

FALL 2011 VOL 8, Issue 3
Family Violence Resource Network News

**A periodic newsletter sponsored by the *Walking Together* program
Samaritan Counseling Center**



The fall FVRN meeting is co-sponsored by Lancaster Domestic Violence Services and Lancaster Theological Seminary in conjunction with national Domestic Violence Awareness month

Please note the meeting location and earlier start time!

October 19, 2011

**Lancaster Theological Seminary
555 W James St., Lancaster
Hafer Conference room (2nd Floor, Library)**

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM – Coffee, Networking

**9:00 – 10:45 Program and Discussion:
*Freedom From Faith, Freedom With Faith***

**11:00 AM – Worship in Chapel with Seminary community
*Domestic Violence and the God of Freedom***

RSVP: LCrockett@scclanc.org or call 717 625 1722

In this special event organized by Domestic Violence Services and Lancaster Theological Seminary, our focus will be two-fold:

Part 1:

Religious beliefs that oppress – and can endanger - victims of violence

Part 2:

Religious beliefs that are a resource and a source of liberation for victims

Read more in the article on page 3!



Our facilitator will be Dr. Elizabeth Soto, Coordinator of Field Education at LTS and author of Family Violence: Reclaiming a Theology of Nonviolence (Women from the Margins) (2008, Orbis).

We will also hear from survivors who have experienced abuse and sought help from their church community, as well as from advocates and friends who walk with them as they seek safety and search for a God who hears their cries and responds.



The Silent Witness Exhibit, representing some of the women, children and men of Lancaster County who have died as a result of domestic violence, will be on display at the Seminary. The life-sized carved wooden figures were made by employees and friends of Lancaster General Health, and have been displayed at schools, churches and the hospital over the last few years, drawing thousands of visitors to pay tribute to these loved ones who found that their homes were far more dangerous than the streets.

To find out how your church or organization can schedule a display of the Silent Witness Exhibit, contact Mary Steffy at Lancaster General @ MLSteffy@LancasterGeneral.org

Freedom from faith; Freedom with faith **A Theological and Pastoral Perspective**

For some people, the concepts of family violence and religious faith clash like oil and water. We have come to realize that religious faith is a major contributor to domestic and family violence. I have known many cases within a Christian home where members of a family encounter abusive behavior coming from the hands of a Christian man. Too often, the church was not a refuge for the victim and did not seek to hold the perpetrator accountable for his behavior.

The irony lies with the idea of Christ being used to justify abuse toward children or spouses. In this way, the Bible is wrongly used to preach submission as a way of controlling the wife and children.

Many victims of domestic and family violence, in order to claim freedom from the abuse, let go of their faith. It is only understandable that they need to walk away from the church structure that teaches them to continue in an abusive marriage. During these stages they move from questioning their faith--which is necessary, asking "where was God when I suffered"-- to entering a faith crisis.

As leaders we can understand that this faith was not life giving, but death provoking. The victim, full of anger toward a Christian tradition that was not able to walk with them when they needed to make the decision to leave an abusive husband, lets go of faith. Christianity has much to confess for these many wrong teachings done in the "name of Christ." **This is what is meant with the phrase "freedom from faith."**

As religious leaders we have heard of too many cases when the church has done harm instead of good. That is why those of us that have decided to stay in the church are committed to educating our clergy in better pastoral care in order to help victims of family violence. We believe that courses on family violence need to be incorporated in the training of our future pastors. Together we examine the messages that we are preaching from the pulpit and teaching in Bible studies and discern the root of our problem--the theological beliefs regarding the Cross and Suffering that keep victims from breaking the cycle of violence.

On the other side of the spectrum you will find women survivors standing ever stronger in their faith in God. **This is what we are calling "freedom with faith."** This phrase is coined because these women were able to question those teachings that perpetuate and glorify suffering and yet they kept the faith (a renewed sense of faith.) They have known the truth and that truth has set them free (Jn. 3:28). They are free to discover a loving and caring God that does not want them to suffer and carry on in an abusive relationship. They have found freedom in faith to make their decision. **Some of these remarkable women have even journeyed this path holding onto The Liberating Jesus alone, with no church support. Others have found Christian**

leaders that believe it is not God's desire that we suffer and that there is no redemption in carrying the cross of an abusive spouse.

At the FVRN meeting on October 19, our focus will be on the theme Freedom from faith; Freedom with faith, incorporating an honest dialogue on how faith has limited victims in their freedom from the bondage of domestic violence. We will seek to know **Jesus the freedom giver** and how he accompanies those who suffer abuse on their journey and in their liberation from violence to freedom--the true peace. Following this event, we invite our guests to join the seminary community to worship at 11 am together our **God of Freedom** in the Santee Chapel.

By Elizabeth Soto, D.Min
Lancaster Theological Seminary

Domestic Violence Services of Lancaster County provides...

Emergency Shelter: Temporary emergency housing is provided to victims of domestic violence **and their children. Contact the 24 hour telephone hotline at 717.299.1249**

The new children's program seeks to break the cycle of violence by working with affected children in the community, in addition to those residing at the Shelter. Educational and recreational activities, as well as child and adolescent groups and counseling support, are offered. Suggestions are also provided to improve parent-child relationships. **Contact the 24 hour telephone hotline at 717.299.1249**

Domestic Violence Legal Clinic: The legal clinic helps domestic violence victims utilize the full protection afforded them by the court system. This includes providing them with information regarding Protection from Abuse Orders and assisting them with filing the necessary paperwork to access this protection, in addition to court accompaniment. Attorney services may include assistance with other civil legal remedies. Hours are Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. **For more information, please call 717.291.5826**

Bridge Housing: The Bridge Housing project provides transitional housing and supportive services for as many as 10 domestic violence victims and their children. **For more information, call 717-394-4930**

Learn more! <http://www.dvslanc.org>

About domestic (intimate partner) violence:

- **It is found in all age, racial, religious, socioeconomic, educational and occupational groups.**
- **85% of victims are women**
- **1 in 3 women are affected during lifetime**
- **CDC (Centers for Disease Control) calls it a MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM**
- **Women are killed by intimate partners more often than by any other category of killer.**
- **In 70-80% of IPV homicides, regardless of which partner was killed, the man physically abused the woman before the murder.**
- **Deaths in PA as a result of domestic violence:**
 - 2007:121 people**
 - 2008:148 people**
 - 2009:180 people**

The Church's Response to Abuse

A personal account

The church is a place to find healing and solace. When a loved one dies or is gravely ill, we can find peace and comfort among those of like precious faith. However, when a woman comes to her church with the truth that she is being abused by her husband, why do many women find disbelief, condemnation, and more abuse? This may not be the case in every church, but far too often, it is the norm. Statistics show that one in three women will experience abuse of some kind in her lifetime. The evangelical church is not exempt from this.

Ministers are trained in seminary to be a shepherd to their flock. A shepherd will go to any length to retrieve a lamb from the grip of a wolf. So why doesn't the shepherd of the church do the same for a battered woman caught in the grip of a violent man? The amount of domestic abuse in Christian homes is appalling, and the church should be doing something about it. But this is one mission field where the church is falling down on the job.

Pastors need to acknowledge that domestic abuse is a problem in the church and learn how to counsel women wisely. They mean well when they offer "marriage counseling". But in the end they can do more harm than good. My own personal experience with that resulted in sessions of reproof. I was rebuked for a lack of faith in God to give me strength to endure the "difficult" times and was instructed on being more submissive. Blame was cast on me for my abusers actions. Ultimately, the burden of fixing the marriage and turning my spouse back to God fell on my shoulders.

The church frowned on the use of outside agencies. I was chastised for going to Domestic Relations to secure child support. The biweekly battle of getting a check from my husband was wearing me out. My pastor said I should have come to the church for help – that we needed to use the system only when my husband completely stopped paying me. I was discouraged from seeking a PFA for fear it would push my husband to file for divorce. Again, I was being held accountable for his choices.

Another example of handling our situation “in house” was when my husband went into a rage and began breaking furniture. I called one of the pastors to come to the house rather than the calling the police. My pastor told me I could call at any time – and they would come right away. When I didn’t call, I was given statements like, “if that afternoon was as bad as you have shared, then you should have called. At least that avenue was available for your safety and well-being.” My question now is “what was wrong with calling the police?” Interestingly enough, the associate pastor purchased life insurance for fear he would get caught in the middle of one of our fights or that my husband would get so angry with him he would kill him.

The counsel I was receiving from these men was to love my husband, to continue to pray, to work toward reconciliation of the marriage by going on dates with him, and that “it might get worse before it gets better.” They just didn’t seem to understand.

I began to see a counselor which neither the pastors nor my husband were very happy about. It was suggested by the senior pastor that I should only be counseled by one person and he wanted to be that person. They created guidelines for us to follow entitled, “Trust Builders.” There were five points, the first being a schedule for child visitation which had already been established in a court order but was being ignored by my husband. Point number two was a guideline for “counsel on the marriage situation” to be limited to the elders (all three of them) and their wives. I was “permitted” to talk openly with one other female friend but discretion was to be used with family members. This point was completely initiated by my husband to cut me off from my family.

Number three stated that any discussion concerning our relationship toward each another must take place with a third party and was limited to the elders of the church. Number four, phone calls were limited to only discuss the children; all other issues would be discussed at our weekly or biweekly meetings. Immediate issues had to go through the elders via a phone call or emails. Number five, my husband had permission to use the garage at the house anytime he wanted and he could enter my home for ten minutes when picking up or dropping off our children. Needless to say, none of these things worked and **I was continuously being abused by my husband and micro-managed by the elders of my church. I no longer had one abuser; it felt more like I had four!**

I finally refused to continue to participate in the manipulative games any longer. **I stopped going to the “marriage counseling” sessions and began to distance myself from the pastors. I was soon asked to meet with the elder board of the church. I was accused of living as an ungodly woman, not relying on God, being**

impatient, and not allowing God to work in the marriage. What a devastating blow that was. I stopped attending that church. I received an email just days after missing one Sunday. It stated that I was hurting and tired and that it was NOT the best time to make lasting decisions. The email went on to say that they were only looking out for my best interests and even more, what was right before God. I sent a letter asking them to remove me from their membership.

A week later, I received a letter signed by all of the elders declining my withdrawal of membership. I was reminded that I had entered into a covenant with this church family and that my actions now, and over the past few months had been very selfish. They said they had counseled me very strongly to be patient, and not to make huge life changing decisions while so emotionally unstable and hurting. They went on to say that they saw a very selfish, sinful mindset in my conversations and emails, which focused on myself rather than God's will. They felt that I wasn't focused on what was best for the church family or even my children. It stated that if I did not give them the opportunity to minister together with me, they would have to take the next step which would be to enact church discipline.

I didn't respond to their letter. Because of that, the pastor notified the congregation that they were going to enact church discipline on me for breaking fellowship. I was asked to come before the entire congregation to answer for my behavior. I refused. No one in the church knew about the abuse or my husband's affairs. I was told not to air dirty laundry before the church and to allow my husband to save face if he ever attended the church again. The congregation only thought that there were "marriage problems."

The pastor found out where I was attending church and met with my new pastor to ask him to cooperate in the discipline which my new pastor refused to do. **My new church gave me the time and space I needed to heal and get my life together again.** As you can see, the first church completely went about "helping" me in the wrong way. I felt certain that if I would have stayed and followed their well-intentioned but inexperienced counsel that this could have gotten me killed.

On the other side of all this came much growth from studying the Word of God and my relationship with the Lord deepened, bringing a stronger desire to learn and grow. It is actually what strengthened me to the point of having the courage to say no to my husband and put up appropriate boundaries both for my husband and the elders of the church. **I put into practice 2 Corinthians 12:9 and relied heavily on God's grace to sustain me in my weakest moments and carry me on through the pain and difficult times that lay ahead.**

Coming from a non-denominational, conservative church background, I have never heard a sermon, bible study or teaching of any kind about spousal abuse. Why is that? The principles are all there in the Bible concerning what a marriage should look like and what God thinks of violence. Nevertheless, you don't hear teaching on what to do if the marriage is filled with violence. There is a serious lack of understanding regarding abuse and the dynamics of abusive relationships, including their impact upon the lives of people within the church.

Churches today need to educate themselves on domestic violence. Congregations need to hear it preached from the pulpit. It cannot be assumed that the people in the church know that abuse is unacceptable, how to identify it, and what to do about it. Women in the church need to know that this is not their “cross” to bear. They need to be told more than to “just pray.” The Bible says, “Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:26 NKJV) Faith is a good thing and with action, it’s alive.

So how do you educate the church on the subject of domestic violence? First, acknowledge that it is a problem. Create a safe, confidential environment where women can come, open up, and share without the fear of judgment. Make it known that this environment exists. Help these women create a safety plan. Provide a program within the church for abused women or utilize a program or agency outside the church to which you can lead these women.

I come back to my original question: Why doesn’t the church help these women? Is it ignorance? Ignorance is not bliss! There is no excuse for a lack of knowledge in this day and age where information is so readily available. Perhaps it’s a lack of experience? Again, this cannot be an excuse. Contact a fellow minister who has dealt with these issues. Experience can be gained simply by coming along side of another minister who has the knowledge of how to care for these wounded lambs. Or seek training at your local domestic violence shelter. **The church cannot continue to stick their heads in the sand and say, “not at my church!” Yes, it could very well be at your church!**

Resources are many! Domestic Violence Services of Lancaster County and Samaritan Counseling Center are just a few of the many resources at our disposal. Women with a strong faith and commitment to their church do not have to abandon either one in the face of domestic violence. It should not become a matter of needing to choose one over the other. The two can walk hand in hand, thereby producing a process of complete healing--of the whole person!

by Dawn Dornes

What is a Safe Church?

- **A Safe Church environment is one that provides for the protection of the physical, emotional, and spiritual health and well being of each person. More than simply offering protection from danger, the Safe Church sees itself as a sanctuary, where one finds protection, security, support, guidance and the presence of God.**



What is under the “umbrella” of a Safe Church?

- A set of policies developed in alignment with the mission that are oriented to creating a sanctuary where all can gather in an atmosphere of trust and safety
- Child & Youth Protection
- Prohibition of Sexual Harassment (Title VII)
- Distribution and tracking of keys to facility
- Screening, hiring and responding to allegations of inappropriate conduct
- Church Response to Domestic Violence

For information on the Samaritan Counseling Center services to help you create a “Safe Church” contact Linda Crockett@ 717 625 1722 or email

LCrockett@scclanc.org

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ABOUT THE FAMILY VIOLENCE RESOURCE NETWORK

The FVRN meets 4 times a year, the 3rd Wednesday of January, April, July and October, at 9:30 AM – 11:45 AM.

Meeting Schedule 2012

Date	Location	Sponsor
01/18/12	First United Methodist	Samaritan Counseling Center
04/18/12	YWCA (Lime St)	YWCA of Lancaster Sexual Assault Prevention & Counseling Center
APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT & CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS MONTH		
07/18/12	First United Methodist	Samaritan Counseling Center
10/17/12	First United Methodist	Domestic Violence Services of Lancaster County

OCTOBER IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

REFRESHMENTS: 9:30 AM
MEETING: 10:00 AM – 11:45 AM

First United Methodist Church is located at 29 E. Walnut St., Lancaster

If you are interested in connecting with others who are concerned with family violence in Lancaster County, plan to attend these meetings! Great opportunities for learning, networking, and discussing prevention and assistance strategies in a cross-disciplinary forum that includes religious, medical, agency, mental health, survivor, advocate and community volunteer perspectives.

To be removed from this mailing list, email fvrn@scclanc.org
And type "REMOVE" in the subject line.