

**THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS (SPIRITUALLY-BASED)
COMMUNITIES
IN ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE:**

**A Brief Submitted
to
The Alberta Round Table on Family Violence and Bullying**

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**On Behalf of
FaithLink**

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7. Executive Summary

FaithLink is a network of religious (spiritually-based) community leaders and secular service providers who recognize the strength that can result when they work collaboratively to prevent domestic abuse and to provide healing and hope to all those affected by it.

Domestic violence is as prevalent within religious/spiritual communities as it is within the general society. Religious (spiritually-based) communities are uniquely positioned to play a role in preventing and responding practically to family violence. Yet many leaders are reluctant to confront the issue and feel ill equipped to respond. Many victims of domestic abuse want the practical and emotional support of their religious/spiritual leaders and communities, and the services offered by secular agencies. When this in fact occurs, the potential for healing and change is multiplied.

Secular services and shelters are increasingly recognizing the importance of one's spiritual perspective and that many clients desire to have their spirituality acknowledged. As secular services link with religious/spiritual communities, opportunities are provided for clients to access both professional expertise and spiritual wisdom in their healing and change process.

FaithLink exists to: assist religious (spiritually-based) communities effectively respond to domestic violence within their congregations; to assist secular services recognize the importance of, and acknowledge, the spiritual perspectives of clients; and to provide opportunities for collaborative connections between religious/spiritual leaders and services providers. To this end FaithLink:

- Develops response protocols and offers implementation training to religious/spiritual leaders;
- Develops resource and educational materials for preventive action and education;
- Offers conferences, consultations and workshops on issues of mutual concern between religious (spiritual-based) communities and secular service providers;
- Does presentations;
- Conducts research and program evaluation; and
- Raises funds to sustain its work.

Although significant work has been done to date, immerging needs include:

- Within religious (spiritually-based) communities: awareness raising of the issue of family violence to the end of increasing knowledge, changing attitudes and facilitating effective responses to domestic abuse;
- Within the secular service provider community: enhanced awareness of and comfort in acknowledging the importance of spirituality for clients who come from religious communities; and linking with religious/spiritual leaders to access the resources available through their communities;
- For FaithLink: sustainable funding to enable the taking advantage of opportunities to enhance the work already begun and to expand it to other religious (spiritually-based) communities.

1.

History and Mission

FaithLink is a network of individuals and organizations whose purpose it is to build closer working relationships between family violence service providers and religious (spiritually-based) communities.

The genesis of FaithLink lies in the discussion, research and collaboration between individuals from within the religious community and those providing secular services to those affected by family violence, including ACAV, RESOLVE Alberta, YWCA Family Violence Prevention Centre and Sheriff King Home, the United Way of Calgary and Area, and the Cathedral Church of the Redeemer. This coming together was a part of the wider discussion within the community which resulted in the creation of the Calgary Justice Working Project and the eventual establishment of a dedicated domestic violence docket court and HomeFront as its administrative agency.

In the spring of 1999 the Action Committee Against Violence (ACAV), in collaboration with the United Way of Calgary and Area and the Calgary Injury Prevention Coalition, commissioned an Angus Reid survey to determine Calgarians' attitudes toward violence. In answer to a question asking where a victim of domestic violence could seek help, 16% of respondents identified their church as a place to receive help. Later that fall RESOLVE Alberta, and the YWCA Family Violence Prevention Centre and Sheriff King Home hosted two informal discussions with Dr. Nancy Nason-Clark¹. Emerging from these discussions, a working group formed to examine ways to promote greater dialogue between religious (spiritually-based) communities and service agencies addressing the issue of domestic violence in Calgary.

The following spring (2000) a workshop, co-sponsored by ACAV and the Cathedral Church of the Redeemer, funded by the United Way and facilitated by Drs. Nason-Clark and Lori Beaman-Hall (University of Lethbridge), brought members of religious (spiritually-based) communities and domestic violence services agencies together. The objectives of the workshop were: to raise awareness of domestic violence; affirm what is being accomplished; and suggest a framework for working together. The potential for partnerships to develop between religious (spiritually-based) leaders and family violence service organizations was evident. A number of recommendations were generated and a working group formed to begin implementation. These recommendations formed the foundational elements of a long-term initiative to build bridges between religious (spiritually-based) communities and domestic violence serving agencies in Calgary to better assist congregational members who may be experiencing violence in their lives.

The working group completed a strategic planning process. The name 'FaithLink' was chosen and a mission statement (**working together to build bridges between faith communities and domestic violence services in Calgary**) adopted. Goals were defined:

- to facilitate religious (spiritually-based) communities becoming an integral part of the larger community's response to family violence;

¹ Dr. Nason-Clark is a sociologist and Chair of the Religion and Violence Research team at the Muriel McQueen Ferguson Centre of Family Violence Research, University of New Brunswick. She has done extensive research with faith/religious communities and is internationally recognized for her work.

- to raise awareness of family violence within religious (spiritually-based) communities and enhance their capacity to respond – through preventive and practical action;
- to broaden understanding among community service providers of the importance of beliefs to individuals espousing a religious/spiritual frame of reference; and
- to facilitate collaborative working relationships between religious/spiritual leaders and secular service providers in the healing process by victims and responsibility taking by those who have acted abusively within their intimate relationships.

The working group evolved into the FaithLink Steering Committee.

In 2003, with funding from the National Crime Prevention Centre's Community Mobilization Program and private donations a part-time Co-ordinator and Advisor were hired. In 2004, with additional funding from the Community Mobilization Program, additional co-ordinator time was allocated to continued work within the Christian community and expanding the work to the Jewish community.

The Importance of the Work

Researchers have long argued that domestic violence crosses all societal boundaries and that the rates of incidence inside and outside religious (spiritually-based) communities are similar. Statistics confirm this claim.² Surveys also identify that religious (spiritually-based) leaders are often seen as a resource in times of crisis.³ Notwithstanding these findings, it is often hard for religious (spiritually-based) communities to acknowledge that abuse exists within the families of their congregants.⁴ As a result, Nason-Clark notes, there are few resources available to help the person who has acted abusively, the victim or the child witnesses. Most religious leaders feel uncomfortable when confronted with domestic violence situations and feel ill equipped to respond.

But religious (spiritually-based) communities are positioned to play a unique role in confronting family violence. These are communities that often reach large numbers of people, including those from minority cultures, older persons, persons with disabilities, immigrants and individuals who may not access main stream services. A religious community may be one of the few places the person using abusive behaviours does not control or in which the movements of the victim can be restricted.

These are communities who can, if appropriately resources, address openly and directly the issue of family violence, including speaking out against family violence; ensuring their communities are safe places; and making information about domestic abuse available to congregants. Leaders can educate their congregations through utilizing age-appropriate curriculum, and assessing for and raising the issue during pre-marital classes. Through taking advantage of training opportunities leaders, staff members and volunteer leaders can understand how to respond

² Nason-Clark. *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky., 1997. Beaman-Hall, L. & Nason-Clark. *Partners or Protagonists? The Transition House Movement and Conservative Churches*. *Affilia*. 12(2), Summer, 1997, 176-196.

³ Horton, A. & J. Williamson. (Eds), *Abuse and Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough*. Lexington, Ma., Lexington Books., 1988.

⁴ Nason-Clark. *Shattered Silence or Holy Hush? Emerging Definitions of Violence Against Women in Sacred and Secular Contexts*. *Family Ministry*. Vol. 13, No.1, Spring, 1999, 39-56.

appropriately to disclosures of abuse, ensure that disclosures of child abuse are reported to Child Welfare and/or the police, and offer support to the victim and his/her children.

Religious/spiritual leaders can hold the person who has used abusive behaviours accountable for their actions, encouraging the access of specialized treatment services and working collaboratively with secular professionals to ensure the spiritual needs of all family members are addressed.

One of the significant roles religious/spiritual communities can play is to offer support to the children of conflicted families. Research suggests that “children exposed to marital conflict are better able to cope if they have close peer relationships and positive and distracting activities outside the home that enable them to distance and disengage themselves from the conflict.”⁵ The activities and relationships offered through religious/spiritually-based communities can be invaluable supports for children and youth who witness and/or directly experience violence within their homes.

Many abuse victims want the practical and emotional support of their religious/spiritual community and the services that secular agencies can provide. When this assistance is placed alongside that of other professionals and agencies, the potential for healing and change is multiplied.

Violence is a multi-faceted community problem with social, psychological, spiritual, legal and economic aspects. Victims of violence need multi-faceted supports – spiritual and secular, emotional and practical. The potential for partnership between the secular and the religious/spiritual in the struggle to end violence is significant: enhancing this collaboration is the work and mission of FaithLink.

Achievement to Date: Impact Upon Best Practices

The foundational work, which resulted in the establishment of FaithLink as a ‘formal’ community initiative, the identification of goals for guiding the work and their implementation was undertaken on a volunteer basis by those members comprising the Steering Committee. Within a two year period (2000-2002) their achievements were impressive.

- The membership of the Steering Committee was expanded by reaching out to religious (spiritually-based) communities not currently represented. Representatives from the Ishmaili and Jewish communities were recruited.
- The beginning work on developing a generic protocol that could serve as a template for the development and implementation of effective responses to domestic abuse disclosures within religious (spiritually-based) communities was begun.
- A brochure, explaining FaithLink’s mission and how to respond to domestic violence, was developed and distributed to religious (spiritually-based) leaders.
- A training workshop for religious (spiritually-based) leaders and those providing pre-marital courses to couples, featuring Dr. Nason-Clark, was organized in co-operation with The Ecumenical Task Force for the Prevention of Family Violence. It was well attended, with 82 participants.

⁵ Statistics Canada. *Childhood Aggression and Exposure to Violence in the Home*.
www.statcan.ca/english/research/85-561-MIE/112/intro.htm

- Resource materials were developed and distributed to religious (spiritually-based) communities for use to participate in Turn Off The Violence Week.
- Practicum placements in service agencies was arranged for students from Rocky Mountain College.
- A display table was hosted at the TRAIN, 2001 and 2002 Conferences, distributing resource materials and providing networking opportunities. This is a major conference for educational leaders within the Christian Evangelical community.
- A database of all Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in the city was developed to facilitate regular mailings of resource materials.
- A second workshop was held November 2001, again featuring Dr. Nason-Clark as the keynote speaker. Over 70 participants, representing Jewish, Ishmaili and Christian religious traditions, in addition to service providers, attended.
- Invitations were extended to Dr. Nason-Clark to speak at First Baptist Church, Central United Church, the Cathedral Church of the Redeemer and South Calgary Community Church.
- A presentation was made to Christian-based counselors at the 'Caring on the Cutting Edge' conference.
- Training on domestic abuse was provided to the Pastoral Counselling staff at Central United Church.
- A meeting of the Calgary Evangelical Ministerial Ass'n (CEMA) was attended and an article submitted for inclusion in their newsletter.
- Media interest in the FaithLink initiative resulted a full-page story in a Nov. 2001 edition of the Calgary Herald.
- Invitations to speak were accepted from the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta, March 2002, in Red Deer. FaithLink was used as a model for engaging religious (spiritually-based) communities in social issues.

By the summer of 2002 it was apparent that further development of the work required the time that could only come from a staff position. Funding was obtained, through a federal grant a part-time (0.6fte) Co-ordinator was hired January 2003. Private funding was obtained and a part-time Advisor was also hired at the same time. This latter funding was seen as an indication of the community support for the work and mission of FaithLink.

During this past year the work has been focused in six primary areas, four of which (#1,2, 3 and 4 below) are directly related to enhancing best practices among religious/spiritual leaders.

1. Protocol Development and Training

A pilot protocol document was developed with, and for, The Salvation Army, Glenmore Temple. The document includes:

- Issues of concern for clergy;
- Specific protocols for taking disclosures from adult victims, child victims and individuals who have acted abusively;
- A response team model for handling the impacts disclosures can have within and upon a congregation;
- Information about family violence; and
- Community resources and how to access them.

- Training for all Calgary based Officers and service personnel is scheduled for the spring of 2004. The Salvation Army Canadian Territorial Headquarters is considering the adoption of this protocol for all Corps in Canada and Bermuda.

From the pilot document a generic document was developed that can be adapted by individual denominations/congregations to reflect unique structures and issues. To this end:

- It is being used as a template by one Christian education institute and one church to develop their own policy re: responding to family violence;
- It has been shared with an additional three congregations and interest in pursuing protocol development work has been expressed by another denomination. Another educational institution has been approached re: developing a protocol document.

2. A Resource and Activities Manual

A Resource and Activities Manual has been developed in consultation with the Turn Off The Violence Campaign and the Ecumenical Task Force for the Prevention of Family Violence (Fire In The Rose Project), incorporating:

- Resources for pastors in sermon development;
- Sample educational lesson plans for ages kindergarten through teens;
- Sample discussion formats for youth and adult groups;
- Information re: family violence, including responding effectively to disclosures of domestic abuse; and
- Community resources.

Approximately 460 Manuals were mailed to Christian churches in the city and surrounding area the latter part of August in preparation for fall planning. An additional 340-350 have been distributed through a variety of events in the city and throughout the province.

The evaluation forms, included in the manual, that have been received to date suggest the manual is useful and well received. A sample comment: “This is a tremendous resource – we haven’t used it yet but see many applications.” As a result of the manual distribution, the Roman Catholic Diocese requested family violence information to provide each parish in the diocese.

3. Conference and Marriage Preparation Workshop Planning

FaithLink sponsored two major events during 2003:

- A consultation, held Nov. 10th 2003 (Freedom from Fear and Abuse), that brought 60 members of the Evangelical Christian community and service providers together for a day long discussion of mutual concerns.
- A Marriage Preparation Workshop, Nov. 22nd 2003, for faith leaders, counselors and others who provide preparatory counselling to couples planning their lives together. The focus of the workshop was to raise awareness of family violence and enhance assessment and resource access skills. It also facilitated connections between faith community members and services providers who presented. 22 individuals registered for this workshop

A spring event, planned for March 8th, will seek to enhance the capacity of leaders from various religious traditions in responding effectively to individuals of their communities who have acted abusively. To this end:

- Dr. David Livingston, author, clinician and professor of religious studies at Mercyhurst College, Erie, Penn, will be the keynote presenter;
- Key individuals from a number of religious communities and service professionals are being identified to participate in the program of the day;
- Participants will be grouped by faith identification with service providers and asked to consider how best treatment practices can be blended with belief tenets.

4. Presentations and Meetings

A number of presentations about the work and services of FaithLink were made to a wide range of audiences, including:

- Christian educational institutional leaders and faculties, Evangelical Christian pastors and representatives from varying congregations/denominations;
- Leaders of the SikSika First Nation;
- Officers and management staff, The Salvation Army, Centre of Hope;
- A representative of the TRAIN Conference (major educational training conference for the Evangelical Christian community)
- Dr. Mohammad Iqbal Al-Nadvi, Imam, Moslem Community of Calgary

5. Research and Evaluation

FaithLink has contracted with RESOLVE Alberta to evaluate the work of the Project. A survey questionnaire is being sent to all Christian faith communities in the city as a way of establishing a baseline for gauging changes in knowledge, attitude and behaviour, over time, relative to family violence. Results are in process of being analyzed.

A research project has been formulated, the general goals of which are:

- To positively influence the organizational cultures that religious (spiritually-based) communities provide women who are members of those communities; and
- To positively influence the responses of community agency front line workers who deal with women who have been victims of family violence; so that
- Women embracing a spiritual component to their lives, who have been victims of family violence are heard, supported and served more effectively.

A proposal is being submitted to the Status of Women, Canada for three year funding to conduct this research.

6. Fund Raising

Seeking funding in support of the continuing work of the project is a continuing exercise.

FaithLink has been successful in obtaining grants from:

- The National Crime Prevention Strategy, Community Mobilization Program for funding for 2003 and 2004; and
- The Calgary Foundation for specific activities.

Specific activities have been joint ventures with, or have been supported by, The Ecumenical Task Force for the Prevention of Family Violence. In-kind support is received from the Action Committee Against Violence (administrative support) and members of the Steering Committee (participation on task teams and committees).

Administrative Activities

An Executive Committee was formed in January 2003 and has met periodically throughout the year to. Its work has included:

- Addressing staffing needs;
- Addressing emerging issues and bringing recommendations to the Steering Committee; and
- Provide guidance to the Co-ordinator;

The Project Advisor and the Co-ordinator have met regularly throughout the year to discuss current and projects undertaken by FaithLink and emerging opportunities.

Identified Needs

1. Within Religious (spiritually-based) Communities

Much of the work done to date by FaithLink has been focused within the Christian faith. From the first data of the evaluation (N= 56) there are some interesting trends. (Note these are preliminary data and cursory analysis.)

- Re: knowledge of domestic abuse:

Most Christian pastors have taken steps to increase their knowledge of family violence.

When asked specific questions about domestic abuse, most responses correspond with the generally held knowledge in the field. Some exceptions include:

- One half of respondents believe family violence is caused by other issues, e.g., alcohol, substance abuse)
- Just over on half of respondents believe family within faith communities are unlikely to be families experiencing violence.
- Just over one half of respondents believe violence against women by men is most often an attempt to control the woman's behavior.

Although these data are encouraging, there is need for continued education about domestic abuse among Christian pastors.

- Re: Attitudes about family violence:

Most respondents agreed that violence within the home was unacceptable and that intervention by government and/or social agencies was justified, although this was higher for violence between adult partners than for abuse by a parent against a child. Most respondents agreed that abuse between adults was unacceptable, however, one quarter identified that saving the marriage was their top priority in situations of spousal abuse. This latter finding suggests that there is need for continued education and awareness re: the danger victims may be in and therefore the need for those receiving disclosures to place victim safety as the first priority.

- Re: Behaviour in relation to family violence.

Although there are varying responses, it would appear that about one half of respondents make a point of displaying materials about family violence within their facilities or preach about abuse.

The data is more encouraging when respondents were asked about their alertness and/or questioning about family violence within the context of counselling. Most indicated they were alert to signals of abuse during pre-marital and couple counselling sessions. Most report seeing the partners separately when domestic violence is suspected.

When asked about their responses to disclosures of abuse, one third indicate reporting suspected child abuse to Child Welfare and/or the police. About one half report seeking advice from, or giving advice to, colleagues within the ministry. Responses to questions re: the frequency with which respondents have received disclosures of abuse, suggest that respondents – although the minority - receive disclosures of abuse from: children; adult female victims; adult male victims; individuals who have acted abusively towards children and/or partners; the elderly and handicapped members of their congregations. These data confirm that family violence occurs within Christian faith communities – across ages, types of relationships and disabilities.

When pastors were asked about their own actions in response to receiving disclosures of abuse, responses suggest that about one half handled the situations on their own while the other half sought counsel from fellow pastors/staff members or referred to resources in the community. A minority referred to Child Welfare (20%) or a family violence service agency (32%).

These data re: pastoral behaviour in response to preventive and practical actions towards family violence suggest the continuing need for resource support and perhaps skill development. That most pastors report never having received disclosures of abuse is concerning. Gaining a more complete understanding of the reasons for these findings is necessary. Again, it should be noted that this analysis is cursory and utilizes only the preliminary survey returns. Perhaps this picture will change when the full data set is subjected to rigorous analysis.

FaithLink has is only now in a position to extend its work into other religious (spiritually-based) traditions and communities. We are therefore not able to speak directly to the degree of violence within these communities but would expect its prevalence to be similar to that of the Christian community and the general public. This assumption leads to the conclusion that support and resources are needed within a wide variety of religious/spiritual communities.

2. Within Service Providers

Shelters and secular based service providers have incorporated sensitivity to the cultural identities of clients accessing their services but have not always been as sensitive to the spiritual identities espoused by clients. Religious organizations have similarly been hesitant to refer congregants to shelters, fearing the women's spirituality would be attacked.

It appears to us that these positions are changing. Shelter staffs are recognizing the importance of one's spiritual perspective. As religious/spiritual leaders become more aware of the dynamics of family violence, and connections are made with individuals within the shelter system, there is a growing openness to refer congregants to secular agencies. These are beginning steps for each sector. A lot more dialogue and understanding is needed.

Many clients who hold a spiritual perspective for their lives desire to have this identity acknowledged. They wish to incorporate the strengths they gain from their spirituality to enhance their healing from trauma suffered. They often will have deep roots within a particular congregation and may wish to continue to worship there, to receive the support of friends and spiritual leaders. They may wish for their spiritual leader, or other member of their faith group, to be a part of the counselling process.

For FaithLink to assist shelter staff enhance their sensitivity to women's spiritual dimension we need to better understand what information and/or resources would be helpful for them and in what format it can best be presented.

3. For FaithLink

The work FaithLink has done to date has been primarily within the Christian faith community. This is a large and disparate community representing differing theological emphases and organizational structures. Approaches for engagement in the work and vision of FaithLink, resource materials for preventive and practical responses to family violence, and the enhancement of skills through training and conferencing must be sensitive and varied. Responding sensitively and appropriately to these various factors requires time, understanding and the skill to incorporate denominational specific language, culture and concerns into documents and opportunities for collaborative connections.

FaithLink has recently taken steps to expand its work within the Jewish community. This has developed through the involvement of members from this community represented on the Steering Committee. To do this effectively will require the development of materials, resources, consultation opportunities and training that is specific for the various sects and groups within the broader Jewish community.

Most recently, FaithLink has established connections with key individuals within the Hindu, Sikh and Ahmadiya Muslim communities. These opportunities need to be cultivated, key leaders supported and engaged in the work and vision of FaithLink.

All of the above are opportunities for advancement, but cannot be realized without a sustainable funding base through which staff can be employed, resources developed and opportunities created to enhance collaborative responses to domestic abuse. Immediate funding needs include:

- Funds to continue the employment of a 0.3fte co-ordinator position beyond June, 2004. The responsibilities of this position include: working directly within the Jewish community; working with secular service providers to enhance their sensitivity to women's spiritual dimension; and enhance the Resource and Activities Manual for Christian congregations.

More long-term funding needs include:

- Funds to expand the work to additional religious (spiritually-based) communities, including: the development of community specific resources, training for religious/spiritual leaders, offering consultation opportunities with service providers.

- Administrative and structural support for FaithLink. At present we work out of home-based offices. As the work develops there is need to consider establishing a central office with accompanying costs.

Next Steps

1. Mission, Strategies, Structure

On February 11 past, members of the FaithLink Steering Committee engaged in a ‘forward looking’ exercise. This discussion addressed the following topics and generated ideas for change. To reflect the richness of the discussion, a sample of ideas is given.

- A review of our mission statement
 - The present mission statement reflects what we were. We need a new statement to reflect greater inclusiveness and an increased focus on healing and change for those individuals directly affected by domestic abuse.
- A discussion of current and emerging realities
 - There is continued need for awareness raising and education within religious/spiritually-based communities and service providers
 - Changes within the broader social service sector impacts our work;
 - The constant need for service providers, including FaithLink, to raise sustainable funding saps energies that could better be spend on addressing the primary issue of family violence;
 - We need to be more inclusive – not everyone who should be is at the table.
- Identification of potential strategies
 - To strategically create direction, sustainability and accountability
 - To resource service providers – engage, educate, train
 - To create processes that provide a culture of openness and learning
 - To resource religious (spiritually-based) communities appropriately and with credibility
 - To build Steering Committee leadership capacity
- Next Steps
 - The Co-ordinators and Advisor will ‘frame’ the information the discussion generated for presentation to the larger Steering Committee
 - Objectives for each strategy will be generated
 - Discussion re: structure is needed: how do we best organize to achieve our objectives.

2. Expanding the Work

- a. One of the significant ‘next steps’ for FaithLink is to extend its work into the Jewish community. To this end we have hired a part-time Resource Co-ordinator with the specific task of raising awareness of the issue of family violence within this community and developing resources for leaders to effectively and appropriately respond.
- b. The format of the Resource and Activities Manual is being revised to allow an on-going development of resource materials. With this new format, FaithLink will offer, each year, new material to be added to the already existing curriculum.
- c. Learnings achieved in taking this step will assist us as we look toward incorporating other religious (spiritually-based) communities into the vision and work of FaithLink.

One such learning is the need to find individuals from within any given community to be the primary resource to and for the community.

Appendices

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FaithLink Committee Membership List January 29, 2004

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