

Pastoral Care Guidelines in Response to Survivors of Domestic Violence

Goals for intervention:

- **SAFETY** for survivor & children
- **ACCOUNTABILITY** for the abuser
- **RESTORATION** of individuals and, **WHEN APPROPRIATE**, relationships
OR
- **MOURNING** loss of the relationships.

Do's and Don'ts for working with survivors of domestic violence:

- DO reassure her that this is not her fault, she doesn't deserve this treatment, and it is not God's will for her.
- DO give her referral information; primary resources are battered women's services or shelters and National Hotline. **1-800-799-SAFE (7233) / 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)**
- DO support and respect her choices. Even if she is aware of the risks and chooses initially to return to the abuser, it is her choice. She has the most information about how to survive.
- DO encourage her to think about a safety plan. This might include setting aside some money, copies of important papers for her and her children, a change of clothes hidden or in care of friends. It could also include a plan about how to exit the house the next time the abuser is violent, as well as considerations of what to do about the children if they are at school, if they are asleep, etc. Safety planning is an ongoing process that offers practical assistance and also helps her stay in touch with the reality of the abuser's violence. Battered women's advocates (the hotlines and support groups, both free services) are trained in safety planning – encourage her to use them!
- DO protect her confidentiality. **DO NOT** give information about her or her whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass information on to the abuser. Do not discuss with the parish council/session/elders who might inadvertently pass information on to the abuser. Do not add her name to a prayer chain for any reason.
- DO help her with any religious concerns. If she is Christian, give her a copy of *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*. Refer to www.faithtrustinstitute.org for copies of this book and other helpful information.
- DO assure her of God's love and presence, of your commitment to walk with her through this valley of the shadow of death.

- DO help her see that her partner's violence has broken the marriage covenant and that God does not want her to remain in a situation where her life and the lives of her children are in danger.
- If she decides to separate and divorce, DO support her and help her to mourn the loss to herself and her children.
- DO pray with her. Ask God to give her the strength and courage she needs.
- DON'T minimize the danger to her. You can be a reality check. "From what you have told me, I am very much concerned for your safety . . ."
- DON'T tell her what to do. Give information and support.
- DON'T react with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what she tells you. But don't react passively, either. Let her know that you are concerned and that what the abuser has done to her is wrong and is not deserved by her.
- DON'T blame her for his violence. If she is blaming herself, try to reframe: "I don't care if you did have supper late or forgot to water the lawn, that is no reason for him to be violent with you. This is his problem."
- DON'T recommend couples' counseling or approach her husband and ask for "his side of the story." These actions will endanger her.
- DON'T recommend "marriage enrichment," "mediation," or a "communications workshop." None of these will address the goals listed above.
- DON'T send her home with just a prayer and directive to submit to her husband, bring him to church, or be a better Christian wife.
- DON'T encourage her to forgive him and take him back.
- DO NOT encourage her dependence on you or become emotionally or sexually involved with her.
- DON'T do nothing.
- DO familiarize yourself with your local resources so that you have specific referrals to give to congregants. Meet with their representatives and know what services they are able to provide. Chief of these is the battered women's hotline and shelter or safe home network. Often the state domestic violence coalition is a best first contact for you.
- DO consult with colleagues in the wider community who may have expertise and be able to assist you in your response. Refer to www.faithtrustinstitute.org for resources.

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).

Use LOCAL RESOURCES
