



Hearts and Hands

Piecing Together Faith and Safety for Rural Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence

Dear Advocates, Colleagues, and Friends:

In 2010, Safe Havens staff members spoke to 16 rural domestic and sexual violence service providers in 12 states about the role of faith in rural communities. We are deeply grateful for the wisdom and insights that were so generously shared with us!

What became immediately apparent was the significant presence and role of faith communities in rural America. We heard comments such as, “the faith community can be huge in addressing domestic violence,” and “our community is so faith-based that if we didn’t work with faith-based people, we wouldn’t work.”

It was also clear that building partnerships with faith communities can be challenging. Funding for faith community outreach and training was described as “haphazard,” which led to “choppy” work instead of the strategic, long-term efforts that many of you would like to see. Also, faith leaders, like many in the wider community, have not received vital information about domestic and sexual violence. As a result, there is a wide range of understandings about issues such as safety or confidentiality.

At the same time, the service providers we spoke with were clear that outreach and partnerships with faith-based communities are critical. One said, “Connections in the faith community validate and strengthen outreach in the rest of the community.” Another commented, “Payoff for the faith-based outreach and training we have done has been phenomenal. . . .” Faith community outreach and partnerships can also help meet the needs of clients, who often “struggle with spiritual issues.”

The bottom line is that for many rural women who seek services, faith is a critical resource, a pillar of identity and community, and an essential element in decision-making and healing. At Safe Havens, we believe that rural faith communities can be a resource for these rural women. However, faith communities and faith leaders need outreach, training, resources, and partnerships with service providers to respond safely and effectively.

As one of our rural interviewees pointed out, this will all take “more time, more money, and less stigma.” Although Safe Havens can’t hand out time or money, we are hoping to save you a bit of both. We have developed a toolkit that we hope will help you reach out to and collaborate with your local faith communities.



The toolkit, "Hearts and Hands: Piecing Together Faith and Safety for Rural Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence," includes:

- ❖ Tips for reaching out and planning a first visit to a faith-based organization.
- ❖ Information about sexual and domestic violence (including restroom and bulletin board flyers, suggestions for faith community engagement, and sexual and domestic violence booklets) that you can give to faith leaders in your community.
- ❖ A model cover letter that you can download, edit, and print on your own stationery to introduce the materials to faith communities and to provide contact information about your agency. This letter can be downloaded from the Safe Havens website at www.interfaithpartners.org.
- ❖ An "Outreach Challenges and Strategies" document to help you overcome some of the obstacles that you may encounter along the way.
- ❖ Insight from rural clergy themselves about how service providers can work with faith communities to address sexual and domestic violence. This document can be downloaded from the Safe Havens website at www.interfaithpartners.org.

We hope these resources provide you with information and tools that will help you build and strengthen collaborative and trusting relationships with your local faith communities. We also hope that faith leaders in your community will use the provided information to offer support and provide referrals to victims and survivors who turn to them for help.

Safe Havens is available by phone and email to talk with you about outreach and partnerships with faith communities. Whether you are experiencing challenges, just getting started, or have a wonderful model to share, we would love to hear from you!

To order additional materials, talk about your work with local faith communities, or get more information, please contact Safe Havens at 617-951-3980/3981 or at info@interfaithpartners.org.

Safe Havens thanks you for the important work that you do in rural communities to help victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence find safety, hope, and healing. We are delighted to have the opportunity to join with you in this critical work.

Sincerely,



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Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence

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