

Collaborations

The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.

Volume 9, February, 2005

Collaborating with the Jewish Community

by Rabbi George Stern

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Many community groups are working to obtain broad-based collaborations among religious groups to raise awareness of the etiology of abuse and how religious and spiritual leaders can help combat it. This brief paper tries to address potential problems in including Jewish leaders and religious organizations in the collaboration, and how to ease their involvement.

Some "history" is important here. About twenty-five years ago, a congregant approached me and asked if the synagogue would be willing to host an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. I was stunned to discover that it would be the only one in an area with hundreds of thousands of Jews. Happily, our Board agreed. Today more synagogues are hosting various Twelve-Step and other self-help programs.

Why was the Jewish community so slow in responding to alcoholism and other abuses? Denial played a large role – denial that Jews had such problems. (continued on p. 3)



Highlighted Program: *Prince George's County, Maryland Department of Social Services.* The Prince George's County DSS has established an outreach to faith communities. They hold quarterly meetings at different houses of worship around the county where speakers present topics on social service needs such as: food banks, capacity building, summer lunch programs, assistance with home fuel heating and literacy programs. Contact Ginny Beauchamp at "ginnybeauc@aol.com" or L'Tonya Brown at "LBrown7@DHR.state.md.us" for more information.

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

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Resources:

(Views expressed by the authors of the following articles and websites do not necessarily reflect the opinions of OVC or MCVRC)

The Faith and Family Philanthropy Journal—Looks into the motivations and religious traditions that guide family philanthropists today. http://www.ncfp.org/publications-main-journals&workbooks.html#faith_journal

The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy—Formed in January 2002 with a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts to the Research Foundation of the State University of New York, the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy was created:

"To engage and inform government, religious and civic leaders about the role of faith-based organizations in our social welfare system by means of nonpartisan, evidence-based discussions on the potential and pitfalls of such involvement." www.religionandsocialpolicy.org

Making the Match: Law Enforcement, the Faith Community and the Value-Based Initiative—<http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=1040>

American Prosecutor's Research Institute (APRI) launches faith-based initiative— http://www.ndaa-apri.org/publications/newsletters/apri_highlights_ncpca_winter_2003.html

"What Victims Want to Say to Clergy" by Rev. Dr. Richard Lord—<http://www.crimevictimservices.org/healingissues/index/faith/faith.html>

Starting a Non-Profit at your Church—<http://www.alban.org/BookDetails.asp?ID=860>

Structuring your Board of Directors (FASTEN)—<http://www.fastennetwork.org/qryArticleDetail.asp?ArticleId=DDB4B585-62AD-4016-9AF4-993AB793FAA0> (don't forget to see Part II—Recruiting your Board of Directors)

Entrepreneurial Management (FASTEN)—<http://www.fastennetwork.org/qryArticleDetail.asp?ArticleId=30D67724-AA4D-40B4-98C8-2A884A71AC5C>

Effective Fundraising (FASTEN) - Various Articles: <http://www.fastennetwork.org/Display.asp?Page=Fundraising>

Interfaith Center for Health Issues—A website designed to help people coping with such health concerns as substance abuse, violence, mental illness and other issues, who are seeking guidance, direction and support from their local churches, synagogues, temples and mosques. <http://www.miph.org/interfaithcenter/>

(Collaborating with the Jewish Community—continued from p. 1) In fact, there may have once been some truth to that claim, but in our diverse and blended society, it is no longer true. Unconsciously a kind of defensiveness may have been at work as well, an outgrowth of years of persecution: we don't want to wash dirty laundry in public, lest we be accused of being bad citizens. Still today there are Jews who worry that "one bad egg" might reflect poorly on the whole community. Behind that fear, of course, is an assumption that non-Jews think of Jews in stereotypical and sometimes therefore anti-Semitic ways, not as individuals who happen to be Jewish. Behaviors learned after centuries of persecution die hard.

Domestic and sexual abuse have also been sources of significant denial (not, sadly, only by Jews). Within more traditional parts of the community, dealing with abuse has been exacerbated by two factors common to many traditional societies: (1) an assumption that, because people follow the group's norms and rules, they would not do such things; (2) teachings that appear to give males a superior status and which, when misunderstood, appear to give men permission to engage abusive behavior. Needless to say, Jewish tradition does not in any way condone such behavior; on the contrary, Jewish teachings often accord women special treatment and even deference. But like New Testament references to men as appropriately expecting "obedience," some Jewish teachings can themselves be abused and used by abuser to justify their aberrant behavior. Failure to anticipate such improper interpretation of texts demonstrates an insensitivity that can and must be unlearned.

Community groups seeking to forge multifaith collaborations around violence, abuse, or any other issue, must also be aware of Jewish customs and schedules that, if not taken into account, prevent Jewish involvement and even signal that a Jewish presence is not really desired.

Many Jews "keep kosher," that is, they observe traditional dietary restrictions. The most strict among them prefer not to come to events that are not kosher. This is not the place to detail the rules and regulations. I would simply suggest that, when contacting Jews, the question of food (full meals or snacks) should be mentioned. The potential participant will be able to indicate what is acceptable to him/her. Just raising the question will signal a desire to be inclusive. Asking Jews who keep kosher to provide the snacks might be one way around the problem.

Jewish holiday celebrations are confusing to many. A key confusion is over when holidays start. In general, all Jewish holidays, including the weekly Sabbath, begin at sundown. In American calendars, that means that the holiday usually starts the NIGHT BEFORE it is listed on the calendar. In 2005, for example, calendars indicate that Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, starts on October 4. In fact, it begins at sundown on the 3rd, which a few, but not all, calendars will indicate. Any meeting that comes anywhere near to sundown on the third will exclude Jews. The same holds true for the Sabbath. It starts at sundown on Friday. In general, I would recommend avoiding meetings that desire clergy participation on Fridays (rabbis are often busy preparing) or on days before major holidays. (Passover is an eight-day holiday during which Jews observe very strict dietary rules. It is best to consult potential participants when trying to schedule meetings.)

Finally, some small groups on the very traditional end of the Jewish spectrum tend to avoid significant physical contact between men and women. If sensitivity to their issues is possible, it should of course be attempted. Similarly, events at which entertainment occurs can be problematic, and some might simply opt out of those events. Sensitive alliances will make it possible for Jews to remain engaged even if they are not comfortable with some events.

Attempts to bring people of different faiths together also sometimes falter when the invitational language seems sectarian. Use of religious quotations should keep in mind that "minority" (i.e., non-Christian) religious groups are very sensitive to this issue. I always recommend that conveners of multifaith events state explicitly that they seek to be aware of group sensitivities at all times.

The reality is most religious groups have been slow to confront the issues of violence and abuse. As the following bibliography demonstrates, however, Jewish leaders have been doing so for a number of years. Local Jewish Family and Children's Services offices can be of help, both as resources on abuse and for relevant assistance in making relationships easier to manage. (continued on p. 4)

Julie Spitzer. *When Love Is Not Enough: Spousal Abuse in Rabbinic and Contemporary Judaism*. Can be ordered from Women of Reform Judaism for \$15.00. See <http://secure.urj.org/cgi-bin/hazel/wrj/hazel.cgi?action=detail&theme=shop&ITEM=S486>

The following URL contains a bibliography with references to abuse in the Jewish community:
<http://users.aol.com/agunah/bib-jdv.htm>

Carolyn Goodman Kaufman. *Sins of Omission: The Jewish Community's Reaction to Domestic Violence*. Westview Press, 2003.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski. *The Shame Borne in Silence: Spouse Abuse in the Jewish Community*. Mirkov Publications, 1996.

This Project was supported by Grant No. #2002.VF.GX.K017 awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

