

Collaborations

The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.

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Where Was God? Drunk Driving Victims and Spirituality

By Janice Harris Lord

During a trauma grief group I was facilitating recently, Jane lamented that her only son had managed to return home from Iraq alive but was killed by a drunk driver a few weeks later. She said she had prayed for his protection every day of his life and could not understand how, with that level of devotion every day for 23 years, God could have disregarded her pleas.

It's one thing to acknowledge that science isn't developed enough to cure cancer or AIDS, as painful as it is to watch a loved one die of those maladies. It's qualitatively different, however, (though not necessarily "worse") when someone's choice or extreme negligence causes the death of another. In Jane's son's case, the drunk driver was a civil attorney who specialized in wrongful death cases. He had represented drunk driving crash victims. He knew better.

Drunk driving death and injury are not "accidents." They involve clear choices of an individual to (1) use too much alcohol or other drugs and (2) get behind the wheel of a vehicle. Drunk driving death is more like than unlike murder. The only difference is that the offender does not choose a specific victim.

(continued on page 2)



"One person can make a difference—and every person should try." Stephanie Roper

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Following are some common spiritual issues of surviving family members of those killed by a drunk driver.

Loss of trust in spiritual assurances can result in *despair*. When a person has given as much of himself as he understands to as much of his God or higher power as he understands, then it seems reasonable to expect preferential treatment. No one has figured out how much God influences particular outcomes. In his popular book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Kushner points out that certain rules of physics have been in place since the beginning of time and God rarely, if ever, intervenes in them. Different faiths believe that human beings have differing levels of control over what happens to them. Jews and Christians may recognize human freedom as the cause of certain consequences more than Hindus or Muslims, who may feel that karma or the will of Allah is the greater cause. Figuring out how to now accommodate tragedy into a person's personal theology, regardless of what it is, takes time and hard work.

Loss of support from one's faith community can result in *loneliness*. Some faith communities believe that their role is to proclaim truth and give answers. Those whose loved one have been killed say it helps when their faith communities simply "walk through the valley with them" rather than judging them for their confusion and despair. As Nicholas Wolterstorff says in his book *Lament for a Son*, "Please, just come sit beside me on my mourning bench."

Honesty with one's own emotional state can lead to *guilt*. One woman said, "I've always been told that I must forgive, but if I'm honest with myself, I can't forgive – at least not yet." It hurts deeply for a person of faith to be told they must do something they simply can't do. It requires speaking or living a lie. Lying causes guilt. Yet failing to act according to one's spiritual mandates also causes guilt. It can help to try to spiritually "let go" of one's link with the offender and turn it over to God's providence or trust in karma. Doing that may or may not mean pursuing criminal or civil justice, but many survivors find it helpful to separate the two concepts.

Dealing with all these issues can vary significantly based on the faith practiced. A small book on basic faith facts and rituals, death and dying beliefs and rituals, and justice-related beliefs has been drafted by this Project and is awaiting printing by OVC. We hope it will be useful for faith leaders as well as victim assistance providers as they support victims of drunk driving and other crimes.

Resources:

The Justice Research and Statistics Association (www.jrsa.org) conducts and publishes policy relevant research on justice issues, provides training and technical assistance, and maintains a clearinghouse of state criminal justice activities.

The Crime Victims Advocacy Council (<http://www.gbmg-umc.org/cvac/index.html>) located in Atlanta, GA was organized in July 1989, under the guidance of Urban Action, Inc., the urban ministry program of the United Methodist Church in North Georgia. Urban Action, through participation in various types of assistance programs, became aware of unmet needs of the many crime victims of our society. CVAC was developed specifically to respond to these needs.

Nonprofit Hub (www.nonprofitHub.com) is a site created to help the nonprofit neophyte, whether student, staff member, volunteer, donor, or simply a citizen with a question about jargon used in the nonprofit world or an aspect of management or fundraising practices. There is never, and never will be, any charge for the information provided.

(continued on page 3)

Resources continued:

Responding to Youth Gangs. On August 11, 2005, at 1:30 p.m. ET, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) will air the 90-minute satellite videoconference "Communities Respond to Youth Gangs in America." The videoconference, which may be viewed online, will feature community programs and strategies that effectively address the youth gang problem. It will explore strategies to leverage existing resources, provide examples of partnerships across disciplines, highlight innovative strategies, and share information on faith-based responses. To access further information and register online, visit <http://www.trc.eku.edu/jj> or call Jenny McWilliams at ekujjtap@aol.com or 859-622-6671.

Official clarifies faith-based initiatives; The guidelines include not preaching on Uncle Sam's dime
Publisher: Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA) By: Mary Nevans Pederson. First published: June 11, 2005 (<http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/news/article.cfm?id=2882>)

Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The Domestic Violence Awareness Project has just published its Resource Packet to help communities plan for this special observance. You can order your FREE DVAM Packet by calling the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence toll free at: 800.537.2238, or TTY 800.553.2508 (8 TO 5, EST). OR visit the web site at (dvam.vawnet.org).

New additions to this year's packet include: a CD on "Domestic Violence Awareness for Social Change" AND an on-line calendar where YOU can post your local activities to create a national calendar, plus share information about creative ideas to promote DVAM. There are also helpful brochures about all the major national domestic violence programs and initiatives.

Check out **OVC's Faith Based Programs** (<http://beta.ovc.ncjrs.org/publications/infores/focuson/faithbased/welcome.html>)

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