

# Let's Talk!

## **Ten Program Ideas for Dialogue and Collaboration Between Faith Communities and the Victim Assistance Community**

The goal of the U.S Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime's initiative called *Collaborative Response to Crime Victims in Urban Areas* is to successfully link faith communities and victim assistance programs in five high-crime urban sites to assure comprehensive services for victims of crime.

The following ten program ideas to achieve this mission are not exhaustive, nor are the project sites (Baltimore, Nashville, Philadelphia, St. Paul, and Richmond, California) required to engage in them. They are presented to "prime the pump," so to speak, for program planning and implementation during the final stages of the three year grant cycle and beyond, as the five initiatives continue to grow and expand into mature, stable, and independent programs. We anticipate that by the end of the grant cycle, the sites will contribute to this document the projects they have found successful, and that it will be disseminated more widely.

### **Soup, Salad, and Solutions**

Full-Day or Half-Day Seminars that bring together various members of the faith communities and victim assistance communities might be offered several times a year. Beginning, ending, or breaking mid-day for a simple and inexpensive lunch motivates attendance. The theme and attendees vary from seminar to seminar. Issues identified in the needs assessments or during early stages of the grant form the various themes for the seminars. For example, "Bridging the Gap Between Honoring the Sanctity of the Family and Stopping Family Violence" might be a theme. Invitees for that seminar could include faith leaders (may involve several different faiths) who have expressed negative biases toward family violence programs and some who actively support these programs; family violence staff and volunteers; child protective services staff; and law enforcement officers and their victim advocates who handle domestic violence cases. Equal numbers of each group will be crucial to the outcome (solutions). Seating should be at round tables, if possible, with a representative of each group assigned to each table. A potential full-day agenda might be:

- Introductions
- Family Violence Survivor shares her experience including how her Faith Community helped and hurt her recovery process.
- Speaker or panel of faith leaders speak about "Three/Five/Ten Things I Wish the Family Violence Community Understood About My Faith."
- Speaker or panel of family violence staff or volunteers speak about "Three/Five/Ten Things I Wish the Faith Communities Understood About Our Work with Family Violence Victims."

- Written hypothetical scenarios, related by theme but different for each table, are distributed to each table. Table members discuss Solutions for the issue their scenario has presented, with each member representing the perspective of his or her agency or faith.
- Each table reports to the full group on their scenario and a solution they developed (recognizing that in some cases, there may be no solution but at least a commitment to better understand the issues and treat each other with respect).
- Solutions are word-processed and, at the end of the project, a booklet of the solutions is distributed to the involved communities acknowledging the work of all participants.

### ***Annual Clergy Outreach to Crime Victims Seminar***

Victim Advocates in the Chatham County, Georgia District Attorney's Office (Savannah) noticed that many clergy came to court to testify on behalf of defendants, but rarely did clergy come to court with crime victims or speak to the court about how the crime had affected their spiritual lives.

Since recognizing this disparity, each year the faith community and victim advocates throughout Savannah have come together for a one-day conference to address a different issue concerning crime victims and spirituality. The agencies rotate sponsorship of the seminar, thus sharing responsibility for both the cost and the work. Out of the seminars, a handbook, "Chatham County Crime Victims Resource Manual for Clergy and Congregations" has been developed.

### **Table Talks**

*Table Talks* are short (approximately 2-hour) meetings where a specific solution to a specific problem is addressed. The topic is not as broad as those addressed in Soup, Salad, and Solutions Seminars.

If the community has a Victims Advisory Council or Coalition, this group might compile a list of problematic issues and prioritize them according to need.

*Table Talk* can be held as often as monthly, depending on the number of issues identified. For example, a problem might be that personal death notifications are not always made to surviving families because a community protocol has not been developed. Invitees to that *Table Talk* might include family members who had not been appropriately notified of a homicide, law enforcement chaplains (or the persons responsible for notifications in their agency), representatives of the medical examiner's office, and faith leaders who would like to be trained in death notification so they might accompany authorities and assure spiritually and culturally appropriate notifications and follow-up.

Seating should be at round tables with representatives of each group at each table. These short, problem-solving meetings require assertive facilitation to assure that discussion

stays focused on topic and that all views are presented. A tentative agenda for each table might be:

- Very brief introductions (name tags and brief bios of attendees as handouts serve this purpose)
- One victim shares his or her experience – 10 minutes, uninterrupted.
- Each person around the table shares his or her perspective of the problem for 10 minutes each, uninterrupted. This total process can take no more than 30 minutes.
- Table members ask and answer questions and discuss remedies for another 30 minutes.
- A table representative from each table reports their proposed solutions to the full group. This will take another 20-30 minutes.
- The full-group facilitator sums up remedies to solve the problem for 5-10 minutes and suggest a follow-up meeting or plan. If a reasonable solution is not developed, the topic can be continued at the next *Table Talks* meeting, or a smaller committee can be appointed to further develop the plan. When plans are finished, they are shared in writing with all involved agencies and programs as a Memorandum of Understanding.

### **Room at the Inn or Project Safe Home**

*Room at the Inn* is a name given to faith communities that rotate, generally for two weeks or one month at a time, availability of their Fellowship Hall as over-flow space for local shelters. The faith communities purchase or rent cots, sheets, blankets, pillows, and towels for their guests, transport them to and from the shelter, and provide them a hot supper, breakfast, and a sack lunch for the following day.

*Project Safe Home* asks faith communities to identify a few families who are willing to provide short-term temporary safe housing for victims of violence who share their faith and culture and need safety but may not desire or be able to go to a shelter. Project staff or Family Violence staff who are skilled at providing spiritually-sensitive services train these families.

### **Project Sweat Suit**

When someone is raped, the victim is often instructed to leave the clothing they were wearing with the investigator so that DNA evidence can be collected. These clothes are usually removed at the hospital and retained as evidence, leaving victim with a hospital gown to wear home. Faith communities can provide sweat suits, socks, and underwear (or other culturally or spiritually appropriate clothing) for Rape Crisis Programs for these victims.

### **Adopt-a-Caseworker**

Child Protective Services workers want to leave children in their own homes unless it becomes imperative to remove them for safety reasons. They sometimes open cases on at-risk families but leave the children in the home while they work with the parents to try

to help them do a better job. The children in these families often have more needs than their parents or the agency can provide. While the agency can provide for some needs, they rarely are able to help with school supplies, winter coats, a prom dress or tux rental for a teen, laundry soap and other hygiene products, medical prescriptions, or even rent or utility assistance.

In the Adopt-a-Caseworker Program, a faith community “partners” with an individual caseworker who has children with unmet needs in his or her caseload. Individuals and businesses can become partners as well.

Some faith communities have become very creative with this program by sending children to camp, providing tuition assistance, donating ball game or other recreational activity tickets, or even helping with home repairs (if the family is willing for their identity to become known). One program like this is called *HALOS* which stands for “Helping and Lending Outreach and Support.” In less than 10 years, this program has arranged for more than \$1 million in goods and services to be donated to people in need in the Charleston, SC community.

### **Sabbath Peace Program**

Initiated in Philadelphia, this program is an interdisciplinary, interfaith coalition that encourages and supports religious leaders and congregations to prevent and reduce domestic violence. Each October they hold an Interfaith service to bring attention to their cause.

### **Daughters of Abraham**

*Daughters of Abraham* is a monthly discussion group of equal numbers of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women whose goal is to identify commonalities among the three faiths and seek peaceful solutions to violence. All three faiths have their roots in Abraham, which distinguishes them from other religious groups. Various service projects such as serving meals in shelters, etc. can be undertaken in addition to the discussions. A larger but similar program is called *Congregations in Community* which is funded by the McNight Foundation and the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches.

### **Clergy Committee and Victims Committee**

Developed from an innovative and successful international corporate model called *The Executive Committee*, these two distinct groups are each comprised of 10-12 members of their communities (faith or victim assistance) who commit to ½ day or one day a month for a year to learn more about the other group and consult on issues of common concern. For example, the Clergy Committee, with a facilitator, might address various kinds of victimization at their monthly meetings by inviting speakers and seeking materials from the various victim assistance agencies. The Victims Committee, with a facilitator, might seek to become more spiritually-sensitive by bringing in representatives from the various faith perspectives in their communities to address general beliefs and practices, beliefs about family violence/preservation, attitudes toward women and children, death and

dying issues, and attitudes about justice and participation in the justice systems. After each speaker completes his or her presentation, the group engages in discussion about how to best utilize the information received. Facilitators may want to meet with members of the Committee individually throughout the year.

### **Spirituality and Trauma Support Groups**

Spirituality and religious practices have served as a strong source of resiliency following victimization for many people. Other victims, however, have had negative experiences with their faith leaders or faith communities and, as a result, abandon spirituality. Victims interested in focusing on the connection between spirituality and trauma recovery may benefit from a support group model. Ideal group facilitators are a spiritually-sensitive victim assistance practitioner and a trauma-sensitive faith leader.

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For more information about these programs or how to contact persons engaged in them, contact Scott Beard at the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc. [scottbeard@mdcrimevictims.org](mailto:scottbeard@mdcrimevictims.org) or (301) 952-0063.