

Looking at the Data... from Religious Leaders

Over the last 15 years, we have collected data from over 500 religious leaders concerning domestic violence. Here are some of their beliefs concerning abuse and a snapshot of their experiences related to working with victims and perpetrators.

- Pastors believe that one in five couples in their congregation is violent;
- 9.3% of pastors have counseled five or more abused women in the last year;
- 83.2% of pastors have counseled at least one abused woman;
- 8% of pastors feel well equipped to respond to domestic violence;
- 31% of pastors report that they have preached a message on abuse;
- 40% of pastors discuss violence in premarital counseling.

Evidences of a Holy Hush operating amongst Clergy

- Most pastors have never visited the transition house in or near their local area;
- Most pastors do not know by name any of the workers in the local shelter;
- Most pastors have never preached a message that explicitly condemns wife abuse and/or child abuse;
- Clergy are reluctant to refer to outside community resources those that come to them for help;
- Referrals are least likely from clergy reporting little knowledge or training in domestic violence.

Evidences of Shattered Silence in Congregational Life

- Most clergy have counseled a woman who has been battered;
- Most church women have helped a battered woman they knew;
- Many church women's groups have supported their local transition house by financial or in-kind donations;
- Some churches have information provided in the church washrooms or other safe places that outline what to do if you are an abused woman.

What do these data tell us?

Questions to consider:

- I wonder how men get the idea that the Bible permits them to bully their wives or be dictators in the home. I wonder if we are doing enough as clergy to confront such false ideas about the Bible. Have I addressed those issues clearly enough in my teaching and preaching? Have you?
- I don't know about you, but as a pastor I haven't felt adequately trained to respond to domestic violence by myself. What can we do as clergy to work in partnership with those in the community who seek to help victims of abuse? Have you ever contacted the local transition house? Will you this week?

Building Bridges Between the Steeple and the Shelter...or the church and the community

- Responding to abuse requires both the language of contemporary culture (where issues of safety and practical resources are paramount) and the language of the spirit (with its focus on healing and wholeness);
- The celebration of family life that occurs in many religious circles suggests that women and men of faith stay longer in relationships, even when they are unhealthy;

- Faith leaders have an important role to play in supporting victims through the healing process;
- Abused women of faith find it very therapeutic when their faith leaders condemn the violence they have suffered;
- Faith leaders have an important role to play in calling men who have acted abusively to accountability;
- When pastors suggest that abusive men seek help in an intervention program, whether court mandated or not, they offer hope to the men (and indeed the entire family) of a life where violence is monitored and (eventually) reduced;
- Men of faith who have abused their wives need to have the violence condemned in a therapeutic environment that understands the nuances of their faith perspective, its language, its sacred texts and has an established referral network in the community.

Paving the Pathway Between the Steeple and the Shelter

- Experience with supporting the local shelter and its resident through acts of kindness and compassion;
- Referral...

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