



Featured in this issue: Domestic Violence and Faith

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From the Executive Director

As we say goodbye to 2016 and welcome a new year, we also acknowledge several awareness months, including Stalking Awareness Month and Human Trafficking Prevention Month in January, and Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month in February. We would love to hear about any events, campaigns or initiatives you are planning to mark these months in your communities.

This issue of the bulletin focuses on faith and domestic violence and the role faith leaders can play in assisting victims and survivors. OPDV partnered in November with the Governor's Office of Faith Based Community Development Services and the New York Theological Seminary to host a half-day seminar on the topic and to publish guidelines that can serve as a resource for faith leaders across the state.

Rev. Rachelle Sat'chell Robinson of Deep Wells Ministries wrote the issue's featured article, "Spiritual Abuse as a Component of Domestic Violence," and also reviewed the guidelines and provided invaluable feedback before they were finalized. Our Q&A with Cecilia Thomas, author of "While Waiting for Change," provides a personal account of her journey from victim of domestic violence to survivor, and explains the critical role her faith leader played in encouraging and empowering her to make the best, safest decisions for herself and her children. Ms. Thomas also gave the keynote address at November's seminar.

On behalf of everyone at OPDV, I wish you a peaceful and happy 2017. We look forward to your continued partnership in the coming year.

Gwen Wright

New Resources from OPDV

OPDV recently published the following resources, which are free. Use the Public Education Materials Order Form to obtain printed copies or download them from the OPDV website.

Red Flag Card: This card lists some of the common risk factors for physical danger or lethality in domestic violence cases. It also provides potential bystanders with steps to take if they know someone experiencing any of the red flags within their relationship. It can fit discreetly in a wallet, pocket or smart phone case.

Domestic Violence and Faith Communities: Guidelines for Leaders: This publication provides an overview of the nature and dynamics of domestic violence and offers faith leaders guidance for responding to victims and abusers within their faith communities. OPDV collaborated with the New York Theological Seminary and the Governor's Office of Faith Based Community Development Services to develop the guidelines. This will be available on the OPDV website by the end of January.

Domestic Violence and Strangulation: This brochure details signs and symptoms of strangulation and includes recommendations and resources for victims and professionals.

1-800-942-6906
NYS Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline
Confidential • 24 HRS/7 DAYS
English & español, multi-language accessibility
711: Deaf or Hard of Hearing
In NYC: 311 or 1-800-621-HOPE (4673)
TDD: 1-800-810-7444

January is Stalking Awareness Month

National Human Trafficking Awareness Day is January 11

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month

New York Shined Bright in October

Thank you to every community, agency, organization and individual who helped Shine the Light during October 2016! Your events, efforts, and energy turned the state more purple than ever before. It's not too late to share your photos. Send them to opdvpurple@opdv.ny.gov and we'll include them in our Facebook album.

Did You Know?

A survey by the United Methodist Church showed that one in 10 respondents had been physically abused by a spouse and one in four had been verbally or emotionally abused.

Source: The Domestic Violence Resource Guide for Faith Leaders

# Spiritual Abuse as a Component of Domestic Violence

[Reverend Rachelle Sat'chell Robinson](#), Deep Wells Ministries

Spiritual abuse is a rarely discussed, often misunderstood component of domestic violence. But for those whose faith is a significant part of their lives, this form of abuse can be devastating and extremely damaging. It is imperative that faith leaders and community organizations work together to provide holistic services and healing to victims of domestic violence and their children, and to hold abusers accountable in every way possible.

Spiritual abuse occurs when an abuser:

- Uses religion and spirituality to coerce and control another person
- Uses the victim's beliefs to manipulate them
- Forbids the victim to talk about or practice their faith
- Belittles victims for believing in their faith
- Forces victims to violate their spiritual beliefs
- Uses the victim's spiritual beliefs to coerce them into behaving a certain way
- Misuses religious teachings to excuse/ justify abusive and/or oppressive behavior
- Manipulates spiritual leaders and communities into colluding with them

Although we may not think about faith and religion within the context of domestic violence, a holistic approach to victim-centered advocacy requires that we do just that. For many people, faith and religious beliefs are among the most important, most valuable parts of their lives. And just as others turn to their faith leaders for counsel and support, victims of domestic violence may look to their faith leaders for spiritual guidance, community support and practical solutions to the everyday challenges they face regarding parenting, finances, employment, housing and any other areas of their lives their abuser threatens or destroys.

Faith leaders are in unique positions to provide spiritual and emotional support, which allows for countless opportunities to positively impact the lives of women, men and children. However, even with the best intentions, leaders can unintentionally cause a great deal of harm by adding to a victim's feelings of rejection, guilt and loneliness, and their belief that they should "pray and stay."

Faith leaders are often unprepared to give victims of domestic violence the help and healing they truly need. In many cases, faith leaders:

- Have no knowledge about the impact of domestic violence
- Are not familiar with the resources that are available in their community
- Counsel without the background needed to handle this very sensitive issue
- Have not been educated and/or don't understand their role in these situations

## Partnership is Essential

Not only should leaders of all faiths be aware of the [local domestic violence programs](#) and other community organizations that serve victims in their geographical areas, domestic violence programs should also serve as a resource to faith leaders by working together to meet the faith-based needs of all victims. When faith is a component of advocacy, victims no longer see it as a separate issue that they must address on their own, if at all.

Since many victims have been forced to question their beliefs, customs and practices, they may feel isolated from their God and from the community that could offer them the most support. It is essential to equip all members of the faith community with the knowledge and resources they need to feel empowered and capable of making their own decisions.

Faith leaders can transform faith from a weapon that abusers use against their victims into a valuable resource where victims can find healing and guidance. Leaders can call domestic violence out of the darkness by speaking about it often to their faith communities, to replace the stigma and shame with healing, hope and restoration. It is necessary to break the silence in order to make room for the sound of healing.

### As faith leaders we must:

- Be informed and aware of services available in our community;
- Understand that we should not counsel without proper training; and
- Have an action plan and protocol in place for how our religious institution handles a victim and perpetrator who worship in the same place.

### As faith leaders, we must not:

- Break the victim's confidence;
- Counsel a victim and abuser together; or
- Offer marriage counseling or encourage the victim to stay or leave.

- **One out of four members within a faith community is a victim or survivor of domestic violence**
- **Victims of domestic violence who belong to a faith community are more likely to seek help from their faith leader first**

Source: [Domestic Violence Resource Guide for Faith Leaders](#). (2001).  
MAG Regional Domestic Violence Council: Maricopa Association of Governments.

# Q&A: Lessons Shared from a Person of Faith



**Cecilia Thomas, author of [While Waiting for Change](#)**

**Q When and how did you decide to write a book?**

**A** More than 10 years before writing my book, I knew I wanted to tell my story in book form, but I was still living through the experience, so I waited. After the last abusive incident, when my abuser was no longer in my life, I began writing, allowing all of my thoughts, anger, pain and trauma to pour out onto the page as poems, prose and narratives. That was the beginning of my healing process.

**Q How did you decide which parts of the book should be poems versus prose/narrative?**

**A** I began with the narrative, but then the poems started coming out of me. I wasn't sure how to put it all together. Then a Christian leader who publishes books suggested I open each section with a poem, to introduce the next chapter and allow the story to flow from one time period to the next. That approach best connected/expressed my emotions.

**Q Did you ever consider not writing the book?**

**A** While writing, I worried that my abuser would find out about the book. I still do not know if he has. I also lacked confidence in my ability to finish, publish, and sell an actual book. My fears held me back initially, but people around me kept encouraging me to share my story.

**Q What role did your faith leader play in your journey?**

**A** She was a great listener who possessed tremendous godly wisdom, understanding and knowledge, with experience in speaking and counseling. She built my self esteem and confidence by continually pointing out my self-worth and value. She never suggested I get a divorce, but encouraged me to make the best decisions for my children, my health and future. Her insight into the word of God and its relevance to my situation were of great value and I am forever grateful, not only for her guidance and support, but because she encouraged me to write and then served as editor of my book.

**Q Did your workplace provide similar assistance or support?**

**A** I was employed during much of my abuse, and, at that time, there was no on-site help for victims of domestic violence. Employees did have access to a counseling agency outside the workplace, and I did think about going, but decided not to, because I was not sure that they could help me. I also feared telling my ex-husband that I was going somewhere other than work. I felt obligated to tell him where I was going at all times.

In general, I think that the workplace should implement effective domestic violence policies to support all employees. OPDV's [Domestic Violence and the Workplace handbook](#) should be mandatory for all employers, along with a trained support team in every workplace and a safety plan to respond when known perpetrators come to the worksite.

**Q Did your children's school provide assistance or support?**

**A** My children were in public school when I was being abused by their father. When I expressed concerns at school about what was

happening at home, there were social workers in place to help my children address some of the issues they were having. It was still difficult, however, to reveal information to known mandated reporters. Even so, I do think that training on these issues is vital for all professionals in the educational system, not just counselors and social workers.

Since this is a societal problem, the educational system should be involved in teaching students about coping skills, types of abuse and how to identify and develop healthy relationships. Empowering youth with knowledge and enforcing age-appropriate accountability and intervention skills would also help. Additionally, schools could make more of an effort to proactively connect families to resources that may address myriad issues and challenges.

**Q How can society create a culture that is intolerant of abuse, and what role can faith communities play?**

**A** There should be no comfortable place for a person who abuses, and that includes within the faith community. No one should have to hide what they have suffered behind closed doors.

Society must demand and enforce effective laws and compliance so that perpetrators are held accountable for their behavior. I know these are complex issues and difficult to implement, but I also believe that zero tolerance for violence from every race, age group, gender, and socioeconomic group will relieve victims of holding abusers accountable. It is up to society to insist that abusers stop their abusive behavior. We can not stay silent.

# Legislative Update

Several bills that will assist victims of domestic violence or other crimes were signed into law in 2016.

- A new law provides a two-year extension of two provisions of the Judiciary Law.
  - ◊ One grants Family Court referees the authority to issue orders of protection, ex parte or when the respondent has defaulted, any time the court is in session.
  - ◊ The second continues the Family Court Judicial Hearing Officer pilot program in the Seventh and Eighth Judicial Districts in Western New York, extending the authority of hearing officers to issue orders of protection ex parte or when the respondent has defaulted.
- A new law eliminates the requirement that other enforcement remedies must be exhausted before a person who fails to pay child support and/or spousal support can be held in contempt by the court in a matrimonial proceeding.
- New York State outlawed female genital mutilation in 1997. The new crime of “facilitating female genital mutilation” makes it illegal to

intentionally aid in the commission, or attempted commission, of female genital mutilation of a minor younger than 18.

- A new law enhances the work of the state Interagency Task Force on Human Trafficking by expanding the membership of the task force, providing for the creation of subcommittees to investigate special issues related to human trafficking, and requiring that the task force meet at least three times a year and issue an annual report.

## Faith Initiative Project

In November, OPDV partnered with the [Governor’s Office of Faith Based Community Development Services](#) and the [New York Theological Seminary](#) to host an interfaith event for faith leaders on the connections between domestic violence and spiritual abuse.

The half-day event, which brought together faith leaders from across the state to discuss and learn about the ways in which domestic violence impacts their communities and congregations, featured Rev. Dr. Dale Irvin, President of the [New York Theological Seminary](#), Rev.

Karim Camara, Executive Director of the [Governor’s Office of Faith Based Community Development Services](#), and Gwen Wright, Executive Director of OPDV.

Other speakers included:

- Trudy Lawson, Coordinator for Healing Hearts Ministry of the Capital Region
- Rev. Dr. Sally McNichol, Co-Executive Director of [CONNECT](#)
- Cecilia Thomas, author of [While Waiting for Change](#)

The event also featured a panel, of faith leaders: Rev. Philip Grigsby, Director

of Schenectady Inner City Ministry, Rabbi Daniel Eligberg of [Temple Israel](#) in Albany, and Imam Abdul-Hameed Zakee, Instructor of Qur’anic Arabic grammar and Islamic studies in Albany.



## The Office of Faith Based Community Development Services

In 2015, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo created the [Office of Faith Based Community Development Services](#) as a resource for faith-based, non-profit organizations statewide.

Since faith-based organizations provide a wide range of services, including affordable and supportive housing, soup kitchens/food pantries, educational services (i.e., daycare, day schools, and after-school programs), employment assistance, and mental health support, the office carries out three primary functions that help communities maintain these vital resources:

### Capacity Building

The office builds capacity by:

- Working with the [State Nonprofit](#)

[Coordinating Unit](#) to connect faith-based community organizations with grant opportunities and provide assistance with grant applications

- Assisting faith-based community organizations in working with the [Department of State](#) and other government agencies to fully utilize the resources and opportunities available to their communities
- Working with Empire State Development to help and encourage the development of businesses

### Coalition Building

The office builds coalitions by:

- Organizing local meetings for networking and other opportunities
- Providing information and resources

to faith-based organizations so they can provide effective services, improve performance and increase sustainability.

- Creating a network of faith-based organizations to better coordinate efforts, build coalitions and develop effective partnerships.

### Community Outreach

The office partners with the [Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance](#), [Office of Children and Family Services](#), [Department of State, Homes and Community Renewal](#) and the [Governor’s State Nonprofit Coordinating Unit](#) to help communities deliver services to their neediest residents and combat the root causes of poverty.

NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence [www.opdv.ny.gov](http://www.opdv.ny.gov)

Please send any comments or content ideas to: [opdvbulletin@opdv.ny.gov](mailto:opdvbulletin@opdv.ny.gov)

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