his mother, we do have something in common. The painful lessons of masculinity taught to us by our fathers were counteracted by other males in our lives. Rev. James was blessed in his relationship with his grandfather just as I was by some of my teammates. These healthy models of masculinity illustrated a different path for us. While we may have struggled to stay on this path, we at least had someone to show us a different way. Yet this is not the case for many males who only know the one path of "toxic masculinity."

Often when I speak to or teach groups of men, I mention that there are only a small percentage of males who abuse women and children, even though they may have multiple victims. Most of us do not treat others this way—but few of us speak out against this form of "toxic masculinity." How will the majority find the way to this different path of peace and guide others on the journey?

First, men, like Rev. James and I, need healthy adults in our lives. We need models of manhood and guidance from men and women who understand healthy relationships. Second, not all of us have been taught what a healthy man must be. While we may have had poor teaching from the males in our family, this teaching is reinforced by a society that approves of objectifying females and marginalizing people that do not fit into a typical pattern of cultural masculinity (known as the Man Box). Finally, we feel shame and tension when trying to relate to the women and children we love while upholding the values we were given. We know that our struggle with sin is a spiritual one, but these values we were taught appeal to the flesh and seem ingrained within our soul. We want change, but our toolbox is bare. We need more tools to help us become healthy spiritually, physically, emotionally, and sexually.

Congregational leaders have a powerful opportunity to guide men who are not monsters, but broken males needing relationships. Leaders like you can offer us tools which will help us grow and mature, becoming better men.

First, the sacred texts do not teach us to tear down and dominate other humans, and this especially applies to females. We need you to reteach us the Bible and how it applies to males, females, and children. We need to learn to read the text from the margins by listening to those who are oppressed, including the LGBTQIA+ community, which also suffers under the influence of toxic masculinity. We also need to know how to be loving and caring spouses, fathers, and/or friends. We need to not only read this in the text, but we must also see it in action within our congregation.

In addition to rereading the texts we must live in and experience a community where all people are safe. Sacred spaces are safe spaces and people can worship God where they feel valued, loved, and accepted. In Exodus 4:31 Moses told the people that their God was concerned about them. This Hebrew word meant that God knew, heard, watched, and suffered with them. The story then tells us that the people were able to worship because they knew that God was listening. All people can worship God when they come together in safety, support, and justice, knowing they are valued by their Lord and each other.

Third, this community is built to stand in opposition to a culture that promotes toxic masculinity. The faith community does not merely reflect our culture but provides shelter from the evils of “this age.” Congregations offer accountability, repentance, mercy, and healing because they reflect the justice of God and the courage of Jesus in a world that seems to view compassion as a sign of weakness. Yet, these congregations of love promote resistance among empires of power, hatred, and greed through transformation.

Finally, those in community build bridges of collaboration with local agencies, service providers, and law enforcement. We do not reinvent the wheel, we become allies with others to extend sacred and safe spaces outside the walls of our congregations. We learn from others how to promote peace and they learn from us how to build shalom.

## Discussion Questions

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1. What are some of the issues that families face in a climate of toxic masculinity? What do males in these families need from leaders in their congregation? From their faith community?
2. How might they need to understand texts such as Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:17-21; 1 Peter 2:13-17; 3:1-8; Galatians 5:22-26?

## Additional Readings

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Clark, R. (2010). *Am I sleeping with the enemy? Males and females in the image of God*. Eugene: Cascade.

Katz, J. (2006). *The macho paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help*. Naperville: Sourcebooks.

Livingston, D. (2002). *Healing violent men: A model for Christian communities*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

*The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in the US, UK, and Mexico – Key Findings:*

<https://promundoglobal.org/resources/man-box-study-young-man-us-uk-mexico-key-findings/>

# Episode 4 Reflection

HEALING  
THE  
HEALERS



## ***Men Speaking Out: Theology, Power, and Violence For My House Will Be Called a House of Prayer for All***

*(Isaiah 56:7)*

### **Rabbi Mark Dratch**

**Executive Vice President of the Rabbinical Council of America and Founder of JSafe  
(The Jewish Institute Supporting an Abuse-Free Environment)**

From the very dawn of history, humans have avoided and denied responsibility for the welfare of others. Cain's dismissive "Am I my brother's keeper?" set a pattern for many who remained uninterested, uninvolved, and unresponsive just when their brothers and sisters needed them the most. This has unfortunately been the case, too many times, in matters of abuse, assault, and violence. The accounts we have heard in this series—stories of betrayal and inattention by faith communities and faith leaders—illustrate for us great moral and religious failure.

"Few are guilty, but all are responsible" is the way Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel formulated his response to evil. He distinguished between *guilt*, a term that applies specifically to the perpetrators of crime and sin, and *responsibility*, "the capability of being called upon to answer, or to make amends, to someone for something, without necessarily being directly connected with or involved in a criminal act."<sup>21</sup> So, while a minority of the community is actually guilty of perpetrating abuse and violence, the entire community is responsible to come to the aid of victims, to pursue justice, to demand accountability, and to protect the innocents of our communities and the integrity of our faiths.

Heschel's observation is correct, as far as it goes. There are times when *all* are guilty. When the members of the community fail to live up to our responsibilities to prevent abuse and to protect and help the survivors of abuse to heal and find safety and justice—examples of which we heard in each of the episodes in this series—we are more than just responsible. We are guilty of enabling and perpetuating abuse.

We can all agree that it is a sin to ignore the cries of someone who needs help. The Bible warns us, through the commandment to return lost objects, "You may not ignore it" (Deut. 22:3). This caution certainly applies here, where victims of domestic violence have lost their safety and security. The Bible warns us not to close our eyes and ears and pretend as if we are unaware of the circumstances, feigning ignorance so that we do not have the need to get involved. Furthermore, the very language of another verse, "Thou shalt not stand by the blood of thy neighbor" (Lev. 19:16), is instructive. Standing is a passive act. The Bible is telling us that we are not permitted to remain passive. We cannot be innocent bystanders. In fact, there is no such thing biblically as an "innocent bystander." When someone is in trouble, we are obligated to get involved. If we do not, we are not innocent.

<sup>21</sup> Heschel, A. J. (1996). Required: A moral ombudsman. In S. Heschel (Ed.), *Moral grandeur and spiritual audacity* (p. 219-223). New York: Noonday Press.

It might have been easy for me—as a White Jewish male—to think that this was someone else’s problem: another family’s, another community’s, another faith’s, another gender’s. It might have been easy for me to believe the stereotypes of my community which shaped my development. But for a host of reasons—too many for this brief reflection—I came to learn, and then to understand, that domestic violence is not the problem of the *other*, it is mine and ours. Because domestic violence occurs in every faith community, in every ethnicity and culture, and to every gender. Because domestic violence happens even if we, on the outside, do not know about it. Because the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence are our sisters and brothers, our friends and coreligionists, and our fellow human beings, and thus we are all victims of it. Because remaining silent or apathetic is an affront to the humanity and to the Image of God in which the victims of domestic violence are created. Because remaining silent or apathetic is an affront to the humanity and to the Image of God in which I was created.

And once I became aware and started preaching and writing and teaching about domestic violence in my community, removing the stigma and validating the experiences of many who thought that they could not be suffering abuse or that they are the only one in this predicament, I got to know victim-survivors and see their suffering. I opened my eyes, and those of others, to the domestic violence that was there all the time, to which I had been blind and deaf. And women started to approach me, their rabbi, for guidance and help because they felt that there was, finally, someone who would listen and that there is someone who cared.

There are many who remain uninvolved, not because of indifference, but because of beliefs and convictions that stem from their understanding of the Bible or their faith tradition. These arguments may have to do with their understanding of the nature of marriage, the role and place of women, the duty of forgiveness, the value of the church/mosque/synagogue and community over the individual, the fear of secular authorities, the concern of public exposure of wrongdoing that may cast aspersions on the integrity of the community, concerns about gossip, respect for elders and leaders, and others. These principles, and others, are valid, essential principles of religious life and law and should be carefully observed by the pious. But all too often they are misunderstood, interpreted in self-serving ways or through a prism of misplaced priorities and misconceived interpretations of the traditions. Too often they have trumped (at least) equally valid biblical and moral concerns for the safety and security of bodies and souls. This phenomenon is not new. Already more than 1500 years ago in Talmudic times the Sages warned us about pious fools who miss the forest for the trees due to their claims of religiosity and devoutness. These fools, we are told, are represented by those who would refuse to save a woman in distress for fear that they may have to look at her or touch her, or would allow a baby to drown in the river because they needed time to remove their prayer shawls before jumping in the water.

Too often, these errors are made in the name of the Bible for the sake of a perceived higher spiritual purpose. But consider: When a church or mosque or synagogue is perceived as supporting abuse, enabling violence, and ignoring those in need, they are not enhancing the reputation of their faith; they are undermining it. Instead of bringing people closer to their Truth, they are distancing them from it. And in causing people to turn away, they are not saving their church or mosque or synagogue either. Saving souls requires saving lives.

We are all responsible, especially people of faith, to work toward eradicating domestic violence, to help and support victims and survivors, to hold perpetrators accountable even as we support them in their journeys toward change, and to give the greatest expression of our faith as we, in our personal lives and as leaders and members of faith communities, provide comfort and care and show love and responsibility to all God's children, created in God's image.

## Discussion Questions

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1. Throughout this series, calls have been made by religious leaders to reread and reinterpret biblical texts and religious traditions that may have supported and enabled domestic violence. How do you respond to these challenges? Do you think that changing biblical interpretation and religious practices are appropriate responses to the harm and hurt caused to victim-survivors of domestic violence, or do you perceive them as attacks on your religious values and doctrines? Who, in your tradition, has the authority to make those changes? How would you challenge your faith community to acknowledge the problem, and how would you navigate the pushback from community members, if you were to take change seriously?
2. How much are you concerned about the impact that openly and publicly addressing domestic violence and supporting victims will have on the culture of your church/mosque/synagogue and the possible disruption, distraction, and discomfort that it may cause? How much are you concerned about the impact that *not* openly and publicly addressing domestic violence and supporting victims will have on the culture of your church/mosque/synagogue and the possible disruption, distraction, and discomfort that it may cause?

## Additional Resources

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Resources from the FaithTrust Institute.

<https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources>

The Journal of Religion and Abuse.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wrel20>

Bibliography on Sexual and Domestic Violence from the FaithTrust Institute.

<https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/bibliographies/sexual-and-domestic-violence>

## DECLARATION BY A SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

**We invite you to call upon your spiritual community to discuss the following safe church charter statements and work collaboratively to adopt this declaration to uphold a faithful response to domestic violence and abuse. *Complete by adding your faith community name on the lines below.***

We proclaim with one voice as leaders and members in our faith community of \_\_\_\_\_ that domestic violence exists in all communities including our own and is morally, spiritually and universally intolerable.

We acknowledge that our sacred texts, traditions and values have too often been misused to perpetuate and condone abuse.

Our religious and spiritual traditions compel us to work for justice, equality in relationships, and the safety and protection of the vulnerable.

\_\_\_\_\_ will listen, support, and care for those affected by domestic violence and abuse, always placing their safety as the highest priority. Further, we will respect with confidentiality their freedom to direct their own life and decisions to the extent permitted by law.

\_\_\_\_\_ will insist upon accountability for abusers and will thereby support clear guidelines that always ensure safety for those abused.

\_\_\_\_\_ will not tolerate domestic violence and abuse.

Therefore:

- We seek to create a supportive community in which all feel comfortable discussing domestic violence and we commit to prioritize our time, talents and resources to fully address domestic violence and abuse.
- We will adopt policies and procedures that make our faith community a safe place. We will ensure that the policies are maintained, published, and posted for all to access.
- We will support and work with domestic violence programs and agencies in our community to fully understand services available and know how to refer those who suffer from domestic violence and abuse.

We call upon all people of

\_\_\_\_\_ to  
commit to this declaration on (date) \_\_\_\_\_.

## MEN SPEAKING OUT: THEOLOGY, POWER AND VIOLENCE



### *Episode 4 Theme Timecodes*

Balancing Safety and Accountability

Timecode: 7:56 (6 minutes)

Sacred Spaces Are Safe Spaces

Timecode: 13:55 (7 minutes)

Transforming Masculinity

Timecode: 20:07 (7 minutes)

Domestic Violence Happens in  
Every Community

Timecode: 27:04 (2.5 minutes)

Strengthening Community  
Response Through Collaboration

Timecode: 29:37 (6 minutes)

More Men Need to Speak Out

Timecode: 35:47 (2 minutes)

# Reflection

HEALING  
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## *Intimate Partner Violence in Queer Lives: Hidden in Plain Sight*

**Dr. Rolf Nolasco, Jr.**

Professor of Pastoral Theology, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

*David met Anthony when he was 22. The relationship seemed okay in the beginning but in hindsight, there were warning signs of what was to come—coming over unannounced; showing up unexpectedly when David was out with friends; phone calls that seemed to be a little too frequent. He interpreted all these early signs as a strong romantic interest. Before long Anthony had moved in with him and his behavior had become obsessive and controlling.*

*Anthony felt threatened by David's friends and his social life. He hated that other guys would look at him or that he'd slept with other guys around the neighborhood. Tiny things that had not even occurred to him as being possibly offensive would cause enormous rage. The more he was attacked, the more and more David withdrew. He figured that if he could stay away from anything that might cause Anthony to get upset then that would keep him calm. David started to isolate himself from his friends, family, and from everything that he used to enjoy doing. They even moved to a different city where he knew no one except Anthony to get away from his previous life.*

*Over the course of their relationship, David became cautious and scared and his fears escalated when the physical violence began. Punching, pushing, restricting his physical movements, destroying his property were punishment meted out when simply threatening or humiliating him in public wasn't enough.*

*Money was another big problem. There were successive rent periods where Anthony would spend all of his pay on gambling and alcohol within 48 hours of receiving it, leaving David to pay all the rent and daily provisions.*

*Apart from all this, the effect on David's sexuality was really destructive. He became ashamed about being gay, about being sexually attractive, and about having sexual desires. It was like going back in the closet.<sup>22</sup>*

Intimate partner violence (IPV), or domestic violence, is similar, at first glance, in queer and heterosexual relationships and communities. However, a first glance requires a deeper examination. As *Healing the Healers: Domestic Violence* demonstrates, at its core, IPV is a pattern of abusive and traumatizing behavior that one partner (or ex-partner) inflicts upon or exerts over the other. This can take the form of a perpetrator using power and manipulation to control the thoughts, emotions, actions or mobility, and financial and relational resources of their partner.

<sup>22</sup> This case study was edited and shortened from the original version, published by ACON's Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project. (n.d.). *Tales from another closet: Personal stories of domestic violence in same-sex relationships* (pp. 4-5). [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54d05b39e4b018314b86ca61/t/55ac6c37e4b0f1200fcd24e1/1437363255085/Tales\\_From\\_Another\\_Closet.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54d05b39e4b018314b86ca61/t/55ac6c37e4b0f1200fcd24e1/1437363255085/Tales_From_Another_Closet.pdf)

This form of physical (e.g., Anthony punching and pushing David), psychological (e.g., Anthony's unfounded suspicions of infidelity, which is a form of gaslighting), financial and relational abuse (e.g., David becoming the sole provider and cut-off from supportive relationships) creates excruciating pain, especially when such abuse remains hidden in plain sight. The soul-crushing story of David is only one of many stories that need to be told over and over again, stories that need to be taken out of a "violent closet."

Just consider the following statistics. A study conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) in 2010 revealed that 44% of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women have experienced incidences of IPV by a partner in their lifetime compared to 35% of heterosexual women.<sup>23</sup> Twenty-six percent of gay men and 37% of bisexual men have reported various forms of violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives compared to 29% of heterosexual men.<sup>24</sup> Unaccounted for in this data are IPV incidences among the trans community and those who still remain in the closet.

Although more recent data is needed, these figures imply that IPV is more prevalent, or at least more reported, in the queer community than within heterosexual relationships. Social distancing and mobility restrictions caused by COVID-19 also make queer lives more vulnerable to many forms of violence. For reasons detailed below, the disproportionate incidence of IPV in the queer community will likely increase as a result of COVID-19, leaving in its wake broken or dead queer bodies and fragmented psyches. If this reality is not brought to light, acknowledged, and addressed by all people, then every queer body will bear witness to the notion that queer lives do not matter and are not to be grieved.

What factors contribute to the higher incidence of IPV in the queer community? What unique features and relational dynamics are present in queer relationships that may influence this such disproportionate violence? As faith leaders involved and invested in the flourishing of LGBTQIA+ persons and communities, what might we do to address this silent epidemic and growing public health concern? A two-pronged approach is needed to address these questions—one societal-structural and the other personal-interpersonal. Given that most of the literature focuses narrowly and exclusively on personal-interpersonal dynamics of IPV, what follows is an examination of the societal-structural dynamics of IPV in queer lives.

## **Societal-Structural Dynamics of IPV in Queer Lives**

IPV is a direct consequence of intersecting structures of oppression that purport to safeguard the normative status of heterosexual males through mechanisms of control, domination, and subjugation. This reality must be flagged, lifted up, and centered in all conversations about IPV. Sexual minorities experience pervasive minority stress—an excess or added layer of stress to which individuals belonging to marginalized groups are repeatedly exposed by virtue of their minority social standing.<sup>25</sup> A portion of such stress results from institutionalized discrimination, harassment, and violence.

<sup>23</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: Division of Violence Prevention. (n.d.) *NISVS: An Overview of 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation*. [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc\\_nisvs\\_victimization\\_final-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc_nisvs_victimization_final-a.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: Division of Violence Prevention. (n.d.) *NISVS: An Overview of 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation*. [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc\\_nisvs\\_victimization\\_final-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc_nisvs_victimization_final-a.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 674–697. <https://doi.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0033-2909.129.5.674>

In a 2015 study conducted by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Program, it was reported that one in four LGBTQ survivors of IPV who sought the assistance of the police experienced indifference or hostility. Additionally, 44% of those who survived IPV reported being denied access to emergency shelter primarily because of their gender identity. Expectedly, transgender women of color are the most severely impacted by these discriminatory practices.<sup>26</sup>

The heteronormative discourse on sexuality that underlies these oppressive mechanisms is like a surround sound that envelopes our consciousness, organizing, and structuring patterns of erotic desires. Unbeknownst to many, when this discourse is circulated and paired with an emotional booster such as disgust, and then heard repeatedly, it causes stronger synaptic connections and neural patterning in the brain.<sup>27</sup> This then gets etched deeper and deeper into one's psyche, potentially resulting in internalized homophobia—a constellation of negative feelings, attitudes, stances, behaviors, and assumptions about homosexuality that get internalized by queer individuals and become part of their identity.<sup>28</sup> Research demonstrates a strong connection between internalized homophobia and violence towards members of the same sexual minority group.<sup>29</sup> When relationships are unstable and conflict-ridden, it is easier for these homophobic behaviors to get triggered, putting the dyad more at risk for abuse. In the case study above, it is likely that Anthony's aggressive and coercive behavior towards David is significantly influenced by these deeply held and unprocessed beliefs about queer life, even his own. Likewise, it is also possible that David, who has also been exposed to the same messaging, may unconsciously think that he is deserving of such treatment. Coursing through this volatile and tense-filled relational dynamic are feelings of shame, anger, sadness, anxiety, fear, guilt, and other negative emotions that stick and stay with them like glue. Hence, the cycle of violence occurs again and again and again.

Here's one glaring and uncomfortable truth: Being in a queer relationship does not guarantee freedom or even healing from the deep wounds and harm created by the oppressive structures of heteronormative, male privilege. If left, un-checked and un-processed, the larger system perpetuates cruelty and violence towards sexual minority groups, and the cycle of IPV in queer relationships will continue. Sadly, we become our own worst enemy. And sleeping with the enemy is a nightmare that too often turns into reality.

Even in religiously affirming spaces, the problem of IPV in the queer community remains unacknowledged, if not outrightly dismissed as a purely heterosexual issue.

Hence, amidst the joy and celebration that ensues in supporting and championing the flourishing of queer lives, there is a segment of the population who suffers in isolation and is terrified to speak up. This, perhaps, is driven by a fear of tainting the progress that has been made towards equality, that stepping out may only cement the deeply entrenched social mechanism of exclusion that the community is fighting against. These are legitimate fears, if not adaptive responses to long-standing threats to bodily integrity. But continued silence around this issue comes at a high cost—the very lives of our queer siblings.

<sup>26</sup> National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. (2016). *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and HIV-affected intimate partner violence in 2015: A report from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs*. [https://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2015\\_ncavp\\_lgbtqipvreport.pdf](https://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2015_ncavp_lgbtqipvreport.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, K. (2009). *Cruelty: Human evil in the human brain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also Nolasco, R. (2019). *God's beloved queer: Identity, spirituality and practice*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.

<sup>28</sup> Balsam, K. F. (2001). Nowhere to hide: Lesbian battering, homophobia, and minority stress. *Women and Therapy*, 23, 25-38. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J015v23n03\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1300/J015v23n03_03)

<sup>29</sup> Renzetti, C. M. (1988). Violence in lesbian relationships: A Preliminary analysis of causal factors. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 3, 381-399. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626088003004003>

## The Role of Faith Leaders in Addressing IPV in Queer Lives

Faith leaders along with the queer community, especially those who are currently in or have survived IPV, must join forces together to help them “come out of the violent closet” through allyship, focused conversations, psychoeducation, solidarity work with others, and provision of resources (e.g., shelter access) and referrals for individual and group therapy for both victims and perpetrators.

At the most basic level, when victims of IPV come to us for help, an empathic and compassionate presence should be our first and immediate response and their physical safety our primary concern. This initial conversation and felt sense of support and care is a critical step for subsequent and strategic safety planning and trauma care work. It is also important to draw resources from the community—e.g., support groups, community counseling centers, emergency shelters—and commit to working alongside other advocacy groups to increase the level of solidarity and resistance against all forms of dehumanization.

There is so much work that needs to be done and so many stories still to be brought into the open. I hope that these initial reflections will buoy us towards a greater understanding of the IPV in queer lives, empower us to take strategic and collective action towards addressing the problem, and embolden our hearts to continue supporting the flourishing of queer lives in all possible ways.

### Discussion Questions

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1. What is your community already doing to address the problem of IPV among queer folks?
2. Do you personally know or sense queer couples in your own community who are currently in an abusive relationship marked by intimate partner violence? Imagine the victim or the couple came to you for spiritual care or guidance. What initial thoughts, feelings, reactions are bubbling up inside of you as you imagine providing spiritual care? What response or action might you consider taking?
3. What other reasons do you think contribute to the growing incidence of IPV within the queer community?
4. Why do you think some members of the queer community feel it is beneficial to remain silent or stay in this “violent closet?” As a faith leader, how would you respond to someone who holds these beliefs?
5. What resources might the queer community draw from, both personally and collectively, to address this problem and facilitate healing and trauma care-work for both the victim and perpetrator of IPV?
6. What religious, psychological, and communal resources can faith leaders call upon as we proactively join our queer siblings in their resistance against violence and oppression.

## Additional Resources

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- National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs: Hotline: 212-714-1141
- The Trevor Project: Hotline: 866-448.7386
- LGBT National Hotline 1-888-843-4564
- FORGE (For Ourselves: Reworking Gender Expression)  
<https://forge-forward.org/>
- QTPOC Mental Health  
<https://www.facebook.com/QTPOCsupport/>
- Indian Health Service- Domestic Violence Prevention  
<https://www.ihs.gov/dvpi/>
- Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective  
<https://www.beam.community/>
- The Asian Mental Health Project  
<https://asianmentalhealthproject.com/>
- LGBT Life Center- With a hyperlink active: info/resources:  
<https://lgbtlifecenter.org/ipv/>
- NCADV: With a hyperlink active:  
<https://ncadv.org/blog/posts/domestic-violence-and-the-lgbtq-community>

# Chaplain Reflection

HEALING  
THE  
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## Guide for Spiritual Care Practitioners

**Sarah Knoll Sweeney**

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### Survivors become Caregivers

Like Rev. Tawana Davis, Chaplain Jennie Wachowski-Estes is a survivor of intimate partner violence who became a caregiver to other victim-survivors. The pervasiveness of intimate partner violence means that far too many spiritual care practitioners are themselves victim-survivors. Spiritual caregivers are often taught the archetype of the Wounded Healer.<sup>30</sup> This image of spiritual care, popularized by Henri Nouwen, portrays the art of using our own suffering and woundedness as fuel for our healing work. Chaplain Jennie and Rev. Tawana both expressed their desire to do something for others that was not done for them and to be the presence that was missing in their own traumatic experiences. They agreed that using our wounds can only be done by attending to our own healing. Spiritual caregivers must not push for healing in others that we have not attended to in ourselves. Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber referred to this as working “from your scars, not your wounds.”<sup>31</sup> Unlike physicians and psychologists who diagnose and treat, and nurses who dispense treatment, spiritual caregivers use the self as a tool for healing. When a care seeker discloses traumatic experiences that resemble our own, there can be power in our ability to empathize. Yet there is also risk as we may miss how different our stories really are.<sup>32</sup> Pamela Cooper-White’s work on the use of self is a valuable resource toward distinguishing between the shared wisdom of common experiences and projecting our own healing journey onto those we serve.<sup>33,34</sup> When we are working consciously on our own healing, we are able to stay centered on a care seeker’s own needs and experiences.

### Chaplain as Intimate Stranger

Unlike congregational leaders who may spiritually accompany survivors over the course of years, a chaplain encounters a care seeker for a moment or moments in time. Chaplain Jennie described the meaningful nature of encountering and caring for a stranger. As Rev. Tawana discussed with congregational leaders in her other conversations, survivors often feel mistrust of religious leaders who represent a history of condoning or dismissing domestic violence. Additionally, the social network of a congregation can often include both survivors and abusers, so a victim-survivor may decide that disclosing their suffering to an imam or pastor is too risky to themselves and the abuser they often still love and wish to protect.

<sup>30</sup> Nouwen, H. J. M. (1972). *Wounded healer: Ministry in contemporary society*. New York: Doubleday.

<sup>31</sup> Bolz-Weber, N. (n.d.) *Preaching from your scars*. <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/preaching-from-your-scars>

<sup>32</sup> ACPE Outcome 1.2: identify and discuss major life events, relationships, social location, cultural contexts, and social realities that impact personal identity as expressed in pastoral functioning.

<sup>33</sup> Cooper-White, P. (2004). *Shared wisdom: Use of the self in pastoral care and counseling*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

<sup>34</sup> ACPE Outcome 2.6 demonstrate competent use of self in ministry and administrative function which includes: emotional availability, cultural humility, appropriate self-disclosure, positive use of power and authority, a non-anxious and non-judgmental presence, and clear and responsible boundaries.

The chaplain has a different opportunity; they will often not know the abuser and have no obligation to care spiritually for the perpetrator. In chaplaincy, it is the very *ignorance* of the caregiver that can make them feel safer to the care seeker, a phenomenon Robert Dykstra called the “Intimate Stranger.”<sup>35</sup> When a care seeker chooses to disclose their experience of violence, we best serve them when we can: (1) establish a moment that feels safe and calm, (2) receive the care seeker’s experience intently and skillfully, giving the victim-survivor the chance to feel seen and heard, and (3) impose no expectation on how the care seeker will act as a result of this encounter.<sup>36</sup>

Establishing your presence as a source of safety and calm happens verbally and nonverbally. Positioning your body in a non-threatening posture, speaking audibly but calmly, slowly, and with care in your voice, may signal to the care seeker that you have enough time and interest in them that they might risk a very important disclosure. Holding eye contact, leaving space for silence, and use of conversation skills like minimal encouragement and buffering,<sup>37</sup> inform the care seeker you are wholly present to receive their story and respond with care. In a pediatric setting, young care seekers are especially alert to which adults speak and listen directly and intently to them. Young care seekers also experience violence or a lack of safety. They may seem uncomfortable in the presence of adults, but finding opportunities for them to open up may be the difference between them disclosing and not disclosing their experience of abuse with you. Know the protocol for these disclosures in your particular institution so that you can be empathically present throughout your conversation; survivors can smell your “official script” and it can shut them down. There is no need to change your tone and approach when receiving a disclosure and preparing to bring in other team members who can help, but rehearsing and preparing for these moments will ensure you can remain fully present.

For many survivors, the care received by an intimate stranger becomes an important step in gathering the strength to tell friends and loved ones, and to take action towards increased well-being in their lives. When we are the intimate stranger to a survivor, we give them a chance to practice conversations with those in their inner-circle, where changes are likely to last and integrate into their daily lives.

## Trauma is Different From Other Suffering

In whatever context we receive a care seeker’s disclosure of violence, it is important for us to assess whether they are in an acute stage of trauma survival or have begun a more long-term integration of their experience into the rest of their life. Trauma impacts the brain and the soul differently than other loss and struggle, and knowing this helps us care for survivors more skillfully. When encountering a survivor who is exhibiting the physiological disruptions and intrusive memories of a traumatic experience, spiritual caregivers can help to facilitate a basic sense of physical and emotional safety and be fully in the present moment.<sup>38,39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Dykstra, R. C. (2005). *Images of pastoral care*. St. Louis: Chalice Press.

<sup>36</sup> ACPE Outcome 2.3 demonstrate a range of pastoral skills, including listening/attending, empathic reflection, conflict resolution/transformation, confrontation, crisis management, and appropriate use of religious/spiritual resources.

<sup>37</sup> Kidd, B. (2012). Foundational listening and responding skills. In S. B. Roberts (Ed.), *Professional spiritual & pastoral care: A practical clergy and chaplain’s handbook* (pp. 92-105). Woodstock: SkyLight Paths Publishing.

<sup>38</sup> Doehring, C. (2015). *The practice of pastoral care: A postmodern approach* (Rev. ed). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>39</sup> APC Competency PPS2 Provide effective spiritual support that contributes to well-being of the care recipients, their families, and staff. and PPS4: Triage and manage crises in the practice of spiritual care.

Spiritual caregivers and faith community leaders will benefit from participating in trauma-informed caregiving education.<sup>40</sup> As trauma-informed caregivers, we can be especially mindful of the following: (1) the impact of story-telling for trauma survivors and the danger of rushed meaning-making, and (2) the importance of not pushing our agenda for a survivor's next actions.

Often our training has taught us that story-telling is the most healing experience we can facilitate, but in trauma, telling the story before feeling safe or ready can trigger reliving the events themselves and actually induce further suffering and harm.<sup>41,42</sup>

As the caregiver, we may feel ready ourselves to find the meaning and spiritual significance in the care seeker's survival because our brains are not in a trauma state. As counterintuitive as it may feel for us when we want to be useful, helpful, and significant in the lives of care seekers, following and assessing the care seeker's desire to tell their story to us becomes a sign of how safe we really are. Anything that gives the care seeker a sense that we demand access to their story can resemble the intrusion of abuse itself. However, when we have embodied and created a momentary sense of safety for the care seeker, their relief is often palpable to us as caregivers, and our ability to listen intently and respond skillfully can become the next step in a healing journey.<sup>43</sup>

Chaplain Jennie and Rev. Tawana emphasized the radical simplicity of being believed as integral to their healing. Knowing that a survivor has often experienced extensive gaslighting<sup>44</sup>, a spiritual caregiver's ability to withhold our own interpretations, our guidance, our advice, and our meaning-making invites the survivor to narrate their own story and take agency within their own healing. In abusive relationships, victim-survivors have often temporarily lost their sense of agency and accountability, so our embodiment of the care seeker's ability to reclaim these is invaluable. As spiritual caregivers, we may get distracted by our own need to be helpful and accidentally insert too much of ourselves into the care seeker's healing journey. The more we place our energy in establishing and maintaining a safe presence, and listening and responding with compassion to empower the care seeker, the more likely we are to contribute to healing.

## The Spiritual Wound of Domestic Violence

In all of Rev. Tawana's conversations, and especially with Chaplain Jennie, there is a haunting refrain: that the worst betrayal of trust a victim-survivor feels is eventually not that of the abuser, but that of the trusted friend, family, or spiritual leader who denied, dismissed, or otherwise overlooked their suffering. Spiritual caregivers must take note of this powerful statement that runs through these testimonies. To experience physical, emotional, psychological, financial, digital, or sexual harm in the context of an intimate partner relationship is a devastation that demands a lifetime healing process.

<sup>40</sup> Helpful, digestible information about trauma-informed care can be found at <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care/what-is-trauma-informed-care.html> Training is available from myriad sources across the country.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Levine's work is especially useful in tracking the way trauma impacts the healing potential of story-telling. For example, see <https://www.psychotherapynetworker.org/blog/details/1066/video-peter-levine-shares-a-personal-story-about-trauma>

<sup>42</sup> ACPE Outcome 2.4 assess the strengths and needs of those served, grounded in theology and using an understanding of the behavioral sciences. APC Competency ITP2: Incorporate a working knowledge of psychological and sociological disciplines and religious beliefs and practices in the provision of spiritual care.

<sup>43</sup> APC Competency PPS1 Establish, deepen and conclude professional spiritual care relationships with sensitivity, openness, and respect.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.thehotline.org/resources/what-is-gaslighting/>

The very person one has entrusted with their vulnerability, their body and soul, becomes a force of destruction, desecration, and violation.

If we understand spirituality to encompass all the ways we make meaning of our lives, the spiritual wound of intimate partner violence cannot be underestimated: *all* relationships are then subject to the mistrust generated in that devastating betrayal.

As spiritual caregivers, we represent the hope of healing offered by our sacred traditions, and when a care seeker approaches us, they are seeking that hope but often guardedly, with a healthy, self-protective degree of mistrust. After all, if primary nurturers, partners, and lovers cannot be trusted, how could a chaplain, imam, or pastor? Remembering that no matter the context of our work as chaplains or faith leaders, we represent religion, which has long been a source of oppression, harm, and violence. We have the opportunity to challenge the care seeker's expectations and instead be someone who sees and hears them as a sacred being worthy of acceptance, love, healing, and agency.

## Cycles of Generational Trauma

In their conversation, Rev. Tawana and Chaplain Jennie share the notion that abuse is not spontaneously generated between two individuals; it stretches through generations. Family systems theory<sup>45</sup> informs a spiritual caregiver's understanding that if 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced domestic violence, abuse is often something we witness before we experience or perpetrate it. This means that as spiritual caregivers, we also likely bring an experiential understanding of domestic violence that informs our spiritual care. To responsibly provide spiritual care to survivors, we must seek healing for ourselves as those who have witnessed, experienced, or heard stories of domestic violence within our own families. It also means that we must catch any judgment we might make of a survivor as they tell their story to us. Tragically, domestic violence is an epidemic woven into the fabric of most lives, and any sense we have that it is easy to escape, to confront, or to heal and transform these experiences will hinder the compassion a care seeker feels from us. Recognizing the power of generational cycles of violence on both survivor and abuser can renew our ability to stay in the present moment with a victim-survivor, receiving their experience as they disclose it to us without believing the lie that we can fix or solve the most spiritually damaging experience an individual can have – that the person who should be most trustworthy, most safe, and most nurturing is the very person who seeks our destruction.<sup>46</sup>

## The Power and Control Wheel and Basic Knowledge to Inform Spiritual Caregiving

The Power Wheel<sup>47</sup> is a foundational teaching tool in domestic violence circles and central to Chaplain Jennie and Rev. Tawana's conversation. Familiarity with this image as well as with organizations devoted to victim-survivors' healing increases our compassion and empowers us to refer care seekers appropriately once we have assessed their needs and resources. If as a spiritual caregiver you find you are unfamiliar with basic psychological and spiritual resources regarding trauma and domestic violence, taking time to educate ourselves will indeed make us more equipped to see and hear victim-survivors with more clarity and understanding. Relying on our personal experiences alone leaves us vulnerable to projecting our own particular stories onto care seekers.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> <https://thebowencenter.org/theory/eight-concepts/>

<sup>46</sup> ACPE Outcome 1.5 recognize relational dynamics within group contexts. APC Competency ITP5 Articulate a conceptual understanding of group dynamics and organizational behavior.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.thehotline.org/identify-abuse/power-and-control/>

<sup>48</sup> APC Competency PIC1 Be self-reflective, including identifying one's professional strengths and limitations in the provision of care.

It is also important that we scrutinize religious organizations offering domestic violence resources; not all are trauma-informed and some continue to reinforce the life-limiting theologies<sup>49</sup> that Chaplain Jennie and Rev. Tawana received as survivors. However, be aware that some organizations springing from more conservative pockets of our various traditions have a special stake in confronting these theologies and being a force of healing from within.<sup>50</sup>

## Trauma and Secondary Trauma: Caring for Victim-Survivors' Beloveds

While most of our focus may be on how to care for victim-survivors, we may also offer care to their friends as well as chosen and biological families. Rev. Regina and Rev. Bonita's story gives us the opportunity to ponder how we might care skillfully for those who witness another's abuse and those who are actively supporting survivors. Witnessing the threat to someone's life is also trauma, and hearing a loved one's firsthand account of their trauma is secondary trauma. Both benefit from trauma-informed caregiving. Sometimes witnesses, whether young or old, feel guilt and helplessness. Taking care to witness to these thoughts and feelings without dismissing them or seeking to rescue or reassure them from this distress is critical. When our human impulse is to protect and help others, often a victim-survivor's beloveds suffer in their inability to save their loved one from further violence and harm. Like survivors themselves, they often presuppose judgment of a religious figure for not making the violence stop; they may expect you to echo their sense that they should have done more or done something differently. Carefully reflecting a beloved's feelings and experience, including their hope to help a loved one more, can be a powerfully healing and empowering experience. Remember, as with victim-survivors, these care seekers may use their conversations with us to practice for talks with those who can make a practical and logistical difference in the midst of domestic violence. If requested, resources similar to those that have empowered your caregiving can be immediately useful to a friend or family member.<sup>51</sup>

## Domestic Violence is Systemic: Caring for and Advocating within your Institution

Staff in your institution are experiencing the same secondary trauma as you are when they witness the effects of domestic violence. Remembering how widespread domestic violence is helps us to care for all persons within a system that is impacted by violence. In healthcare environments, staff have developed a hard shell in order to get through another day, week, month, and year of witnessing suffering in those they serve. Likely you experience difficulty in assessing and caring for these fellow caregivers who want to survive the moment well enough to go on to the next patient. Being aware of shift-change opportunities, down-times that you can express to them you are aware that what they saw is impacting them, and making yourself available as a HIPAA-compliant listener has value whether or not they utilize you the first, second, or third time you offer it. Code Lilac<sup>52</sup> or similar events, coordinated between chaplains and clinical supervisors, recognizes the toll that caring for victim-survivors and their beloveds is taking on our colleagues. Advocating for these events, as well as regular training in trauma-informed caregiving and domestic violence with institutional leadership, creates an environment that resists the silence, shame, and stigma that accompanies domestic violence. When leaders join us in being willing to name this pervasive source of suffering in so many of our lives, we address not only interpersonally but systematically the destructive force of violence among us at work and at home.

<sup>49</sup> Doebling

<sup>50</sup> The Mend Project from Christians for Biblical Equality is one such example. <https://themendproject.com/>

<sup>51</sup> APC Competency PPS6: Provide religious/spiritual resources appropriate to the care of patients, families and staff.

<sup>52</sup> Turner, A. (2016, December 17). Hospital's "Code Lilac" aims at reducing care givers' emotional distress. *Houston Chronicle*. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/lifestyle/houston-belief/article/Hospital-s-Code-Lilac-aims-at-reducing-care-10803484.php>

## From Conversation to Ritual: Marking Time and Space in the Wake of Violence

A conversation in which someone feels truly heard and seen is itself a way of marking time, place, and significance for the sufferer. As spiritual care practitioners sometimes say, conversation is itself a prayer of sorts. Survivors and their beloveds are overpowered with cruelty by the very persons who are meant to love and care for them. Children who witness or experience this violence learn that those with power and authority are dangerous and untrustworthy. A resulting theme of nearly all Rev. Tawana's interviews and conversations is how authority and power ascribed to God and religious authorities become inherently problematic for survivors. Before jumping to theological conclusions with care seekers, let us who serve in multifaith environments take care to listen to the sustaining beliefs and practices of victim-survivors, beloveds, and staff colleagues who are grappling with domestic violence. While we may feel the urge to offer alternative images of the Divine, such as a co-suffering God or a Divine Being in solidarity with the afflicted, our sensitivity to a victim-survivor's faith is critical; our effort to comfort can also feel like imposing a strange new way of seeing the world at a time when everything already feels uncertain and foreign. If a survivor asks us to pray, we do well to remember images of the Divine as Comforter, Accompanier, Witness, Liberator, and Sojourner. Emphasizing God's power can feel cruel when a survivor cannot feel God's presence, is not experiencing the force of liberation, and whose main experience of power is at the hands of their abuser. In most spiritual traditions, there are stories and teachings regarding suffering and deliverance. What does your care seeker remember from their own spirituality that will continue to nourish them long after your encounter? In my own little branch of the Christian tradition, a prayer with survivors reminds us of Jesus' own suffering, the holiness of our flesh and preciousness to the Creator, and asks God for justice, healing, and the chance to rejoice again. With staff, rituals that acknowledge powerlessness can be a force of healing and reassurance.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> PPS7: Develop, coordinate, and facilitate public worship/spiritual practices appropriate to diverse settings and needs.

# Liturgical & Ritual Resource Guide

HEALING  
THE  
HEALERS



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For survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV), and their faith communities, ritual can be a powerful force for liberation, healing, and transformation. Rituals create a container that can hold intense emotions and give form to what often cannot be said in words. Rituals can be used to express the wounds and mourn the losses of IPV, to celebrate the strength and resilience of victim-survivors, and to reconnect, rediscover, reimagine, and transform one's relationship with self, family, community, culture, and God.

Rituals can be a sacred way to break the silence and bring a deeper awareness to the issue of IPV. There is an infinite variety of rituals and ritual expression. Some examples include yearly vigils for all those who have lost their lives to IPV; services designed by the survivors in your community; and a series of reflections and community conversations about intimate violence or healthy intimate relationships using sacred texts during an appropriate Holy season.<sup>54</sup> Examples of different services, liturgies, and rituals are featured below.

**Be prepared:** If you decide to do a ritual, whether with survivors individually or collectively, or with the community as a whole—and in whatever form, be it liturgy, or healing circle or prayer and blessing, or confession and repentance—it is critical that you are prepared to care for individuals and the community whatever their response. Sometimes survivors or those still struggling in hidden abusive relationships will be triggered, so it is always important to have people who are skilled at addressing trauma in the room. There might also be a sudden wave of disclosures that include stories of past harm and/or present danger that demand healing and justice, sometimes urgently. This is hard, complicated, and heartrending work. It should not be done alone. Before you plunge in, lay the groundwork. Establish a relationship with a local domestic violence program where you can turn for training, support, and guidance when you do encounter IPV in your community. You and your faith community may in turn be of help to the advocacy community on religious and spiritual matters and even be a place where survivors would feel safe making a new spiritual home. Robust, trusted, and genuine partnerships between secular organizations and faith communities are a powerful force for prevention, justice, and healing.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> One church CONNECT Faith worked with did a weekly Lenten series dedicated to learning about domestic violence. They focused each week on a topic related to domestic violence and the education took place in the context of a prayer service.

<sup>55</sup> APC Competencies PPS6: Provide religious/spiritual resources appropriate to the care recipients, families, and staff. PPS7: Develop, coordinate, and facilitate public worship/spiritual practices appropriate to diverse settings and needs. PPS8: Facilitate theological/spiritual reflection for those in one's care practice.

# Best Practices for Screening the Episodes and Facilitating a Discussion

## Examples of Services, Liturgies, and Rituals Related to IPV

- Worship Services for Domestic Violence Awareness Sunday. <http://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2014/06/AVA-DV-Sunday-Liturgies-Prayers-and-Readings.pdf>
- ritualwell. Healing from Trauma & Abuse. <https://ritualwell.org/healing-trauma-abuse>
- Wewillsspeakout.us Faith Communities Uniting to End Sexual Violence. Speak Out Sabbath. <https://wewillsspeakout.us/speak-out-sabbath-2/>
- Sojourners. 100 Sermons. <https://sojo.net/100sermons>
- World Council of Churches. Worship to End Domestic Violence. <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources/campaigns/women-against-violence/week-6-stories-from-around-the-/prayers.html>
- FaithTrust Institute. Liturgy. <https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/liturgy>

If you are interested in facilitating a virtual discussion on intimate partner violence, or a screening of the *Healing the Healers* film and a discussion, below are some tips for centering the discussion on healing across various lines of difference.

- Diversity is key. Try your best to make the gathering intergenerational. It is important and vital to have elders present.
- Be sure to start the gathering with introductions including name, preferred pronouns, where are you located right now, or the name of the religious organization/institution you are affiliated with.
- Assign a safety person or two. This person can be contacted at any time throughout the event and they can start a breakout room if there is a participant who would like space to process outside of the larger group. Ensure that all participants know this role exists and how they can contact the safety person before you begin your film screening and discussion/debrief.
- Acknowledge that we process information mentally, spiritually, and physically. Facilitate a brief, body-based centering exercise before the screening and be sure to name the option of turning one's camera off. Meditation and body-based practices that force participation are not helpful. The key to these gatherings is flexibility and ensuring trauma informed options.

- After the screening, allow a full five minute break. Feel free to extend the break if you have the time or if it seems needed. Encourage folks again to turn their cameras off, get up and stretch if they are able, and/or engage in an activity that helps them to decompress and center.
- Keep 3-4 key questions in mind for the larger discussion and remind participants before the start of the discussion about how to access the safety person.
- End the larger debrief/discussion with a feeling word activity (with the option to pass): Ask each participant to share a word that describes how they feel. This ensures that all participants have a sense of their contribution to the time together and it helps the facilitators develop a sense of how the gathering went.

## Odyssey Impact

**Odyssey Impact** drives social change through innovative storytelling and media, connecting faith and secular communities. Founded in 1987 as the National Interfaith Cable Coalition, Odyssey Impact is a multimedia and interfaith 501c3 that harnesses the goodwill of faith based and secular organizations to build awareness, change attitudes and catalyze actions for social change through award-winning films, powerful stories, impact campaigns and coalitions of change makers.

## Transform Films Inc.

**Transform Films Inc.** a documentary production company that tells stories of hope, compassion and the quest for a more just world, presents *HEALING THE HEALERS - Preparing and Supporting Faith Leaders - Domestic Violence film series and resource*.

## In Partnership with the FaithTrust Institute

**FaithTrust Institute** is a national, multifaith, multicultural training and education organization working to end sexual and domestic violence. Founded in 1977, FaithTrust Institute offers a wide range of services and resources, including training, consulting and educational materials. They provide communities and advocates with the tools and knowledge they need to address the religious and cultural issues related to abuse.

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# HEALING THE --- HEALERS

## Series 2: Domestic Violence

Encouraging and Preparing Faith Leaders to Respond

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Expert Resource Guide

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Working together to end  
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