Dear Advocates, Colleagues, and Friends,

In 2017, Safe Havens staff members spoke with 26 domestic and sexual violence service providers across 22 states about their work with local faith communities. The agencies shared stories of successes and challenges in their work to build partnerships with communities of various faiths and denominations in rural, urban, and suburban settings.

Each of the agencies spoke to the important role faith communities can play in addressing domestic and sexual violence and facilitating healing for survivors. Service providers recognized that “for many survivors coming out of a crisis situation, their faith was one of the pillars that helped them move on with their lives.” We heard other comments such as, “in our state, we really see faith communities as a resource, and they really see us as a resource.”

Building partnerships with faith communities also comes with many challenges. Funding for faith community outreach and training is often insufficient to provide for the long-term relationship building, extensive outreach, and training needed for effective partnership. And many faith leaders have not received fundamental information about domestic and sexual violence.

One service provider expressed the importance of long-term relationship building: “I don’t want to refer someone back to a community where [they’ll receive advice that jeopardizes their safety]. I’m going to refer them to somewhere where I know they’ll be safe, and that’s why personal relationships are so important.”

Building these relationships across community and faith lines takes time and energy. One interviewee pointed out that the biggest lesson she learned from collaborating with faith communities is that “partnerships take time”—time to build trust, to learn the particular challenges faced by community members, and to create a blueprint for partnership that addresses their particular needs.

The bottom line is that for many victims who seek services, faith is a critical resource, crucial to their identity and community, and an element in decision-making and healing. At Safe Havens, we believe that faith communities can be a resource for these victims. However, faith communities and faith leaders need outreach, training, resources, and partnerships with service providers to respond safely and effectively.

Although Safe Havens can’t hand out time or money, we are hoping to save you a bit of both. We have developed a toolkit that we hope will help you reach out to and collaborate with your local faith communities. The toolkit, “Pieces of a Bigger Picture: Faith Communities and Service Providers Working Together to Support Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence,” includes:

- Tips for reaching out and planning a first visit to a faith-based organization.
- Information about sexual and domestic violence (including restroom and bulletin board flyers, suggestions for faith community engagement, and sexual and domestic violence booklets) that you can give to faith leaders in your community.
A model cover letter that you can download, edit, and print on your own stationery to introduce the materials to faith communities and to provide contact information about your agency. This letter can be downloaded from the Safe Havens website at www.interfaithpartners.org.

A “Guide for Service Providers” document to help you overcome some of the obstacles that you may encounter while doing outreach.

Insight from clergy themselves about how service providers can work with faith communities to address sexual and domestic violence. This document can be downloaded from the Safe Havens website at www.interfaithpartners.org.

We hope these resources provide you with information and tools that will help you build and strengthen collaborative and trusting relationships with your local faith communities. We also hope that faith leaders in your community will use the provided information to offer support and provide referrals to victims and survivors who turn to them for help.

Safe Havens is available by phone and email to talk with you about outreach and partnerships with faith communities. Whether you are experiencing challenges, just getting started, or have a wonderful model to share, we would love to hear from you!

To order additional materials, talk about your work with local faith communities, or get more information, please contact Safe Havens at 617-951-3980/3981 or at info@interfaithpartners.org.

Thank you for the important work you are doing to help victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence find safety, hope, and healing. We are delighted to have the opportunity to join with you in this critical work.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Anne Marie Hunter
Director

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Associate Director

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Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence

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