

Our House, Inc.



New Birth To Violence Free Living

Faith Based - Action Plan

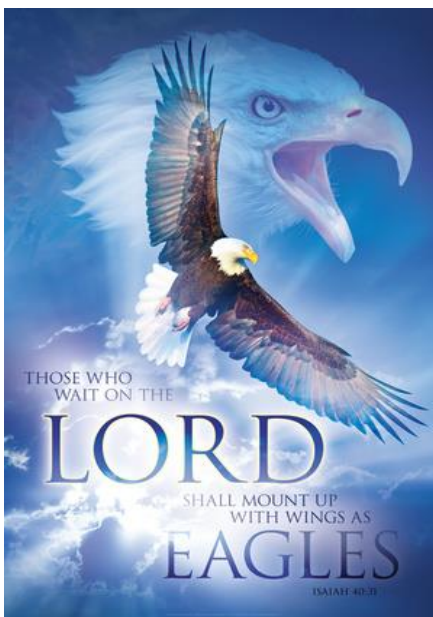
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THIS PLAN ADDRESSES THE NEED TO INVOLVE FAITH BASED LEADERS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

Vision: *A world free of interpersonal violence*

Mission Statement: *To eliminate domestic violence and sexual violence through intervention, prevention, prosecution, victim protection and sustainable restoration*

Seven Steps On How To Work With Churches



Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault are horrendous acts. Sadly, most times these acts are perpetrated by someone the victim knows. Everyone deserves to live a life without fear. Children should not live in fear of coming home each day from school to a war zone or worse, to be abused by someone they love.

Who can help the most?

Faith-based leaders are the number one avenue to help stop a

generation of violence. It will take the partnerships of faith-based leaders and social/victim service advocates working together to provide the critical services and support that victims need. This plan demonstrates how one agency, Our House, Inc., has developed a vital plan to end the violence with the help of the faith-based community. Through this plan, we share our initiatives on how we work to better protect and provide services to victims. Spiritual leaders are the main agents that

The contents in this action plan is a compilation of various research articles, documents, writings, policy, procedures, comments, testimonies and other related entities that have been collected over the past thirty years. The writings regarding domestic violence and violence against women were compiled by Our House, Inc.'s staff, board members and volunteers. Any and all unnamed authors, writers, and entities whose materials may be listed and desire credit for said content, we respectfully request that you contact us at 662-334-6873.

As a resource, religion encourages women to resist mistreatment. As a roadblock, its misinterpretations can contribute to the victim's self blame and suffering to the abuser's rationalizations.

Our reasons for working with faith-based leaders have three overall goals:

- safety for the victim and children,
- accountability for the abuser,
- and restoration of the relationship (if possible) or mourning over loss.

(Taken from Marie Fortune-Abuse No More)

This plan will give you examples of how to ask for support from the faith-based community. The examples included in this plan are actual events and/or situations involving Our House, Inc. staff and volunteers. Many of these examples do not require money but do require TIME.

The benefit of this plan will be: A correct reading of Scripture leads to an understanding of the equal dignity of men and women, and to relationships based on mutuality and love.

- Husbands should love their wives as they love their own body, as Christ loves the Church.
- Forgiveness does not mean forgetting the abuse or pretending it did not happen. Forgiveness is not permission to repeat the abuse.
- An abused woman's suffering is not punishment from God. This image of a harsh, cruel God runs contrary to the biblical image of a kind, merciful, loving God.
- No person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage. We sometime encourage abused persons who have divorced or would like to divorce to investigate the possibility of seeking an annulment instead if allowed by their faith.

It is important to recognize that developing relationships with faith-based leaders is not going to happen overnight. It may take days, months, even years.

"The relationship of the Bible to domestic abuse is one of the most heartbreaking and misunderstood issues of our day. By not considering the whole counsel of Scripture, our well-intentioned efforts to save marriages can increase the burden of those who need our help the most. . . . original intent for marital permanence was never meant to provide a cover for conditions of marital abuse that are worse than divorce."

*Mart De Haan, Contributing Writer
Our Daily Bread Devotional and the Discovery Series
Bible Study Booklets*

It is extremely different working with faith-based agencies in the rural community verses the urban community. In the south, everyone knows everyone or at least think they do. Churches are a community with multiple of clicks/groups built into the setting. You have to know who to approach.

We have listed 7 steps in our action plan to work with the faith-based rural community. These steps may or may not be taken in order. In fact, on many occasions the steps will overlap.

STEP 1: WHO DO I APPROACH?

Faith-based leaders can be a tremendous assistance in ending interpersonal violence (domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence). To a victim of abuse, faith-based guidance can be a major source of assistance in getting the critical help that is needed for the victim. One of the first things we did at Our House, Inc. was to establish a Board of Trustees with respected faith-based leaders from the community.

One of our barriers in approaching the faith-based community was our lack of understanding the different denominations' proper chain of command. In the beginning, we mistakenly thought that you should always go to the head of the church with your requests. However, in many denominations, it is not the pastor that is in charge; but, the deacon and elder boards that are in charge. Any requests about policy making or speaking engagements





needed to go through the deacon/elder board.

In some cases, the most effective approach for us was to get to know first lady of the church or the church's secretary. In the south, the church's secretary (whether volunteer or paid) knows who to approach and how to approach them. It did not matter what we needed (money, presentations or a hotline) the secretary could tell you how to get it done.

STEP 2: WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM THE CHURCH

A lot of victim-service advocates assume that because there are churches in the community they should automatically jump on the band wagon to end the violence. One of the things we learned in the beginning was to get our priority straight. We asked ourselves, "What was it that we really needed and wanted from the church? Did we need them to preach a sermon on domestic violence and sexual assault prevention? Did we need for them to do a fundraiser? Did we need volunteers from the congregation? Did we need speakers to help end interpersonal violence?" *Finally, we realized that what we needed most was for the church to acknowledge our existence so that victims knew where to go for help.* One step was to get the churches to trust our agency and not feel threaten by our resources. So many churches shared that they believed that victim-service advocates' job was to separate the family. They believed our main mission was to encourage divorce in cases of domestic violence. We had to educate the faith-based leaders through telephone calls, letters and one on one about our Vision and Mission statements. ***We had to stress that we were concerned about the removal of violence not the destruction of marriage.***

STEP 3: UNDERSTANDING THAT THE CHURCHES HAVE MISSIONS OF THEIR OWN (Churches are a business that have their own agenda.)

Churches' main mission is salvation. After that, the leadership of the churches decides on what their secondary missions will be such as a prison mission, substance abuse mission, working with child abuse, providing food for the poor, etc. Before we approach a church, we had to learn what the church's secondary missions were. Then, our agency approached them through the churches' secondary missions. For example, one church shared with us that their church had a prison ministry, and their pastor went each week to speak to prisoners and offer them salvation or help with their families. We approached this pastor/minister about our Men Against Spousal Harm Program (MASH), which are court mandated behavioral modification classes for offenders of domestic violence. We shared with the pastor that assisting us in teaching these courses would be similar to working with a prison ministry. Except with our program, we had a structured outline for the classes and wanted to add a spiritual component by involving ministers and pastors as the teachers. We shared that pastors are the best person to work with batterers who are mandated to change their violent behavior and to empower them to be the leaders that God designed them to be. We shared a sample of our curriculum, adapted from the Duluth MN model, on family, decreasing anger, rebuilding their relationship with their

Many victims of sexual assault and domestic violence believe that forgiveness means releasing the offender from their crime...not true. Forgiveness is about releasing the victim from the pain, helping them to remember the incident but to let go of the pain.



mate and children. We also shared that we would provide a 40-hour training; and they would receive certification upon completion of the training. As a result of this approach, we have over the past ten years certified 16 pastors as MASH instructors. Many have gone on to establish a MASH program in their own church. Another pastor had a strong substance abuse program in his church. We approached him on allowing us to train the church ministers (30 individuals) on how substance abuse was not a cause of family violence but an enhancer of the violence. We requested to share the laws on how a person under the influence of substance abuse could not consent to participating in a sexual act. We asked to speak to his ministers, staff and clients. This has become an ongoing procedural for our staff until recently, when we requested to conduct a training for the trainers' program. Now, this church co-sponsors a "Darkness to Light" substance abuse program to prevent sexual assault and domestic violence every year.

Another church provided food to 300-500 individuals per week. We approached them by asking them to put a crisis card under every lunch/dinner plate each week. They took an 11 x 17 sheet of paper, listed our services and contact information, and used it as a plate mat.

STEP 4: INVOLVING THEM IN YOUR SETTING, PROJECTS AND DREAMS.

To help faith-based leaders be involved with Our House, Inc., we created two educational booklets explaining "what interpersonal violence is" and "how the clergy can help". Copies of these booklets are available for reprinting at no cost.

Many churches are very interested in partnerships. We partnered with three churches on a three-year Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration Project entitled: "Becoming A Responsible Teen (BART)." This was a substance abuse and HIV/STDs afterschool prevention program. We partnered with six churches on conducting a "Safe Date" curriculum with the Center for Disease Control for five years. We partnered with two churches on a Fatherhood Initiative Grant with the Department of Health and Human Services. We partnered with four churches on our "Youth Advocates Program" with the Justice Department. We started each of these partnerships with prayer before we even wrote the grant. Staff would invite the pastors of the various churches to come and pray over our building, projects, conference agendas, grants, and survivors. We would call pastors in the community and share with them our vision of partnerships and how we, together, can apply for funding that will enhance the healing in our youth. Additionally, we offered to provide training on grant writing, establishing 501 (c) 3, establishing budgets, setting up policies and designing church bulletins. By sharing our expertise, we were encouraging them to create new programs within their own church setting. We also invited them to utilize our facility for meetings, receptions and special programs.

Domestic violence not only affects those who are abused, but also has a substantial effect on family members, friends, co-workers, other witnesses, and the community at large. Children, who grow up witnessing domestic violence, are among those seriously affected by this crime. Frequent exposure to violence in the home not only predisposes children to numerous social and physical problems, but also teaches them that violence is a normal way of life - therefore, increasing their risk of becoming society's next generation of victims and abusers. Sources: National Domestic Violence Hotline, National Center for Victims of Crime, and WomensLaw.org.



STEP 5: START WITH WHO YOU KNOW

When we decided that we wanted to have a grand opening and involve the local churches, we started with who our staff members knew. Our main resources for building relationships with churches begin with input from our staff and volunteers. Example: When planning for our grand opening, we asked all staff to give us the name of their pastors and share with us the best way to approach them. Staff informed us of appropriate contacts and the best time to make contact. In a rural community, you do not mail correspondences without a follow-up call. Many churches only meet twice a week and the mail is normally picked up once a week. If you have a deadline, you need to hand deliver all correspondences. One of my staff personnel informed me that if you want the churches to show up, you must get them involved in the planning stages of the program. Her suggestion was to request that each church provide us with 10 ushers or greeters to assist with the program. We reserved the convention center on faith. After asking each church to provide us with ushers/greeters, we met with each group and shared our vision. We also selected a speaker/messenger who was well-known by most if not all churches. We invited 21 churches to participate. We had 19 churches to provide us with ushers/greeters. With the churches consent, 190 individuals assisted us in the coordination of the grand opening. We appointed people to greet at the door, to monitor the restrooms, escort pastors/wives to their seat, assist with the collecting the offering, assist with helping people up and down the stairs, assist with providing hand fans for the program. At the time of our grand opening, we had only 5 staff persons. Because each church invited their members, each usher/greeter invited their family and friends;

we had an overwhelming turn out. We ended up having over 1,900 people to attend this event. Although we developed public service announcements, the best media blitz was “word of mouth.” There was no admission fee. We collected two offerings: the first offering collected was over \$11,000, and the second offering, after the Message was spoken, was over \$13,000. The speaker was from New York, Rev. Jackie McCullough. What the audience did not know until they got to the program was that Jackie McCullough is a survivor of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Our strategy was to get the people there and let the Messenger share our agency's mission through her experience. All of our advertisement was targeting the Messenger and what a wonderful time we will have with the Word of God being shared. We put our agency in the background but in the end, we were in the forefront.

The next time we had program, it was entitled "From the Crack House to the White House". We had a guest speak who was highlighted by the President of the United States. We invited pastors to come and lead us in prayer. We had 7 topics: children, women, men, family, community, school, and health. Each pastor had 2-3 minutes to pray at the end of the program. We knew they would take 5 minutes. We asked that each pastor come prior to the program and pray over the program and the building. The pastors arrived 45 minutes before the program started and walked around the building praying. By having the pastors there in the beginning, we knew that they would stay till the end to finish their prayer. Therefore, they had a testimony on substance abuse, domestic violence and rape. We now had 7 more churches that will allow us to share our services and pass out our handouts. Joint community activities is the key to working with the Faith Based organizations.



STEP 6: RESPECT THEIR THEOLOGY

Before you approach a faith-based leader it is crucial to understand their theology. For example: Church of Christ does not allow women to speak before the congregation. Women can only give reports or comments from the congregation; but they cannot stand in the pulpit. Muslim women wear head gear. In many cases, we found that to reach rural churches, the best approach was to get a male volunteer to speak on behalf of the agency.

Don't try to compare sociology with theology. It is not the same. Are they similar? Yes, they are in theory, but not in practice. Don't use language like, "risk protective" "interpersonal violence" or "domestic violence". These are harsh words used by researchers. Instead say, "We are working with ending family violence or hurting children." You want to be very basic. This is not to say that the faith-based community is not knowledgeable of the topic. It is to develop a common language between the two of you, secular and religious, that can be easily used to communicate.

Respect the church. If you are asked to speak at a church, call ahead and speak to the secretary and ask, "When I come, where should I sit and where will I be standing?" On one occasion, we were at a Baptist church and walked to the pulpit to speak and were never invited back again. We called the secretary and asked her if she knew why our agency was not invited back. She shared that instead of our agency waiting to be seated, we went to the pulpit. Only pastors were allowed in the pulpit. All guests speak from the floor and not the pulpit. We were not aware of this or given this information prior to our arrival.

Respect the time. If you're lucky to be invited to speak at a church, respect their time, even though you have gone to a church before and witnessed others go over their time limit. If the pastor gives you 30 minutes, take 25 minutes and have the congregation on your side. If they give 5 minutes take 4 ½, respect their time.

Respect the instructions. Don't add onto your assignment. For example, if you were given time to speak about your services, don't decide to pray for your program or give scriptures.

Learn how to give an opening to your presentation. Some churches want you to acknowledge the presence of God in your life and give honor to the first family and other Christians. Some churches don't.

Don't speak and leave. If you are invited to set up a booth or to speak, don't speak your five minutes and then say you have to go. This is disrespectful to the church. The congregation is watching you. If you don't have time to fellowship with them, the assumption is you don't have time to provide effective services.

Do take the time to find out what the pastor/minister's stand/thoughts are on domestic violence and sexual assault. Conduct community background checks. Ask others about the pastor/minister's stand. You do not want a pastor that is a batterer to be on your speakers' bureau to speak for your agency. You do not want a pastor/minister that tells a victim to go home and pray harder asking God to forgive them for someone else's sin. You do not want a pastor/minister that is unethical and exploitative and has a history of taking advantage of vulnerable women. In a small town, people will talk and you can lose your credibility.

Do not try to give scriptures to justify your point unless you have an in-depth understanding of the Bible. You may know the main scriptures, but can you explain the Greek and Hebrew definitions of the scriptures. If you don't know, don't try to challenge religious beliefs. At Our House, Inc., we have two wonderful pastors who will speak at churches and provide background scriptures to support our mission. These pastors are known in the community as "Walking Bibles."

Here are some religious issues that victims and survivors struggle with...

- If God is good, why does God let this happen to me?
- I watched my mother get beaten by my father. My boyfriend has beaten me from the time I began to date him. Shouldn't I just accept it and live with it? This must be God's will for me.
- I am not a good Christian. I have done some bad things in the past. Maybe this abuse is God's way of punishing me. This must be my cross to bear.
- The Bible says that the wife must submit to her husband. Does this mean that I must submit to abuse?
- If Jesus calls us to forgive our enemies should I not go back to my spouse/partner/sibling/child who abuses me?
- When my family, friends, colleagues at work, even the church community, turn away from me and blame me for being abused, then why should I believe that God has not abandoned me?
- If Jesus prohibited divorce, then how can I leave my husband/wife?
- I was abused by my father. I was an incest victim. How can I honor my father?

Before we enlist the support of a pastor to represent Our House, Inc., we ask them about their responses to the sample of religious issues listed. We ask them how they will respond to the statements. If their answer is to tell the victim to pray and to become a better person, we know that this minister/pastor might need a little bit more education on the issues. And, that the victim might be re-victimized by the pastor/minister. The victim should not be blamed for the violence from the religious community. This action can further endanger him/her and lead to additional emotional scars.

STEP 7: ENGAGING THE YOUTH

Another way we reach out to the faith-based community is through their youth ministry. Many times, the church may not allow victim advocates to speak before their congregation; but, they will allow you to speak at a youth rally.

At Our House, we have a team of youth who are trained to present at youth rallies. These youth are part of **WAVE-Working Against Violence Everywhere Youth Council**. In order to become a member, they must have two letters from the religious community and one letter from their school recommending them to be a part of this team.

The faith-based and school representatives have to agree to nominate the youth and have them participate in the project by supporting the youth's activities, i.e. allowing the youth to share information learned with the church and or school body.

WAVE meets monthly. We train them on the dynamics of domestic violence and sexual assault prevention and intervention. When our agency is invited to speak at a church, for the most part, we always invite one of our youth to attend with us. Adults love to see youth who





are involved. Youth have more respect for our agency when they see a team of presenters both young and adult.

Prior to all presentations, the WAVE youth council members will outline their presentation with one of the staff. Then, the youth will share their presentation with the community at large. We have found that we are invited to more churches because of our youth program than because of any other form of advertisement. WAVE youth council members present skits, praise dances, songs and lectures on why it is important to end domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault and dating violence. On an average, the WAVE youth council receives request from 16-20 churches annually.

We also have another youth group called YES - Youth Empowered to Serve. This group consists of survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, homicide acts and dating violence. This group hosts a healing program each year. Each youth invites members from their church to attend their programs.

Closing Remarks

We had to understand that once you get churches involved, it is on you to maintain the follow-up, paperwork, setup agendas, send out notices and above all, provide food at all meetings. All of this takes time.

For example: We had a conference in 2010 for social workers entitled: Broken Vows and Broken Promises. We wanted the church involved; therefore, we created topics such as "Sex and the Believer" and "When Love is Gone Who Do I Turn To". We had four pastors from four different churches to assist us

with the spirituality tracks. We started planning the conference six months in advance. We had to make the calls to the pastors, follow-up with them, schedule meetings and above all listen to them. We scheduled planning meetings for the pastors to discuss their workshops. The planning meetings were scheduled for one hour. However, each meeting lasted 2-3 hours. The pastors would discuss the workshop, they would discuss the issues, and they would discuss scriptures. It was powerful, but it required us to remind them that the audience will be secular. Being reminded that we needed to transform the Word of God to layman terms, sparked the excitement among the pastors again. Because the meetings lasted so long and we were imposing on their work time, we fed them a meal at each session. We made all the follow-up reminder calls, sent out the notices, did the agendas and created the flyers. As a result of these meetings, two major things were accomplished- one, we hosted a conference for 160 social workers who expressed they had a better understanding of how the church and social services can work together, and two, our Executive Director was invited to teach a Master Level Course at Exodus School of the Bible on Victimology.

When getting faith-based leaders involved in your program, the main thing to remember is that *all* Christians are faith-based leaders. Therefore, do not ignore a person who is "just" a member of a church. This person may be the person who can guide you to a long lasting partnership. Example: The Xerox copy repairman came by my former job (before Our House) to work on our copier and shared with the staff that Rev. Roderick Mitchell will be speaking at his church for a revival. The staff did not believe the repairman at first because he is Caucasian and Rev. Mitchell is an African-American.

The repairman's church was not known to accept African-American ministers in their pulpit. However, they had a new pastor who invited Rev. Mitchell to speak. The staff attended the revival as a courtesy to the repairman. At this revival, we met Rev. Mitchell. After service, we spoke to him about our vision. After many conversations over a period of two years, Our House, Inc. was co-founded by Rev/Bishop Roderick Mitchell, Pastor Thomas Paul Williams, Judge Margaret McCray, Denise Strub, Doris Lee and Dr. Patricia Davenport.

Recently, we just held our 1st Annual "Speaking of Faith" Conference, August 2015.

Highlights from our booklet on "Recommendations for Clergy"

When an abusive situation is brought to the church's synagogue's attention:

- Listen to the woman. Believe her when she says she is battered. Avoid victim-blaming. Let her know about a shelter or safe home or a domestic violence program that can offer protection for her and her children. (The church/synagogue sometimes has the tendency to want to believe that the wife has done something to cause the battering, and wants her to forgive the husband and bring reconciliation within the family. To suggest that the wife return to her home at this point, to preserve the family unit at all costs, asks her to place herself and her children in very real danger.)
- Accept your limitations and get expert help. Refer her to local domestic violence programs/shelters and give her their telephone numbers.

- Hold the abuser accountable. It doesn't help him for you to tell him that God forgives him. The only hope for changing his behavioral pattern is that he must admit to the problem, and get long-term, professional domestic violence help. If he has been arrested, encourage the legal system to hold him accountable.
- Don't use mediation.
- Don't try to counsel the couple together. This put the victim in danger.
- One caution to Christian leaders: Do not presume to use the crisis in the battered woman's life not the shelter program as a means to evangelize. The battered woman needs support and understanding, not religiosity.

To prevent abuse from happening:

- Speak out from the pulpit against battering and for equality and mutual respect in intimate relationships. Include victims and abusers in public prayers (withholding their names for safety purposes.)
- Offer pre-marriage counseling which approaches the topics of equality, conflict, money, sexuality, and in-laws, to help clarify basic expectations between partners in advance of marriage.
- Use available teenage curricula to help prevent domestic violence. Abusive patterns formed in teenage relationships are hard to break later in adult relationships.
- Ensure that the congregation's library owns several copies of: *When Love Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can't Do Anything Right For Churches: Keeping The Faith: Questions and Answers for the Abused Women* by Marie Fortune.





Recommendations On How Religious & Secular Communities Can Work



- Establish a committee to address domestic violence issues.
- Support special education and training of clergy and lay persons so that there will be a committee or support group which understands what domestic violence is all about. Often general counseling techniques which many clergy learned in seminary - especially marriage counseling - are inadequate and dangerous to deal with domestic violence.
- Become associated with a battered woman's shelter. With a close relationship, the shelter can know the religious belief of your congregants, respect them, and take the beliefs seriously. Offer financial and volunteer support.
- Invite domestic violence professionals to make presentations at adult classes or lecture.
- Provide brochures in the church/synagogue vestibule about community services dealing with domestic violence.
- Make it clear that violence is not acceptable behavior in a family.
- Speak up when someone tells a wife-beating or sexual assault joke.
- Set aside a regular worship day to focus on domestic violence so those victims in the congregation can come forward.
- Offer the local domestic violence program meeting space in your church or synagogue for a support group for victims.
- In rural communities, if no shelter is available, participate with other community leaders in establishing a safe-home network.



*“The majority of women in the United States were raised in Christian homes or as adults have affiliated themselves with a Christian church. This is a sociological reality. Therefore, when a woman is battered by a member of her family, she will likely bring to that experience her background and values as a Christian woman. Also likely is that **her experience of violence in her family will not be only a physical and emotional crisis but also a Spiritual crisis.** She will probably have many questions about her faith: What guidance does Scripture give her? What is God’s will for her? How can she deal with this situation in her life as a Christian woman?” Marie M. Fortune, Author,*

Keeping the Faith, Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse.