

CHAPTER 11

The Faith Community

Tens of millions of Americans call upon clergy and religious leaders for spiritual guidance, support, and information in times of personal crisis.² One study found that people in crisis due to the death of someone close were almost five times more likely to seek the aid of a clergy person than all other mental health sources combined.³ While the faith community has historically provided prison ministry programs, few religious institutions have developed programs specifically to serve victims of crime.

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."⁴ It recommended that the ministry develop both seminary and inservice training on the criminal justice system, the needs of victims, and ways to restore victims' spiritual and material health.

The faith community has made steady progress toward these goals. With support from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), educational initiatives on victim assistance have been developed in communities across the country. Led by groups such as The Spiritual Dimension in Victim Services in Denver, Colorado, these initiatives have included training for parish clergy and hospital chaplains conducting ministries in high-crime urban areas, training for crime victim service providers seeking ways to involve the faith community in their efforts, workshops at national and regional denominational events, and distribution of manuals, brochures, and other materials on victim assistance to clergy and congregations.⁵

This section describes the wide range of victim assistance programs established by the faith community in the past 15 years and suggests specific ways in which communities of faith can more effectively assist victims of crime.

Faith-Based Victim Assistance Programs

In communities across the country, faith-based victim assistance programs have grown in number and expanded the services that they provide. They are now an important source of support to victims and their families.

Our families are torn by violence. Our communities are destroyed by violence. Our faith is tested by violence. We have an obligation to respond.¹

Pastoral Message, U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994

- In Akron, Ohio, the Furnace Street Mission established one of the first faith-based victim assistance programs in the United States in 1982. Today it serves more than 25,000 people a year, exemplifying how traditional ministries can be expanded to include crime victim assistance.
- Neighbors Who Care, an interdenominational program, was founded in 1992 as the victim-serving subsidiary of the large national organization, Prison Fellowship. The program enlists volunteers from churches to provide direct services, primarily to victims of property crime. Volunteers repair property and provide transportation, moving assistance, and other vital services. The program recently expanded to include services to victims of domestic violence and other crimes.
- African-American churches in the East Bay communities of Northern California have joined together to conduct neighborhood meetings and counseling after violent crimes and instances of police officer misconduct.⁶
- In Jackson, Mississippi, Catholic Charities sponsors a shelter for battered families that serves 350 women and children each year from seven rural counties, providing transitional housing, legal assistance, and individual and group counseling.
- The United States Catholic Conference has developed a number of publications on crime victims' issues. *Confronting a Culture of Violence—A Catholic Framework for Action* highlights a number of victim assistance and crime prevention activities in dioceses, parishes, and schools across the country and calls for a major effort to mobilize the Catholic community to confront the culture of violence. *When I Call for Help—A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women* contains practical suggestions for assisting women who are battered as well as men who abuse. *Walk in the Light—A Pastoral Response to Child Sexual Abuse* reaches out to people who have been abused, to abusers, and to pastors, pastoral staff, and other church workers who can assist victims.
- Brother Modesto Leon of the Catholic Church in Los Angeles operates a support and intervention program for mothers of murdered Latino children. The mothers comfort each other and tell their stories to gang members to prevent further gang violence and death in the Los Angeles Latino community.⁷
- In Memphis, Tennessee, Victims to Victory provides faith centered support and healing to homicide survivors. Katherine (Kitty) Lawson, an African-American ordained minister at Abundant Grace Fellowship Church, founded Victims to Victory in 1995 in response to the needs of a church family tormented by a double murder.

- Religious and spiritual organizations frequently invite victim assistance organizations to use their space to conduct support groups, candle-light vigils, and other victim assistance activities. In Cleveland, Mississippi, for example, Pastor Roderick Mitchell opened his church in 1995 to a rape crisis program in need of a home. The church has now expanded to provide services to all victims of crime through a community-based organization called Exodus Center for Life.
- The Christian Society for the Healing of Dissociative Disorders is a national consortium of psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers who combine therapeutic skill and spirituality in treating ritualistically abused survivors. The Society is headquartered in Bedford, Texas, and holds an annual conference of several hundred participants to share treatment information.

Multidisciplinary Efforts

One of the most promising areas of the faith community's response to the victims' movement has been the willingness of religious organizations to collaborate with the secular victim assistance community. The programs discussed below illustrate how communities of faith can work with organizations pursuing similar goals to provide comprehensive services to crime victims.

- Faith communities are "adopting" child protection social workers, serving as a resource for them as they help children recover from family violence. The programs, which have a significant presence in California, Oklahoma, and other states, also help to educate congregations about child abuse and neglect and the large numbers of children who suffer from these crimes.
- In Costa Mesa, California, Royal Family Kids Camps help congregations sponsor summer camps for severely abused and neglected children. To date, more than 4,000 children between the ages of 7 and 11 who are in the custody of child protective services have enjoyed a week of positive support in a safe and nurturing environment.
- The Center for Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, affiliated with the United Church of Christ of Seattle, Washington, directly supports victims and survivors and promotes cooperation between communities of faith and secular organizations across the country on sexual and domestic violence issues. The center recently expanded its activities to include education on clergy sexual misconduct and assistance to the victims of this crime.
- The Colorado/Oklahoma Resource Council (CORC), a secular organization, was formed in Denver, Colorado, to provide resources to victims of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City after the trial was moved to Denver, Colorado. CORC

By proclamation and performance churches must come forward to give assistance to victims of crime.

Pastor Roderick Mitchell,
New Life Church,
Cleveland, Mississippi

established a spiritual needs committee to support those attending the trial. CORC, the Denver Police Chaplaincy Corps, the Colorado Council of Churches, The Spiritual Dimension in Victim Services, and other organizations have established a multifaith coalition to assist and provide counseling to the families.

Victim-Offender Dialogue

The community of faith has created numerous faith-based victim-offender mediation/dialogue programs in which meetings between victims and offenders are arranged when victims request it and the courts allow offenders to participate. Mediation/dialogue programs allow offenders to confront the consequences of their crimes and then work out contracts with victims to provide them with restitution. Volunteers from the faith community are trained by professional mediators to facilitate the dialogue, which must be undertaken with great care to ensure that victims and offenders are prepared adequately for what can be a painful healing process.

- The Mennonite-based Victim Offender Reconciliation Program in Clovis, California, offers victim-offender dialogue services that have been used widely in other communities of faith to help individuals start the recovery process in the aftermath of victimization. The program is supported by 42 churches and provides training to Christian and Jewish communities.

Victims of crime often experience a crisis in faith. How religious leaders respond to their needs can be either a help or a hindrance in healing.

Anne Delaplaine,
Associate Director,
Spiritual Dimension in
Victim Services,
Denver, Colorado

Confidentiality and Reporting Crime to Law Enforcement

Religious leaders are responsible for ministering to all members of their congregations, including those who may have committed criminal acts. This obligation presents ethical and religious dilemmas when crimes are confessed in confidentiality, especially if the criminal activity is continuing. In these situations, clergy must weigh the importance of respecting privileged communication in relation to the need to protect victims and society from harm. To make responsible decisions, clergy must have a full understanding of the law as well as the nature and consequences of victimization.

Laws requiring the reporting of suspected child abuse highlight this dilemma. All states mandate the reporting of child abuse by professionals who come into contact with children, and at least 30 states require clergy to report child abuse in some circumstances. Only five of these states, however, clearly require clergy to report in all circumstances, leaving largely intact the traditional privilege given to communication with clergy. But an increasing number of faith communities are modifying their codes of clergy conduct to require clergy to report suspected child abuse and complete training on child abuse issues.

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gives this directive to clergy: “Ordained ministers must respect privileged and confidential communication and may not disclose such communication, except with the express permission of the person who has confided it or if the person is perceived to intend great harm to self or others.”⁸
- The Episcopalian Church requires 4 hours of training on child abuse for those who work with children during their daily activities. This requirement applies to all religious leaders as well as day care providers. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church requires some Archdiocese to receive similar training.

Recommendations From the Field for the Faith Community

FAITH COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FIELD #1

The faith community should recognize that the victim, no less than the victimizer, is in need of aid, comfort, and spiritual ministry, and faith-based congregations and organizations should provide assistance to victims whenever possible.

There continues to be a general lack of education and understanding of the needs of crime victims in the faith community. Recognition of crime victims’ needs should be an integral part of the faith community’s worship, life, and ministry.

In a 1992 survey of 97 denominational headquarters, respondents were asked about their programs to assist crime victims. Most replied that their programs were jail and prison ministries for offenders, not victims. While these programs should not be diminished, it is insufficient for the faith community to address the spiritual needs of offenders without recognizing the spiritual needs of victims. The faith community can and should conduct ministries for both.

While many denominations have mission statements that address child abuse and neglect and domestic violence, these mission statements should be expanded to include all victims of crime. All denominations should adopt such statements and include them in canons of ethics.

Many excellent examples of programs have been created and supported by the faith community, from providing emergency property repair, transportation, and other crisis services to supporting summer camps for child abuse victims. These efforts should be expanded.

FAITH COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FIELD #2

Courses on crime victimization and crime victim assistance should be established in clergy educational institutions and theological seminaries, including both worship and pastoral counseling courses.

Because so many people in crisis seek clergy for assistance, professional schools that educate future religious and spiritual leaders must provide a foundation of knowledge in the field of victim issues. Classes should include the clergy's role in intervening with crime victims, appropriate courses of action that involve criminal justice, medical, mental health, and social services referrals, and planning of worship services centered around a crisis. Clergy should have education in appropriate death notification following a sudden death as compared to death following illness.

FAITH COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FIELD #3

Continuing education on crime victimization and crime victim assistance should be provided for all clergy and religious leaders, including chaplains in hospitals, police departments, and the military and other individuals within the faith community who may come into contact with victims.

Education about the consequences of victimization will increase the faith community's responsiveness to crime victims. To help spiritual and religious leaders appropriately treat or refer serious trauma-related cases that require in-depth mental health intervention, they should be trained to recognize symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and other long-term psychological reactions to crime victimization. They should also be knowledgeable about community, state, and national resources that provide victim assistance.

Religious leaders often are among the first responders following a sudden, violent death. Although most clergy are educated in traditional grief counseling techniques, education on specific interventions for trauma, grief, and loss following criminal victimization should be provided. Clergy should also receive training on appropriate death notification practices.

Other groups within the faith community also interact with victims and need education about victims' issues and services. They include Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, choir directors, and counselors on prayer phone lines providing comfort and assistance to individuals in crisis. Religious and spiritual organizations should identify such groups within their memberships and make continuing education on victims' issues and services available to them.

FAITH COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FIELD #4

Religious institutions at all levels should cooperate with victim assistance agencies and organizations to offer joint services to victims of crime and to disseminate publications on crime victim assistance.

Religious organizations working in conjunction with victim assistance agencies have the capacity to provide important services to crime victims. During the trials of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, for example, safe havens were established in local churches by victim assistance providers to ensure that victims would have a quiet place to meet and receive counseling. In another collaborative effort, the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., worked with Mothers Against Drunk Driving to hold the International Candlelight Vigil of Remembrance and Hope in December 1997, which featured the voices of victims and survivors of crime.

Efforts must be expanded to distribute victim assistance information, including booklets, pamphlets, videos, and educational materials, more widely in the community of faith. Ministerial associations and interfaith alliances should be included routinely in the dissemination of victim service information.

FAITH COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FIELD #5

The clergy should provide training for victim assistance providers, criminal justice officials, state victim assistance administrators, compensation program directors, and other public officials about the important role they can play in assisting victims.

State administrators, criminal justice-based victim assistance providers, and other public officials are often uncomfortable dealing with the faith community because they fear a blurring of the separa-

tion of church and state. The victim assistance community should recognize that faith-based programs can play a significant role in victim support as long as public funds are not used to promote specific sectarian beliefs. Victim service providers should ask clergy to help them react appropriately to people whose victimization includes a faith crisis.

FAITH COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FIELD #6

Requiring clergy to report suspected cases of child abuse should be seriously considered by religious institutions and governmental agencies, and appropriate policies should be developed to ensure the protection of children. Even in cases involving confidential communications, the clergy should hold the needs of children paramount and recognize their moral responsibility to help and protect child victims.

Many victims' organizations believe that clergy should be required to report suspected cases of abuse to law enforcement, even when information is revealed within a confidential setting, and that clergy should be held to the same mandatory reporting requirements and standards as medical or mental health professionals and teachers.

Recently, many state legislatures have considered whether clergy should be among those mandated to report child abuse and neglect in view of their legal privilege of confidentiality. The results have been mixed, with some states requiring clergy to report in all cases, other states requiring reporting in selected cases, and most states exempting clergy from reporting requirements when an offense is revealed in a confidential pastoral counseling or confessional setting. However, all states require clergy to report incidents of suspected child abuse while serving as therapists, school administrators, or day care providers.

FAITH COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FIELD #7

Communities of faith should hold clergy and other religious leaders in positions of trust within their congregations accountable for crimes they commit, including sexual acts against adults and children. Policies and procedures should be developed to ensure that appropriate cases of clergy misconduct are referred to law enforcement agencies.

Criminal background checks should be mandatory for all clergy, faith community staff, and volunteers who work with children. A number of high-profile civil legal actions have been brought against religious leaders accused of child abuse or sexual assault and their religious institutions for not reporting known incidents of abuse to law enforcement agencies. While those who commit such acts represent a small percentage of the faith community, it is crucial that policies and procedures be developed to ensure that these cases are handled with utmost concern for the victim and that appropriate cases are not only referred to law enforcement agencies but dealt with swiftly within the institution to ensure the protection of others.

FAITH COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FIELD #8

Religious and spiritual leaders should be encouraged to use their pulpits to educate and sensitize their congregations about crime and victimization issues.

Religious and spiritual leaders have an opportunity to use their positions to educate their congregations about crime and its impact—information that could help the members of a congregation seek out the services they need if they become victims of crime. Religious and spiritual leaders could encourage congregations to join in the national October observance of “Domestic Violence Awareness Month” and deliver at least one sermon that month about the impact of family violence. In addition, they could highlight crime victims’ issues during National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, generally held at the end of April. Each year, the Office for Victims of Crime funds a National Crime Victims’ Rights Week kit which includes a sample sermon about victims’ issues.

The Catholic community has much at stake and much to contribute. What we believe, where we are, and how we live out our faith can make a great difference in the struggle against violence. We see the loss of lives. We serve the victims. We feel the fear. We must confront this growing culture of violence with a commitment to life, a vision of hope, and a call to action.

Pastoral Message of the
U.S. Catholic Bishops,
*Confronting a Culture
of Violence:
A Catholic Framework
for Action*, 1995.

FAITH COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION FROM THE FIELD #9

Religious and spiritual leaders should be willing to serve in leadership roles on community crisis response teams providing services in the aftermath of mass violence and other crimes that have significant impact upon entire communities.

Religious and spiritual leaders can play a leadership role in helping to ensure that their communities are prepared to respond to community and individual needs following incidents of mass violence, terrorism, or other major crimes. They can also volunteer to serve on crisis response teams that provide assistance to other communities, such as the teams organized by the National Organization for Victim Assistance to debrief school children, teachers, and emergency responders following the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

The recommendations in this chapter were based upon input from participants at public hearings and reaction and working groups, as well as papers submitted by experts in the field, identified in Appendix A. The recommendations do not necessarily reflect all of the views of the contributors, nor do they necessarily represent the official views of the Department of Justice.

Endnotes

- 1 United States Catholic Conference, Inc. *Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action*, Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994:2.
- 2 Chalfant, H.P., P.L. Heller, A. Roberts, D. Briones, Aguirre-Hockbaums and W. Farr, "The Clergy as a Resource for Those Encountering Psychological Distress," in *Review of Religious Research*, vol.31 no.3, 1990:305-313.
- 3 Verhoff, J., R. A. Kulka, and E. Douvan, *Mental Health in America*, New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- 4 President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, *Final Report*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1982:95-96.
- 5 Reverend D. Delaplane and A. Delaplane, *Victims: A Manual for Clergy and Congregations*, Denver, Colorado: The Spiritual Dimension in Victim Services, 1996 (original edition published under a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime).
- 6 Brian Ogawa, *Color of Justice: Culturally Sensitive Treatment of Minority Crime Victims*, Sacramento, CA: Office of the Governor, State of California, Office of Criminal Justice Planning, 1990:272.
- 7 *Id.* at 267.
- 8 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Definition and Guidelines for Discipline," November 19, 1989, in *Victims: A Manual for Clergy and Congregations*, D. Delaplane and A. Delaplane, Denver CO: 5th edition, 1989.