

Spirituality and Victim Services

A Collaborative Response to Crime Victims in Urban Areas

Operational Guidelines

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THE ST. PAUL AREA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, ST. PAUL, MN
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IN COOPERATION WITH THE MARYLAND CRIME VICTIMS' RESOURCE CENTER, INC.

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Spirituality and Victim Services

Faith-based crime victim assistance programs were virtually nonexistent in 1982 when the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime released its *Final Report*. The Task Force encouraged the faith community to recognize that "the victim certainly no less than the victimizer is in need of aid, comfort, and spiritual ministry." When *New Directions from the Field: Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century* revised the original document 16 years later, it added... "and faith-based congregations and organizations should provide assistance to victims whenever possible." Eight additional recommendations were offered to bring faith communities and crime victims services agencies together.

With bi-partisan support, the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193)* significantly changed the relationship between the faith community and the

public sector by allowing religious organizations to compete for funds on the same basis as secular agencies without impairing the religious character of the organizations, and without diminishing the religious freedom of beneficiaries of assistance funded under such programs. Faith-based organizations were no longer required to establish a separate 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization to receive public funding to provide social programs. However, they must maintain separate accounting systems for the services and must use the funds for the intended social services, not for worship, instruction, or promotion of any single faith.

The most widely-recognized new program developed after the passage of this law is *Charitable Choice* which allows faith-based organizations to receive funds to serve those who qualify for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program including food stamps, Medicaid, and a wide array of other services.

Charitable Choice allows faith-based social service providers to maintain a religious environment at their facilities – displaying crosses or retaining a religious name, for example.¹

In January 2001, in his second week in office, President George W. Bush established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (website: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/conferences.html>) to strengthen and expand the role of faith-based and community organizations to address the social problems of the nation. Centers were also created in six Federal Departments (Justice, Agriculture, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Education) and four Federal Agencies (International Development, Commerce, Veteran Affairs, and Small business Administration).

The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc. has been awarded a *Collaborative Response to Crime Victims in Urban Areas* grant by the Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice. Through this grant, five urban sites were competitively selected from a field of 55 applicants to successfully link victim assistance programs and faith communities.

Principles and Guidelines

One of the selected sites for this initiative, Baltimore's Sidran Institute, had previously developed a *Risking Connection* framework for a curriculum to address survivors of child abuse. *Risking Connection* emphasizes that caring, respectful, growth-promoting relationship is crucial for healing. Adapted from this framework, the *Spirituality and Victim Services Project* bases its work on four core principles: respect, information, connection, and hope. Within these principles are Operational Guidelines to specifically define relationships and commitments as the selected project sites work independently, with each other, and with the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center Inc.

Respect

The United States enjoys the most diverse collection of believers in the world, many of whom live in the inner city. In addition to the more common faiths of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, we find Buddhism, Hinduism, Native American spirituality, and many others. This project draws on the strengths of each faith within a community to assure that all crime victims are treated with spiritual sensitivity. Respect goes beyond religious tolerance. It reflects a willingness to set aside preconceptions and appreciate the value of others' points of view, positions, talents, and roles in the community. Respect fosters genuine understanding and collaboration. This project centers around bringing people and services together.

¹ Victims of Crime Act (or VOCA) funded programs are not a component of Charitable Choice, but they also prohibit discrimination based on religion in hiring and services.

- The Project at all levels does not discriminate against program participants on the basis of religion, a particular religious belief or practice, or choice to participate or not to participate in religious activity.
- The Project at all levels creates a network of victim services programs and faith-based organizations in which faith-based partners are not prohibited from engaging in practices that further their religious mission as long as inherently religious activities are provided separately in time or location from federally-funded services.
- The Project at all levels maintains separate accounting systems for Project funds and uses the funds for the intended Project goals, not for worship, instruction, or promotion of any single faith.
- The Project at all levels complies with the minimum wage and maximum hours provisions of the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act for all hired staff.
- The Project at all levels assures that the civil rights of staff, volunteers, and program recipients are not violated.
- Project Staff does not engage in lobbying and assures that no grant funds are used for lobbying.
- Project workplaces at all levels are totally drug-free.
- Project Staff and Multidisciplinary Advisory Committees collect and share ideas about best practices for dealing with faith issues that arise among crime victims.

Information

Many people turn to their clergy for help. Yet most clergy members say they are unprepared to address the specific needs of victims of crime. Secular agency providers may be even less likely to know how to offer spiritually sensitive services. This project includes collaboration and training between faith groups and victim assistance agencies to assure that spiritually-sensitive services are available to victims who seek help. Whether crime victims approach their faith leader or a service agency, their physical, informational, emotional, and spiritual needs are to be sensitively addressed.

While the federal government has funded faith-based organizations that provide social services for decades (Catholic Charities, United Jewish Communities, the Salvation Army), researchers have yet to produce reliable data on the actual performance of faith-based community services. As skeptics stand ready to try to show that these kinds of programs can't work within Constitutional guidelines, this Project is scientifically measuring the effect of collaborations to meet the needs of crime victims and its ability to incorporate publicly-funded services into programming of the faith community.

- The Project includes uniform assessment of the needs of crime victims in each site community.
- The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center and the five selected sites are cooperating fully with the Project Researcher to assure that valid, reliable data that is consistent across sites is collected and analyzed.
- The Project at all levels utilizes information from the needs assessments to drive the development of strategic plans.
- The Project seeks to "do no harm" and to provide effective faith-based services to victims of crime.
- The Project at all levels is obtaining education and information about the nature of social diversity and oppression in their communities with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability, and religion.
- The Project at all levels seeks to ensure the safety of all victims of crime within the site communities.

Connection

Victims, like the general population, may have a cultural aversion to public services agencies. In addition, the misapplication of some doctrines, such as forgiveness and divine providence, by some faith institutions may turn victims away from faith-based services. Some clergy doubt the effectiveness of service agencies. And service providers may fear that the faith community will minimize the complexities of victimization. In addition, because of the interpersonal nature of criminal victimization and cultural concerns, some victims are unwilling to enter into relationship with service providers of any kind. They report feeling disconnected and isolated in many ways and, at times, even blamed or shamed for their victimization. At the very time they most need the support of others, support may be unavailable, insufficient, or misdirected.

This project acknowledges the leaders of faith communities and victim service communities must engage in honest dialogue and collaboration before meaningful and trustworthy connections can develop. The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc. and the five sites have assessed the needs of victims, faith communities, and victim assistance agencies. This assessment has guided the sites to identify key stakeholders to make these connections work. Assessment findings also guide the sites to build meaningful relationships and develop missions, goals, and objectives for the three years of the project in an effort to assure the continuation of the collaborations after the grant period ends.

- The project team of staff and volunteers includes a broad and diverse array of people and organizations in the faith communities and victim services communities, as well as those most affected by crime, the victims themselves.
- Multidisciplinary Advisory Committee members, paid and unpaid, attend scheduled meetings, holding these days and times exclusively for the meetings and scheduling other activities around them. They understand that being absent from meetings means missing significant opportunities to both provide and receive consultation.
- Project Staff and volunteers treat each other with respect at all times, acknowledging proper chain-of-command for communication up or down to the degree that these relationships are bureaucratic, yet respecting all other partners as interpersonal equals. They avoid unwarranted criticism of colleagues.

Hope

Hope for improved services for crime victims ultimately guides the Project. The staff and consultants with the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc. and the five sites base every decision on an affirmative answer to the question, "Will this endeavor ease the burden of criminal victimization in our community?"

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