

Time to See, Hear and Speak of Abuse: Faith and Domestic Violence

by Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune

For centuries religion has been a roadblock for women seeking escape from the brutality in their homes. Through text or teaching, religion has made it virtually impossible at times for women to seek shelter and safety or consider divorce.



Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune will be the keynote speaker at Safe Nest's upcoming conference:

A Call to Action: Domestic Violence in the Faith Community

To register, visit www.safenest.org or call 877-0133, x233.

Many wife abusers use religion to excuse their behavior through quotes from scripture ("Wives be subject to your husbands" Ephesians 5:22), or by interpreting teachings such as the one used recently by an accused wife abuser to justify marital rape. The defendant claimed the Roman Catholic Church had taught him that once married, he had free sexual access

to his wife at any time. That free access allowed him to break down her locked door, slap her around and force her to have sex. Reaction from the local Catholic Diocese reaffirmed the position of the Church that marriage is a sacred covenant and should be governed by love, respect, and commitment.

In fact, religious leaders and their teachings have the capacity to be an abundant resource for battered

women and for those who abuse them. The agenda must be one of safety, healing, and justice for the most vulnerable rather than an agenda of no see, no hear, no speak which allows domestic violence to be protected and prolonged behind the curtain of privacy.

Until recently, the Church has had nothing very helpful and some very harmful things to say about wife abuse. We are now beginning to see some leadership from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in its statement originally released in 1992:

As pastors of the Catholic Church in the United States, we state as clearly and strongly as we can that violence against women, inside or outside the home, is never justified. Violence in any form—physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal—is sinful; often, it is a crime as well. We have called for a moral revolution to replace a culture of violence.

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Suffering in Silence: Immigrant Women and Domestic Violence

by Maria Outcalt, Outreach Coordinator

Mary, a Haitian woman, was visiting a friend in Las Vegas when she met David; he was also of Haitian descent, but he was a U.S. citizen. Mary and David developed strong feelings for each other and David encouraged her to move to the United States. He promised that they would get married, allowing Mary to become a citizen.

When she first moved into David's home, it seemed like a dream come true, but soon, everything changed. He became aggressive and controlling, telling Mary how to dress and refusing to let her leave the house without his permission. David used his knowledge of American culture against Mary, calling her stupid and uneducated.

Mary felt lonely and longed to make friends, but David refused to let her go out alone, even to church. One night, David came home from work to find Mary having a conversation with a neighbor; he grabbed her and pulled her into the house. He slammed her against the wall and began punching her, yelling that she was never to talk to anyone when he was not around.

David threatened to have Mary deported if she ever spoke to anyone about the abuse. She had no money and no friends to turn to for support. Due to her lack of knowledge about the American legal system and services available to immigrant victims of domestic violence, Mary had no idea that help was just a phone call away.

Many immigrant women in the United States suffer Mary's fate. They arrive seeking new opportunities and a better life but become trapped in abusive relationships that are made worse by their undocumented status. The power to keep a partner at permanent risk of deportation provides batterers who are U.S. citizens and permanent residents with a coercive tool that keeps abused immigrant women trapped in violent relationships. U.S. citizens and permanent residents can file visa "petitions" for their spouses to obtain legal permanent residency or citizenship. However, they can revoke those petitions at any time.

Many immigrant women come to Safe Nest with fears that are very real to them, such as the threat of losing their children. Many are led to believe that they do not have legal rights in the United States, even when it comes to seeking medical treatment for injuries caused by abuse. For example, if a woman tries to run away to a domestic violence shelter,

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Thanks to the generosity of our friends at Toyota Financial Savings Bank, the shelter has a brand-new van!

From left: Len Bencomo, Chief Compliance Officer; Susan Shanks, Safe Nest Director of Emergency Services; and Raymond Specht, President & CEO

Faith and Domestic Violence

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Likewise, some imams are exploring ways to respond to domestic violence. Recent news stories tell of the tough policy adopted by the clergy council, Majlis Ash Shura, of Philadelphia and Delaware Valley to shun Muslims who abuse their spouses and abandon their families. The policy goes so far as to add these offenders to a list circulated among area Muslims. The offenders are to be banned from future marriages, and fellow Muslims are discouraged from patronizing businesses they own. The Peaceful Families Project of the FaithTrust Institute is providing training for imams and community leaders.

In the Jewish community, men and women are organizing to address domestic violence; Jewish Women International is dedicated to ensuring that every woman and girl is safe, in her home and in her relationships. Jewish shelters and programs are now available in many cities. The Jewish Program at FaithTrust Institute and groups like JSAFE founded by Rabbi Mark Dratch are providing resources to help Jewish institutions respond effectively to domestic violence or abuse by clergy. In addition, The Presbyterian Church USA, among other Protestant denominations, is implementing a comprehensive pro-

gram led by their Task Force on Domestic Violence.

Recently, 40 national religious leaders from a variety of denominations and movements declared that in the past, they have been part of the problem, and in the future, they will be part of the solution. The National Declaration by Religious Leaders to Address Violence Against Women will be published and distributed to every battered women's shelter in the U.S. Hopefully shelter residents can scan the 40 names and determine whether their faith group supports them in seeking safety for themselves and their children. Other individuals and faith-based groups are urged to add their names to the National Declaration.

When religious leaders join with other community leaders in speaking out about domestic violence to offer support to individual families, we will see ancient roadblocks turn into resources that save lives and bring healing. And we will eventually see the day when domestic violence is a peculiar, rare event in our communities and faith groups.

The author is an ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ and founder of FaithTrust Institute, a national organization working to end sexual and domestic violence. Her most recent book is "Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited."

Immigrant Women and Domestic Violence

(continued from page 1) the abusive partner may go to the immigration authorities to withdraw his petition for her documentation and have her deported. In this way, he also escapes being prosecuted for the physical abuse of his partner.

Battered immigrant women are at increased risk of losing their lives or being severely injured because they are often socially isolated. A batterer may convince his partner that no one will care if she dies, given that her support system is in another country. These women are also at increased risk for sexual assault; they may be raped by their spouse or forced into prostitution. In addition, many immigrant women are forced to work without work permits and use false social security numbers, putting them at increased risk of deportation.

Some relief is available for battered immigrant women. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has given immigrant victims the opportunity to leave abusive relationships and start a new lives. VAWA gives battered immigrant women the right to file their own petition for citizenship or legal permanent residency, taking the abuser out of the equation and removing the threat of revoking the petition as a tool of power and control.

Safe Nest provides counseling and education for immigrant women and their children. Counseling gives women strength they need to begin the process of seeking independence from abuse; education provides the information and tools necessary to make decisions about their future. Most importantly, immigrant victims need to know they have a right to be free of violence and lead healthy lives. For more information, call 877-0133 x250, or visit www.safenest.org.

Men and boys...

TAKE THE PLEDGE !

TAKE A STAND!

Help create a world where violence against women is no longer tolerated

Sign the pledge online at

www.safenest.org

A Beary Special Day!

By Cindy Bagunu, Volunteer Coordinator

When 23 children, four volunteers and three staff from the Safe Nest shelter piled into vans and headed to a Build-a-Bear Workshop, they knew it was going to be a special day.

Each child chose a furry friend and took it to the “Master Bear Builder” where their new buddy was filled with stuffing. Then they picked two special satin hearts, made a wish and put one heart inside the bear and kept one to protect. One four-year-old boy declared to his new pal, “You are my baby and I’ll love you forever!”



Staff and volunteers at the Build-a-Bear Workshop

Then their new furry friend received a bath. “Don’t forget to wash behind the ears and between the toes”, said the Master Bear Builder. The kids lined up at the Final Stitch Station where associates inserted a barcode inside the bear so that if he or she got lost, the bear can be returned to the workshop and reunited with his owner.



Master Bear waves goodbye

One five-year old was heard promising “I’ll keep you safe and take care of you!” At the Dress-Me station kids selected fashions for their new friends with help from their Personal Shopper.

At the Name-Me station, Fluffy, Lt Commando, Ballerina Bear and a host of others received their new birth certificates, Cub Condos and fashion name bracelets before heading back to the shelter.

Local Contractors Complete Shelter Renovation

After months of hard work by dozens of local companies, the much-needed renovation of one of the buildings on Safe Nest’s shelter property has been completed. The project was spearheaded by the Las Vegas chapter of the Associated General Contractors (AGC) and involved contractors from the flooring, plumbing, electrical, masonry and roofing and other trades donating their time, energy and materials.

The building, which has room to house 3-4 families, had a leaky roof, inadequate plumbing and outdated electrical fixtures. Today, the house looks like new—complete with new floors, paint and a new kitchen. It is already occupied by shelter residents.

Safe Nest would like to extend its deepest gratitude to the generous and community-minded AGC member companies who made this renovation possible.

84 Lumber	Lamb Asphalt
A.C. Houston Lumber	LND Construction
Ace Fire	Lovitt & Touche
APCO Construction	LVI Environmental
Borm & Associates	Magic Brite Janitorial
Carpenter Sellers Assoc.	Nevada Contract Carpet
Champion Tile	Nevada Lath & Plaster
CR Installation and Construction	Oakview Construction
Door Solutions	PABCO
DP Air	R&B Craftsmen
Dunn Edwards Paint	Rafael Construction
Evergreen Recycling	Service Masters
Fasteners, Inc.	Simpson Strong-Tie
Framecon Incorporated	Templeton Development
Frehner Construction	Triple Crown Painting & Drywall
Gurrola Tile	Vergith Contracting
Hawthorne Plumbing	Western Technologies
Helix Electric	Westpac/Hamilton Materials
K & G Stucco	Williams Scotsman

Thanks to the many companies who donated their time, labor and supplies to turn a house into a home for shelter residents



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Upcoming Events

May 25 & 26: **Interfaith Domestic Violence Conference**, with Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune of the FaithTrust Institute
Cost: \$60 Continuing Education Credits available
Register online at: www.safenest.org

June 2-4: **Just for Fun: From Stinky Creek to Sun City**
Proceeds from this musical comedy to benefit Safe Nest.
Cost: \$11 **For more information call: 341-6885**

Summer Donation Drive for Children
The children and babies in shelter need your help to get ready for summer!

Baby wipes & Diapers	Socks: girls & boys
Pull-ups: girls & boys	Sunscreen: children & babies
Summer clothes: girls & boys	Hats: children & babies
Sandals & flip-flops	Underwear: toddlers-teens

Mission: *To be the leading advocate in promoting the eradication of domestic violence by providing confidential assistance including shelter, food, clothing, counseling, education, and other services to individuals and families experiencing domestic violence while maintaining the highest respect and dignity for our clients.*

Domestic Violence Hotline: 702-646-4981

Administrative Office: 702-877-0133

Donation Pick-up Service: 702-257-3800

Las Vegas Counseling Office: 702-877-0133

Mesquite Counseling Office: 702-346-1944

Boulder City Counseling Office: 702-293-7836