Faith Communities and Service Providers Working Together to Support Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are. - 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Pastoral Response

Develop Protocols
Have an action plan in place to follow if a victim of abuse asks for help or if you learn that a church member is being abusive. Prioritize the safety of victim(s) and the accountability of the batterer. Be ready to refer to area service providers.

Create a Safe Haven
Make your church a safe place where victims of abuse can ask for help. Let your community know that you are prepared to provide support. Keep an updated list of referral resources for women, men and children.

Teach through Life Cycle Events
You will have more contact with families around life cycle events, such as baptisms, confirmations, first communions, weddings, and funerals. Observe the dynamics within families and share resources as needed. Be alert that pregnancy and the arrival of a child may escalate abusive behavior.

Educate Our Children
Make sure all teachers and youth group leaders receive training about how to recognize abuse and whom to approach with concerns. Include age-appropriate prevention programming about teen dating violence and family violence for children and youth.

Teach Your Prophetic Voice
Give sermons on domestic violence to build awareness, teach that family violence is not acceptable in the Christian community, and emphasize that help is available. Use special prayers on domestic violence, e.g., during the Pastoral Prayer or Prayers of the People.

Get Training
Participate in workshops designed for clergy to learn safe and effective ways to address domestic violence in your congregation. Network with other pastors for support. Contact Safe Havens for education and technical assistance.

Educate the Congregation
Sponsor education programs on domestic violence. Invite staff from local domestic violence agencies to speak during worship or adult education. Print articles that include lists of community resources in the bulletin. Post bathroom flyers with resource numbers. Include abuse in pre-marital counseling.

Work as a Team
Domestic violence is a complex problem that requires a team approach. Clearly define your role as a pastor, and be ready to refer by building relationships with domestic violence advocates, police, and staff at state-certified batterer intervention programs.