

Why faith community involvement is critical in responding to the problem of domestic and sexual violence

❖ The Prevalence of Domestic and Sexual Violence:

Given the prevalence of the problem, it's fair to say that domestic and sexual violence negatively impacts many individuals and families within faith communities. The effects are devastating and long term, including children who witness violence. This negative impact can extend through generations.

❖ The Complex Trauma of Relationship Violence

The trauma experienced in domestic and sexual violence leads to questions of meaning as the survivor seeks a context in which to understand the experience. Faith influences perceptions of reality and the way experiences are interpreted. It is also true that faith itself is affected by this experience. Too often service providers are not equipped to deal with the deep faith issues and questions that arise for the survivor. Faith leaders are often not equipped to deal with the pressing physical needs of the survivor. As service providers and faith leaders build trust and learn to work together, a more holistic response can be provided.

❖ Faith Communities are Powerful Agents of Cultural Formation

Faith communities are a powerful force in either reinforcing or challenging cultural attitudes, beliefs and behavior, which provide the context for domestic and sexual violence. Ways in which faith communities collude with cultural values that allow this kind of violence to continue must be brought to light. Promoting values of justice, love, dignity and respect can greatly enhance efforts aimed at prevention.

❖ Faith Communities are Entrusted with Resources

Resources within the faith community include people, expertise, space and facilities, materials and equipment, money, relationships and political influence. Mobilizing these resources in collaboration with others can have a positive impact in communities dealing with domestic and sexual violence.