



# **Guide to Building Partnerships between Service Providers and Faith Communities to Support Domestic and Sexual Violence Victims and Survivors**



**Pieces of a Bigger Picture**

Faith Communities and Service Providers Working Together  
to Support Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence



Dear Advocates, Colleagues, and Friends,

Welcome to what we hope is an ongoing conversation about how you can build partnerships with local faith leaders that will support victims and survivors of abuse. Safe Havens' staff has worked locally and nationally since 1991 to build partnerships between service providers and faith leaders. Our staff and Board include representatives of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, as well as committed lay leaders and ordained faith leaders. We come to this conversation as faith-based people who are deeply concerned about safety and justice for victims.

Since 2003, Safe Havens has provided technical assistance to Office on Violence Against Women grantees on building partnerships with local faith communities and faith leaders (both clergy and lay).<sup>1</sup> Starting in 2008, we created resources about elder abuse and faith, and since 2009 we have created resources and provided training for advocates and faith leaders in rural communities across the U.S. In 2010 and 2017, we conducted focused conversations to hear from service providers and faith leaders firsthand. We learned about the many successes you have had over the years and your efforts to include faith communities, particularly when working with marginalized communities. Faith leaders and service providers both spoke of the need for more time and funding to build trust and long-lasting partnerships. Every interviewee expressed that, despite the challenges, these partnerships proved invaluable, and that faith communities can be a critical resource in addressing domestic and sexual violence. These trends existed across the country, in urban and suburban communities as well as rural areas.

Using what we learned, we created a toolkit to provide strategies and resources that will help you work with local faith communities to better address the needs of victims. The toolkit, [Pieces of a Bigger Picture: Faith Communities and Service Providers Working Together to Support Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence](#), includes resources for you and for your local faith community leaders.<sup>2</sup>

This document, [Guide to Building Partnerships between Service Providers and Faith Communities to Support Domestic and Sexual Violence Victims and Survivors](#) (Partnership Guide), works with the resources in the toolkit. We hope it will help you:

- ❖ learn more about the importance of faith in the lives of victims of sexual and domestic violence,
- ❖ learn how faith community/service provider partnerships could help victims,
- ❖ learn how to find out more about faith communities in your local setting,
- ❖ reflect on some of the barriers to partnership,
- ❖ consider ways to address some of these barriers,
- ❖ identify effective strategies to nurture partnerships, and



- ❖ draw inspiration from examples of partnerships across the U.S. that are working to keep victims of sexual and domestic violence safer.

Thank you for all you are doing for victims and survivors, and for your work to invite faith communities and faith leaders to conversations about ending domestic and sexual violence.

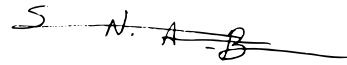
Sincerely,



Rev. Dr. Anne Marie Hunter  
Director



Alyson Morse Katzman, MPA  
Associate Director



Shireen Akram-Boshar  
Project Coordinator

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence

This Partnership Guide can be used alongside accompanying resources we have created for service providers and faith leaders in your community.

You can download service provider and faith community resources for free at [www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org).

For printed copies of resources for your local faith communities, please contact us at:

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence  
89 South Street, Suite 603, Boston, MA 02111  
[www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org) | [info@interfaithpartners.org](mailto:info@interfaithpartners.org)  
617-951-3980/3981

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Partnerships between Faith Leaders and Victim Service Providers	7
Looking at Sexual and Domestic Violence through the Eyes of a Faithful Victim	8
Looking at Sexual and Domestic Violence through the Eyes of a Faith Community	9
Faith as a barrier to safety	
Faith as a resource	
Why Faith Communities and Leaders Are Important	10
Learning More about Faith Communities and Faith-Based Organizations	10
Who are my local faith communities?	
What do faith communities do?	
What is the faith community's role in helping victims?	
Lessons Learned about Partnerships between Faith Leaders and Service Providers	13
Getting from Here to There	15
Facing challenges	
Moving forward	
Establishing trust	
Building a team	
Envisioning a new future	
Drawing Inspiration from Existing Partnerships	19
Concluding Thoughts	22
Appendix A – Resources on Sexual and/or Domestic Violence and Faith	23
Appendix B – Faith-Based Resources on “Safe Congregation” Programs for Children	24
Appendix C – What Faith Leaders Might Want to Know about Victim Service Providers	25

*Our heartfelt thanks to the service providers, clergy, and coalition staff members across the U.S. who shared their time, experiences, and wisdom so generously with us. We have learned so much from you all, and we are deeply grateful. It is an honor to share this journey with you. We are also grateful to the Office on Violence Against Women of the U.S. Department of Justice for their guidance and support.*





## INTRODUCTION

*“Jenna” is a 30-year-old wife and mother experiencing abuse at the hands of her husband, “Adam.” Jenna grew up in a devout household with the expectation that, soon after college, she should marry a fellow member of her faith and raise a family. She met Adam at an annual event for students of their faith, where he gave a keynote speech. She was struck by his charisma, adventurous personality, and the respect he’d gained throughout a network of students and professionals of her faith. He seemed to share her same mix of modern and traditional values.*

*After visiting her at her college a few times, Adam decided to take the official route and approach Jenna’s parents. She agreed, and he visited her hometown. Everyone was impressed by his manners and intellect, and her family and friends soon embraced him. Shortly after her college graduation, they were married.*

*It was during their honeymoon that Adam became controlling, and over the following months, his controlling behavior became physically violent. Soon Jenna found that every aspect of her day-to-day life was overshadowed by Adam’s control, anger, and by fear of his outbursts. But since the community looked up to Adam and stressed the importance of a successful marriage, Jenna felt stuck. She told herself that divorce would mean failure, and that she should put all her efforts into making the marriage work.*

*Seven years later, with two children and years of keeping silent about the abuse, Jenna realized that things had only gotten worse. She had turned closer to her faith for guidance, praying for the abuse to stop, wondering if it could be a test. She had mentioned having marital difficulties to her faith leader, who responded by telling her to increase her efforts to do whatever she could to make the marriage work. But a new faith leader had replaced him in the congregation in the past year, and this time, he listened more closely to what Jenna was saying.*

You may already be working with a case like Jenna’s in which social relationships and spiritual concerns affect a victim’s willingness to discuss sexual and domestic violence or access services.<sup>3</sup> Like Jenna, victims often turn to friends and family in their congregations and communities for help. The 2009 Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review comments, “Victims, survivors, and surviving family members consistently turn to their faith communities for support and safety, whether they disclose the abuse or not.”<sup>4</sup>

**Sacred texts are sometimes misinterpreted or misused, by perpetrators, by faith leaders, and even by survivors themselves, to support abuse, to silence the survivor, or to avoid accountability for the person who perpetrates sexual or domestic violence.**



The study also found that, “in the cases we reviewed, victims of domestic violence are more likely to disclose the abuse to someone in their faith community than they are to seek help from the police.”<sup>5</sup>

*Jenna’s new faith leader had attended meetings with the local domestic and sexual violence service agency. He learned that domestic and sexual violence are more prevalent and dangerous than he thought. He also realized that he brought important skills and knowledge to the table. He could respond to Jenna’s spiritual concerns, one of the main obstacles that had prevented her from seeking help.*

*The faith leader considered Adam a respected and valuable member of the community, so it was at first difficult for him to hear what Jenna was saying. But he had learned that abusers can be charming to people outside the relationship, so he listened with empathy. He acknowledged that he was not an expert on abuse, but told Jenna that he had met advocates that could give her options and help her prioritize safety. The two of them met with the local advocate together, which allowed Jenna to begin the process much more comfortably. She met with the advocate several times afterwards for counseling and safety planning.*


**Survivors of sexual and domestic violence often talk to faith leaders about their experiences, at least initially, in vague terms. This is because:**

- 1) they fear that if they tell the whole story, they won’t be believed, or the response will be, “if it’s that bad, why don’t you leave?” or “why didn’t you just say ‘no’”?**
- 2) most people don’t use the ugly, often profane language of sexual and domestic violence to talk to their faith leader and/or in sacred space so they “sanitize” the story,**
- 3) they are trying to decide whether it is safe to talk to the faith leader before they disclose too much.**

A faith community or congregation can be an effective resource for victims of sexual and domestic violence. For Jenna, as for many victims, faith is a critical resource, a pillar of identity and community, and an essential element in decision-making and healing.

*Meeting with the advocate helped Jenna recognize that she and her children were in danger as long as she stayed with Adam, and that she could get help to safely exit. Still, it was hard for Jenna to imagine an alternative, or imagine leaving the marriage. She was afraid of what members of the faith community might say. Since the expectation of maintaining a successful marriage and raising a family had been emphasized since childhood, Jenna worried about disappointing her family and her faith community.*





*Jenna's faith leader realized that she wanted to talk through each of her spiritual concerns, so they also continued to meet. He told her clearly that he did not blame her, and that Adam's behavior was wrong. Hearing this from a faith leader provided more relief than she would have imagined. They talked through verses of scripture that she had read and that seemed to pertain to her situation, and he provided interpretations that supported her need to prioritize her safety and wellbeing. A few months later, Jenna and her children had moved out and were restarting their lives free from Adam's abuse.*

Jenna found safety because her faith leader and advocate were able to work together, honor each other's areas of expertise, and provide options and services. This teamwork strengthened Jenna's safety net and addressed all the affects of the abuse – physical, emotional, and spiritual. With her faith questions answered, Jenna could move forward.

Some of you may be thinking that you've seen a story like Adam and Jenna's unfold in your own community. You may be wondering, *how can I find a faith leader like Jenna's in my neighborhood?* You may be thinking that Jenna's story would have had a very different outcome if it happened where you live. No matter where your community is in its response to a situation like Jenna's, we hope this Partnership Guide will help you develop partnerships with your own faith leaders in order to better meet the needs of victims and survivors.

## **PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FAITH LEADERS AND VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS**

When we talked at the beginning of this project to service providers and faith leaders, we asked, "would victims and survivors be safer if faith community leaders and service providers worked together as partners, as trusted colleagues"? The answer to this question was a resounding, "yes"! At the same time, we heard both stories of heroic faith leaders who acted decisively to help victims find safety, as well as stories of faith leaders who denied the problem, silenced victims, and discouraged anyone in the community from accessing services. Since 2003, positive stories of faith leaders who support victims' choices have increased. Still, many faith leaders haven't received training and resources.

This Partnership Guide is intended to dig deeper into this notion of partnership, to name barriers and challenges that we have heard from you and seen ourselves, and to explore how you and your local faith leaders can build and strengthen trusting partnerships.

There are many resources online and in print about collaboration as a broad topic, and we hope you will look at those as well. Our goal here is to look at partnership specifically as it relates to partnerships between advocates and faith leaders. One "first step" is to consider how faith affects a victim of sexual or domestic violence.

## LOOKING AT SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THROUGH THE EYES OF A FAITHFUL VICTIM

Domestic and sexual violence are heinous crimes that affect women, men, and children. For victims and survivors like Jenna who are religious, spiritual, or affiliated with a faith community, faith can be both a resource and a barrier.

**Faith as a barrier to safety** - Some survivors may remain in abusive situations or decide not to report sexual assault due to particular teachings of their faith. The silence within faith communities on these issues can shame and isolate victims. Expectations within faith communities can curtail a victim's choices. Advocates have also told us that faith leaders' responses to sexual and domestic violence are uneven and sometimes dangerous. Faith leaders may look for "quick fixes" for those who perpetrate sexual or domestic violence, rush victims to forgiveness, or encourage couple's counseling. In addition, faith leaders have a difficult time talking about sexual assault and abuse. Here, the silence speaks volumes about the lack of training, understanding, and resources. This leaves faith-based victims in a difficult and dangerous bind and can undermine accountability for those who perpetrate sexual and domestic violence.

**Faith leaders' responses to sexual and domestic violence are uneven and sometimes dangerous. "Quick fixes," glib forgiveness, and couple's counseling are never helpful.**

**Some signs of abuse may be subtle, including using Scripture or faith traditions to control another person.**

**Faith as a resource** - At the same time, we heard from service providers, and we know from speaking with victims, that faith can be a tremendous resource. A victim's faith community may be an island of respite, a place of support, and a source of strength. In the midst of the isolation, faith may help victims stay connected to their country and language of origin, family, traditions, culture, and values. In the midst of the losses, faith may be one resource a victim can hold on to. In the midst of the confusion, faith may help a victim regain their balance. In the midst of desolation, faith may give a victim hope. Some victims may return to their faith or explore becoming involved in a faith community as part of their healing process.

Because faith may be central to a victim's understanding of the situation and decisions about what to do, a victim's needs may not be fully met if faith is not addressed. Victims tell us they are sometimes uncomfortable when they go to a sexual and/or domestic violence services agency and "have to check their faith at the door."

The goal of any partnership with faith leaders is to maximize the ways in which faith is a resource.







## LOOKING AT SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THROUGH THE EYES OF A FAITH COMMUNITY

There are many ways that sexual and domestic violence emerge as issues within a congregation, and it is important that you consider the full range of possibilities when working with your local faith leaders. Sexual and/or domestic violence may be present in the faith community in any of these situations:

- ❖ a married or dating couple (adults or teens), with or without children,
- ❖ children who are sexually abused at home by a parent, step-parent, or other caretaker,
- ❖ adults who abuse substances or exhibit mental illnesses due to an underlying history of sexual abuse or sexual assault,
- ❖ teens who respond to current or past sexual assault or abuse or dating violence through substance abuse, delinquency, unplanned pregnancy, or poor school performance,
- ❖ newcomers to a faith community who are seeking healing or relief from the pain of past sexual or domestic violence,
- ❖ someone (including a faith leader) who has abused or sexually assaulted adults or children in the past,
- ❖ faith leaders who themselves are victims of sexual and/or domestic violence, who will need to commit time and energy to their own healing, or
- ❖ perpetrators of child abuse or child sexual abuse who see faith communities as an easy avenue for access to children or teens.

**For faith-based resources that address keeping children safe within congregations, see Appendix B.**

Your local faith leaders may need your help in gathering resources, providing referrals to the breadth of local services (sexual and domestic violence service providers, health care, mental health, substance abuse, law enforcement, etc.), and knowing about and complying with your state's mandatory reporting requirements regarding abuse of children, older adults, or adults with disabilities. In addition, you can help faith leaders

**For information about your state's mandatory reporting of child abuse, see [www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/manda.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm). For information about your state's mandatory reporting of abuse of older adults and/or adults with disabilities, see [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov).**

develop policies and procedures for responding to perpetrators both within and outside of the congregation. A partnership with you can help to ensure that the response of faith leaders to victims of sexual and domestic violence is safe, empowering, and consistent with other community-based services.

## WHY FAITH COMMUNITIES AND LEADERS ARE IMPORTANT

When we interviewed advocates nationally by phone in 2010 and 2017, many enthusiastically described the centrality of faith in local settings. Faith may be particularly important to victims who are low-income, immigrants or refugees, older, or members of a racial, religious, cultural, or ethnic minority community, where faith is often especially vibrant.

Victims have told us repeatedly that abuse affects them in body, mind, AND spirit. Their faith communities and leaders are sometimes the most important element in their understanding of and responses to the situation.

In addition, faith leaders are uniquely located to respond to sexual and domestic violence. They are trusted confidantes who have supported families through other crises. They know individuals and families across generations. They are often involved during life-cycle events (births, deaths, marriages) when violence may begin or escalate. They are often the point of first disclosure.

Faith leaders can help you understand the norms, languages, values, or customs of a community. Partnerships with faith communities can be a helpful component of your ongoing work to meet the needs of your clients and strengthen community access to your services.

## LEARNING MORE ABOUT FAITH COMMUNITIES AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Faith communities can play a vital role in responding to sexual and domestic violence, referring victims of all ages to services, providing information, support, and spiritual guidance, and, where safe, supporting accountability. In addition, faith community leaders can proactively talk to their congregations about prevention and can address the wider social norms that support violence, and particularly violence against women.


At the same time, the complexity and diversity of faith communities are daunting. One service provider called it “so overwhelming”! Building a partnership with faith communities begins with knowing more about them.

### Who are my local faith communities?

At Safe Havens, we use the plural “faith communities” or “faith-based organizations” to reflect the varied beliefs and organizational structures that are present in your local community. From independent local congregations to hierarchical organizations linked locally and globally; from a few like-minded believers to interfaith gatherings, faith communities and faith-based organizations are nothing if not diverse.







This diversity can be daunting to anyone engaged in faith community outreach and collaboration. To help with basic information about the religious institutions in a local area, we use a book called [How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook](#), edited by Stuart M. Matlins and Arthur J. Magida. Also helpful is Jean Anton's book, [Walking Together: Working with Women from Diverse Religious and Spiritual Traditions](#). In addition, many faiths and denominations maintain websites that will tell you more about who they are and what they do.

Your background research can help you answer some of the basic questions. When does the community meet? What do they call their leaders? How might their community norms affect an adherent who is a victim of sexual and/or domestic violence? For more tips on what to do before you begin outreach, please see the resources in our Toolkit, [Pieces of a Bigger Picture: Faith Communities and Service Providers Working Together to Support Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence](#). Look especially at the "Before You Start" and "The First Visit" checklists, as well as the "Guide for Service Providers Reaching Out to Faith-Based Organizations Regarding Domestic and Sexual Violence." All these resources are available at [www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org).

Because victims and survivors may disclose to an ordained or official leader, someone sitting next to them in the choir or congregation, or the administrative assistant, it is important to empower as many people as possible within a congregation to respond to victims and survivors. We like to think of everyone in the congregation as a potential "first responder," someone who can listen with sympathy, provide support, and refer victims to your services. Take a broad approach to working with your local congregations. Include as many people and as many facets of the congregation as possible.

### **What do faith communities do?**

What faith communities do is as diverse as who they are. They may gather for worship, prayer, healing, education, spiritual growth, social justice and change, mission, outreach, community organizing, evangelism, for all these reasons, or for many others. In addition, faith communities are often a community of people who care for, visit, and support one another. This gives faith leaders unique access to individuals and families.

Faith community leaders and members (clergy and lay) are often trusted and respected. As a result, victims may reach out to a faith leader, however guardedly, when faced with sexual assault or domestic violence. (In fact, faith leaders tell us that more people in their congregations disclose after the faith leader takes steps to learn more and begins to talk about sexual and domestic violence.) This makes faith leaders important. If faith leaders in your community recommend your agency and refer victims to your services, this will increase access to and the effectiveness of your services.

In addition, congregations often house community organizations such as Scouts, AA and Al Anon meetings, exercise classes, computer literacy classes, supervised visitation, community re-entry programs, nursery school or adult day care, a free medical or dental

clinic, homeless shelter, food pantry, and so on. Any materials about your programs and services that are made available within a faith community's building have the potential to reach many segments of your community.

## **What is the faith community's role in helping victims of sexual and domestic violence?**

Victims of sexual and domestic violence may ask faith leaders for help. We ask the faith leaders we work with to:

- ❖ listen with compassion and without blame or judgment.
- ❖ respond to faith-based questions and reassure the victim that their faith does not condone sexual or domestic violence,
- ❖ empower victims by providing options and respecting their decisions,
- ❖ offer ongoing spiritual, emotional, and material support,
- ❖ refer the victim to sexual and domestic violence service providers, and
- ❖ where required, and ideally in partnership with a service provider or advocate, report abuse of children, older adults, or adults with disabilities.

**See the [Pieces of a Bigger Picture](#) toolkit for bathroom flyers (for victims and survivors) and bulletin board flyers (for first responders) on domestic and sexual violence that are appropriate for faith communities. You can add your agency's local contact information to these flyers.**

See the [Pieces of a Bigger Picture](#) toolkit for more about how faith communities can respond to domestic and sexual violence.

Faith leaders will respond to victims more safely and effectively if they have learned more about sexual and domestic violence and built partnerships with you BEFORE a victim or survivor turns to them for help. In addition, faith leaders need forums in which to carefully consider their scriptures and traditions and how these can be resources for victims.

Please see Appendix C for some of the things that faith leaders might want to know about you and your services.







## LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FAITH LEADERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

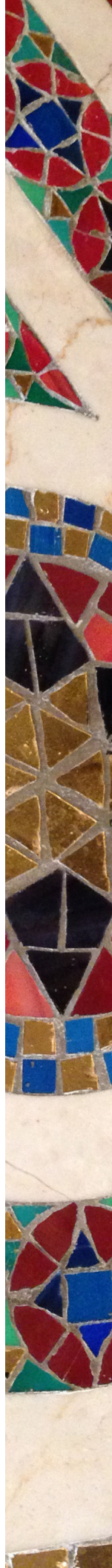
While the benefits of partnership are significant, there are also potential challenges. Not every faith community and victim service provider will find it easy to work together. These relationships can be helpful, but they can also be uneven and complicated.

We named some of the challenges you may encounter when you reach out to faith leaders in [A Guide for Service Providers: Reaching Out to Faith-Based Organizations Regarding Domestic and Sexual Violence](#).<sup>6</sup> These include time constraints, over-commitment, minimizing, etc. For each challenge, the Outreach Guide suggests corresponding strategies that may be helpful.


Our conversations with service providers and faith leaders revealed additional challenges that may arise as partnerships develop, including the following.

- ❖ Language is a challenge on many levels.
  - ❖ Both service providers and faith leaders need to avoid jargon. For example, refer to a “restraining order” rather than the statute number, or use “district attorney” instead of “DA.” Faith leaders should avoid the “alphabet soup” of faith community hierarchies and committees as well as any language that may not be understood by those outside the community.
  - ❖ Survivors may “sanitize” what they say to faith leaders because the language of abuse is ugly, harsh, and often profane. At the same time, survivors may leave out faith when speaking with an advocate. If you are not on the same page with a faith leader, it may be because the victim is only able to talk about part of the experience with you and part of the experience with the faith leader. To provide holistic support, it is helpful for advocates and faith leaders to collaborate.
- ❖ The “culture” and expertise within the agency may also be a challenge. One service provider said that she and her agency would need to do some cross-training and internal work to be fully prepared to support victims and survivors of faith, and would need “a culture change in the agency” to do this.
  - ❖ Survivors are wrestling with faith-based questions around forgiveness, healing, divorce, sexuality, gender roles, marriage, and so forth. Domestic and/or sexual violence agencies have neither the expertise nor the mandate to respond to these faith-based concerns. It will be more effective to train faith leaders to understand sexual and domestic violence and rely on their expertise to address related spiritual questions.
  - ❖ If the agency receives government funding of any kind, this further complicates the situation.
  - ❖ Some agencies report that staff members sometimes try to “convert” other staff members. As a result, the agency avoids conversations about faith.

- ❖ Some advocates see faith exclusively as a barrier to safety rather than a resource. This may translate into an unspoken message to victims that they should not talk about their faith.
- ❖ When both the victim and the perpetrator are in the congregation, faith leaders may struggle to respond. Their mandate is to care for everyone, and supporting the victim while holding the perpetrator accountable feels to some faith-affiliated people like “taking sides.” To avoid this, some faith leaders try not to get involved, although many recognize that inaction ultimately allows the abuse to continue. If they partner with you, faith leaders may feel better able to support survivors and address the needs of those who abuse their partners.
- ❖ Faith leaders and advocates have different areas of expertise. This sometimes leads to division. It will be more effective to work together to enhance safety and support for faith-based survivors.
  - ❖ Faith leaders are generalists, and can benefit from an advocate’s in-depth expertise on: 1) sexual and domestic violence, 2) effective responses, 3) mandatory reporting, 4) confidentiality, 5) how to safely hold perpetrators accountable, and 6) other community agencies that can help.
  - ❖ Advocates are specialists in domestic and/or sexual violence, and might be able to benefit from a faith leader’s knowledge of: 1) cultural competency and the experiences and challenges faced by the community, 2) faith-based concerns that a victim from the congregation might experience, and 3) how to support faith-based victims and survivors.
- ❖ Funding, staff turnover, and limited capacity are extremely challenging in many communities. Advocates may be doing multiple jobs and have trouble taking on one more thing. Clergy may be stretched thin, serving multiple congregations, or working second jobs. In addition, faith leaders are not paid to sit in on roundtables, attend task force meetings, etc. Service providers and faith leaders may need additional funding and capacity to support this work.
- ❖ Advocacy agencies focus on victim empowerment, while some religious communities uphold traditions of male decision making. A trusting relationship and a focus on victim safety may help move the conversation forward.
- ❖ There may be “turf issues.”
  - ❖ Faith leaders may feel defensive or embarrassed if they did not know about or respond effectively to a victim. They may struggle to accept the fact that sexual and domestic violence are present in their congregation. Faith leaders may see the intervention of a service provider as a challenge to their professional skills or an unwelcome intrusion in their work.
  - ❖ Advocates may feel uncomfortable asking about a victim’s faith or referring to a faith leader to address faith-related needs. Also, some advocates reported that interventions offered by well-meaning but untrained faith leaders sometimes challenge their professional skills or judgment.





- 
- ❖ There may be “trust issues” as well.
    - ✦ Faith leaders don’t always trust advocates. They may think advocates “break up families” or represent the government. Faith leaders may also disagree with advocates on critical issues such as sexual orientation, gender roles, and gender equity. Faith community leaders may be concerned that advocates do not understand the family, its history, or its faith. Faith leaders may be concerned that advocates will undermine the faith of congregants who seek services.
    - ✦ Advocates don’t always trust faith communities. They may have encountered untrained faith leaders who responded in a haphazard, unsafe way. They may have experienced faith leaders who “keep families together at all costs.” They may have seen faith leaders who undermined a victim’s ability to name, heal from, or prosecute a sexual assault, or to take the necessary steps to seek safety.
  - ❖ Faith leaders are often unfamiliar with a team approach, and may not automatically turn to outside people or agencies for help.
  - ❖ National trainings are great, but everyone needs practice and opportunities to integrate new skills and protocols at the local level. Several advocates reported that they are looking for ways to integrate questions about faith (e.g., in asking about a client’s existing support network) in hotline and volunteer trainings, intake, and work with individual clients.
  - ❖ There may be faith leaders that advocates simply cannot work with, either because they do not respond to outreach calls, or because they consistently compromise victim safety. In these cases, it is best to move on. Seeds have been planted that may come to fruition at another time. Also remember that other faith leaders in the community may be allies and ambassadors and may be able to help build connections with these “hard-to-reach” faith leaders.

## GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

### Facing challenges

You may have seen some or all of these challenges at work in your own community. Because each community is different, cookie cutter strategies are not effective – there is no one recipe that leads to universal success. However, we have identified some principles that seem to help communities move forward.

- ❖ Faith leaders and service providers cannot wait for full agreement on every issue before they begin to work together. Despite their differences, they must take a “leap of faith,” dive in, and commit to working with and learning from one another while learning together about how to better meet the needs of victims. In areas where there is disagreement, we have sometimes found it effective to focus not on the disagreement itself, but on the impact on the victim. For example, we sometimes say to faith leaders: “no matter where you stand on wider immigration issues, if

a victim feels that they cannot call the police or ask for help, we can agree that this compounds their isolation and prolongs the trauma.” Or: “no matter what you believe about sexual orientation, if the victim is afraid to ask for help for fear of being ‘outed,’ we can agree that this compounds their shame and deepens the trauma.” Sometimes, focusing on the impact on the victim helps to open a door for discussion.


- ❖ Both faith leaders and service providers speak of justice and peace. Both strive to better their communities. Both stand on heartfelt values. Both care deeply about the wellbeing of community members. Agreeing that everyone should be safe and free from violence and assault in their homes and faith communities, at school, and in the streets may be a good place to begin to build common ground. Ask faith leaders with whom you are already working to help you frame your work in terms that their colleagues will most readily understand.
- ❖ Partnership is a two-way street: everyone has valuable information and skills to bring to the table. Partnership requires that both faith leaders and service providers acknowledge each other’s expertise, welcome each other as colleagues, and work together toward a common goal.
- ❖ Building partnerships is time- and labor-intensive. Funders, advocates, and faith leaders must commit for the long haul. The people you serve will reap the rewards when they know more about sexual and domestic violence, when they have better access to your services, and when their work with you is supported by their faith communities. In addition, both faith leaders and service providers ultimately save time if they are able to rely on and refer to each other. One service provider said, “Payoff for the faith-based outreach and training we have done has been phenomenal . . . .”

**Agreeing that everyone should be safe and free from violence and assault in their homes and faith communities, at school, and in the streets may be a good place to begin to build common ground.**

## **Moving forward**

Healthy partnerships begin with mutual respect. We must listen to each other, build trust, and take time to develop a shared vision of communities where people are safe and victims are heard and supported. Often we have more shared goals than disagreements. It is crucial to ask questions and create a conversation that honors everyone’s knowledge, experience, and expertise.

As you begin to overcome challenges and build a trusting partnership, consider the following questions, which are adapted from Michael McCampbell’s “The Collaboration Toolkit for Community Organization.”<sup>7</sup>

- 
- ❖ What perceptions do victim service providers and faith community leaders have of each other?
  - ❖ Where did these perceptions start?
  - ❖ Are any of these perceptions inaccurate or founded on myths rather than facts?
  - ❖ What results/outcomes do we BOTH want for our community?
  - ❖ What can we agree upon?

While the challenges are daunting, there is hope. There are communities where faith community leaders and victim service providers are working effectively together. So, we know it can be done!

## Establishing trust

Trust is the foundation of any partnership, but building trust takes time and patience. Start from the assumption that developing mutual, trusting partnerships will be an ongoing, long-term effort, and not a one-time event. The movement toward trust often begins with a one-on-one meeting or a site visit.

**Developing mutual, trusting partnerships will be an ongoing, long-term effort, and not a one-time event.**

In addition, consider these elements of trusting partnerships,<sup>8</sup>

- ❖ ***Listen respectfully.***

When a victim advocate or faith leader shares his or her perspective, don't judge what they are saying. Instead, keep an open mind. Try to understand. Don't try to persuade them to agree with you.

- ❖ ***Follow up.***

After an initial meeting, follow up and plan a next step together. Communicate regularly, in person if possible. Answer questions, and ask your own.

- ❖ ***Establish group agreements.***

Group agreements help to ensure basic courtesy, and encourage everyone to ask questions, offer opinions, and listen to others. Group agreements can also establish a space in which people of all faiths and people who do not subscribe to any faith are welcome. Some questions to ask are below.

- ✦ What agreements can we make that will help us work together? Possible answers, which are adapted from "Authentic Dialogue Principles" by BluOpal Consulting, include:

- ◇ We will keep our conversations confidential.
- ◇ We will participate, not dominate.
- ◇ We will be curious and ask questions to understand.



- ◇ We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience.
- ◇ We will respect and learn from differences.
- ◇ “No one gets to be wrong . . . Everyone is right, but only partially.”<sup>9</sup>
- ✦ What do we need to know about each other to work together most effectively? Answers from faith leaders could include: “I follow certain dietary laws,” “I greet people with something other than a handshake or hug,” or “I can’t meet on certain days of the week or religious holidays.” Your answers could include any of the above, as well as a reminder that you prioritize safety and confidentiality.
- ✦ How can we honor the faiths and traditions of everyone in the room?
  - ◇ Offer kosher, vegetarian, halal, or other food as necessary, or no food during times when faith communities are fasting.
  - ◇ When speaking of your own experience, use words that fit (Qur’an, church, rabbi, etc.) But when speaking of the wider faith community, use more general terms that include everyone (scripture, sanctuary, faith leader, etc.)
  - ◇ Avoid Holy Days, holidays, and other special celebrations when scheduling meetings and training events.

❖ **Face and discuss challenges.**

You will not agree with all faith leaders on all topics. Faith leaders don’t even agree with each other on all topics! Try to understand the faith leader’s position and why it is important. “Agree to disagree,” stay victim focused, and emphasize the common goal: working together to keep victims safer.

## Building a team

Both within your agency and within a local faith community, think in terms of teams of people who can support the partnership. For example, anyone within a congregation, from the music director to the administrative assistant, could be called upon to respond to a survivor. Cast the net as widely as possible (music program, religious education, women’s and men’s groups). Teach as many people as possible the warning signs and how to respond. The support of those in leadership is also important to making sure that resources and energy are committed to the partnership. This provides depth and breadth for the effort and brings in multiple perspectives.

At the same time, your agency’s team should include community outreach, support group leaders, and advocates, among others. All of these could contribute to the effort to build long-term partnerships with faith communities.

Within both faith communities and victim service providers, think about people who are “bridges.” For example, does the congregation include people who work for a service provider? Does the service provider include people who attend a local faith community? These may be people who can help catalyze effective partnerships.





These questions<sup>10</sup> may help you identify additional partners.

- ❖ Who cares if sexual and domestic violence are addressed in our community?
- ❖ Who is affected?
- ❖ Who can help?
- ❖ How can we honor the diverse knowledge and skills that we bring to the table?

An annual event may help focus efforts and build your team. Perhaps you could ask faith leaders to help you plan and host a “Day of Remembrance” or vigil that memorializes and honors those whose lives have been affected. Alternatively, you might plan an annual event that honors Sexual Violence Awareness Month (April), Elder Abuse Awareness Day (June 15), Domestic Violence Awareness Month (October), or Victim of Homicide Month (November 20 – December 20). A used cell phone drive or other collection (coats, toiletries, duffel bags) that supports your agency is another good way to engage faith communities and build partnerships.

### **Envisioning a New Future**

One-time events can be helpful, but don't be too short-sighted! Think in terms of annual events! Set your sights on a partnership that endures. Take the time to name your long-term hopes and dreams. With this in mind, think about both short-term and longer-term goals.

One-time events can be great for raising awareness and generating energy, but it is also important to build trusting relationships with one another that bear fruit in shared work and mutual referrals over time.

**Remember that the ultimate goal is an ongoing, mutual partnership that will improve the safety of victims.**

### **DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS**

The domestic violence and sexual assault movements are only 42 years old. So, partnerships between faith communities and service providers that address domestic and sexual violence are relatively new. There is no set model for what these partnerships might look like. Although there are too many to discuss individually, a review of two successful partnerships may inspire us all to think broadly and creatively about partnerships in our own local communities. Despite the different approaches represented by these partnerships, they hold this in common: they are focused on safety and dedicated to empowering victims and survivors.

**“It is important to build the relationship [between advocates and faith leaders] before you need the relationship!”**

**Karen Bigelow-Varney,  
Outreach and Training  
Coordinator, New York State  
Coalition Against Domestic  
Violence**

### **New York**

The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which was founded in 1978, hired an Outreach Coordinator to bring together various organizations in the state that serve victims and survivors. At a coalition meeting, a member of the Minority Disparities Group approached the Outreach Coordinator with questions about connecting with the faith community. The thinking was that faith-based organizations play an integral part in the community, especially in minority communities, so it seemed like a good idea to distribute information to faith leaders about

domestic and sexual violence. The Outreach Coordinator decided that she would reach out to faith leaders, and she began to put together and distribute information for them.


Several months later, the Outreach Coordinator convened the first of several meetings with faith leaders to discuss domestic and sexual violence. She describes this process as evolutionary and says “it continues to evolve.” For the Outreach Coordinator, there were many challenges around the use of scripture and how in some instances it could be used to paralyze victims. She was also challenged to work with faith leaders around couple’s counseling and its ineffectiveness (and dangerousness) when there isn’t a balance of power in the relationship. The Outreach Coordinator learned over time that working with a few clergy in the community resulted in a group of supporters that could help her engage other clergy. She learned that clergy listen to and learn from other clergy, and that training clergy to train others was more effective than clergy being trained by a service provider.

The clergy group decided to start with small steps, like setting up a quiet space in their buildings for victims to make phone calls or read through resources. They agreed to help victims set up email accounts that could be used when away from home to seek employment or other information.

The diversity of faith, race, and culture makes the clergy group especially powerful. They learned early on that domestic and sexual violence are not limited to any particular faith, but are present in every congregation. Ultimately, the Outreach Coordinator would like to see this group of faith leaders reach out to additional colleagues in their own communities to grow the group further. She would like to see them develop an evaluation tool that they can use to gauge the success of their collective work. She continues to work with them and looks forward to their collective success.







**“Clergy can have a big impact. If women see the pastor being proactive on domestic violence, then they can talk about it and seek services. The tone the pastor sets definitely makes a difference.”**

**Verzella Bauman,  
Rural Outreach  
Coordinator, South Dakota  
Network Against Family  
Violence and Sexual  
Assault**

## **South Dakota**

In South Dakota, there are 16 Rural Outreach Advocates across the state. They cover 62 of the 66 counties and offer services for both domestic and sexual violence. They describe the faith leaders they’ve worked with as “forward thinking.” They have even been contacted by faith leaders who were new to the community and looking for assistance for congregants.

Most of the faith leaders admitted having not had prior domestic or sexual violence training. Some faith leaders stated that in the past they were told to “keep the family together at all costs.” The Rural Outreach Advocates, with the supervision of their Executive Director, have worked to build relationships with all faith leaders, and have provided training and education as needed.

The Rural Outreach Advocates made a presentation about their work to the South Dakota Ministerial Alliance. This helped the advocates build and strengthen relationships with local faith leaders. In one incident, a victim ran from her home to a church for safety during a crisis. The pastor helped her call an advocate and sat with her until the advocate arrived. The pastor and the advocate worked together with the victim to discuss her concerns and a plan of action.

The Rural Outreach Advocates have distributed domestic and sexual violence posters to the local faith leaders and have received requests for additional posters. One advocate stated that when called to a victim’s home, she asks if the victim would like her to contact a faith leader.

Over time, a diverse group of faith leaders has emerged that the Outreach Advocates depend on to provide leadership on issues around faith and sexual and domestic violence. These clergy have volunteered to meet with victims and survivors when this is requested by the victim.

The advocates have learned that “clergy can have a real impact in prevention by including sexual and domestic violence prevention education in their work with youth within the congregation. Clergy also have the ability to raise awareness in women’s groups in their congregations. It is imperative that the congregations see them play a proactive role on the subject.” The faith leaders are clear that “a person’s presence in the pew doesn’t mean that they can’t abuse.”

The advocates have also learned that outreach is most effective when someone from the faith community speaks to others in the faith community. This is particularly true if the clergy presenter and the participants share the same faith and culture. For example, one domestic violence support group is being led by nuns in the Hispanic Center. This supplements the work already being done by domestic violence advocates at the Hispanic Center who are themselves immigrants.

The Outreach Advocates have developed resources that are specific for faith communities, including information about the roles of law enforcement and various service providers. They address couple's counseling and court mediation. They also encourage clergy to build a team of trained congregants who can respond effectively to victims and survivors.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A victim of sexual and domestic violence reached out to a service provider. She felt that she should leave her home and marriage for her own safety and for the safety of her children. However, her faith leader was counseling her to "give the marriage another try." For many months, this woman carried books, brochures, and other resources about sexual and domestic violence to her faith leader. She told him everything she was learning in support group. She shared her own experiences. She lent him videos that she borrowed from the service provider's library. She worked hard to "bridge the gap" between her faith community and the domestic and sexual violence service provider.

In the end, her faith leader came to agree with her that, for her own safety and the safety of her children, she had to leave the marriage. With his support, she left and found safety.

While we rejoice in the ultimate outcome of this story, it also is heartbreaking. Victims and survivors have enough on their plates without taking on the job of "liaison" between faith leaders and service providers. This is just one of the many victims we have heard about over the years who has fueled our passion to bring together faith leaders and service providers. Because, ultimately, victims deserve the very best that we both have to offer.

Victims are safer when we work together. Victims are more likely to access services, implement safety plans, hold perpetrators accountable, and heal if both advocates and faith leaders support their efforts. Perpetrators are more likely to be held accountable if both faith leaders and service providers support accountability. And domestic and sexual violence are more likely to end if we can come together, face the issues together, and work as partners to build a more just and peaceful world.





## APPENDIX A: RESOURCES ON SEXUAL AND/OR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND FAITH

There are additional resources about sexual and domestic violence and faith online. Please check out these websites:

Faith Trust Institute

[www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

Jewish Women International

[www.jwi.org](http://www.jwi.org)

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

[www.nsvrc.org/publications/collaborative-responses/faith-based-responses](http://www.nsvrc.org/publications/collaborative-responses/faith-based-responses)

Peaceful Families Project

[www.peacefulfamilies.org](http://www.peacefulfamilies.org)

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence

[www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org)



## APPENDIX B: FAITH-BASED RESOURCES ON “SAFE CONGREGATION” PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

Denominational resources for keeping children safe within a congregation:

Southern Baptist Convention

<http://www.sbc.net/localchurches/ministryhelp.asp>

Unitarian Universalist Association on Congregations

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/balancingacts/index.shtml>

United Methodist Church’s “Safe Sanctuary Policy”

<http://www.gbod.org/ministries/family/safe/default.html>

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection

<http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/>

For additional interfaith resources on clergy sexual abuse, child abuse, and/or child sexual abuse, please see FaithTrust Institute’s website at [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org).





## APPENDIX C: WHAT FAITH LEADERS MIGHT WANT TO KNOW ABOUT VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS

The services provided by domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, or sexual and/or domestic violence service providers can be critical in helping victims. Often, these services are not well known within the faith community. You can help by openly describing your services and how you work. Here are some ideas for places to start.

### **What are local victim service providers?**

Faith leaders may know little about victim service providers, and the diversity of models and services may be confusing. Take the time to explain whether you provide services for only sexual assault or only domestic violence victims, or whether your agency addresses both these different but related issues. Explain whether you also serve those who abuse, and if you don't, make sure faith leaders in your area know where batterers' intervention services are available. Be clear about your structure and whether you are an independent, stand alone nonprofit or part of a larger agency. Identify the geographic area you serve, but explain that you often serve people from outside that area who are not safe in their own communities.

There are some things faith leaders can do to get to know your agency better. For example, if you offer trainings to community members who want to volunteer, faith leaders could attend these trainings. This is a great way for faith leaders to learn more about domestic and sexual violence and your services.

There are also opportunities that don't involve training, such as helping with a fun run, community gala, or other fundraising event. Or, faith leaders could ask what you are particularly in need of (toiletries? duffel bags? clothes? toys for the children?) and organize a drive to collect and deliver these items.

Faith leaders can also do some background research. Refer them to your website to learn more about your services and current collaborations and how you can be contacted. Arrange to bring or send cards, posters, brochures, or other information that faith leaders can make available in their congregations. Offer to make a presentation to their congregation or leadership team. Sit down for lunch or a cup of coffee.

### **What do victim service providers do?**

There is considerable diversity among agencies, so let your faith leaders know which services your agency offers: a 24/7 hotline; shelter (short-term or "emergency" and/or long-term or "transitional"); support groups; individual and group counseling; court advocacy; hospital accompaniment; community outreach and education; prevention programs; advocacy with law enforcement, housing, or other systems; safety planning; lethality assessment; case management; and analysis of the power and control dynamic that drives domestic and sexual violence.

Explain that services for victims are available free of charge, whether or not a victim is actually housed or sheltered at your agency. Although some victims may not need shelter, they may benefit from free counseling and a support group.

Explain that advocates give victims information and options and allow victims to make up their own minds about how they want to move forward because this empowers victims and allows them to re-assert control over their own lives. Because of this empowerment model, you never tell victims what to do. Reassure faith leaders that you will NEVER say to a victim, “you have to get a divorce,” or “you have to prosecute this sexual assault,” or “you have to leave your home.”

### **What is the victim service provider’s role in helping victims?**

Let faith leaders know that your agency’s primary goal is to keep people safe, although “safe” is defined many different ways by many different victims. Any of the services mentioned above could help a victim stay safe.

By working from a victim-centered, empowerment model (be sure to explain what “victim-centered” and “empowerment” mean), your agency helps victims regain control over their lives, control that has been usurped by someone who has attempted to dominate and abuse them.





## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this Partnership Guide, we have used the term “faith leaders” to include both ordained and official leaders as well as those within the community who are recognized and respected leaders. Faith leaders could include imams, rabbis, pastors, and priests, as well as cantors, bishops, deacons, the choir director, the religious school leader, as well as all congregants.

<sup>2</sup> You can download all the toolkit resources for free at [www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org). Or, you can call Safe Havens at 617-951-3980 or email us at [info@interfaithpartners.org](mailto:info@interfaithpartners.org); we would be happy to send you printed copies of the faith community resources that you can distribute to faith leaders in your community.

<sup>3</sup> National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2003; Sims, 1998; Weisheit, Wells and Falcome, 1994; Weisheit, Wells, and Falcome, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Georgia Commission on Family Violence and Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2009 Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Georgia Commission on Family Violence and Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2009 Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> You can download this outreach guide and all the toolkit resources for free at [www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org). Or, you can call Safe Havens at 617-951-3980 or email us at [info@interfaithpartners.org](mailto:info@interfaithpartners.org); we would be happy to send you printed copies of the faith community resources that you can distribute to faith leaders in your community.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Michael S. McCampbell, “The Collaboration Toolkit for Community Organizations: Effective Strategies to Partner with Law Enforcement,” Community Oriented Policing Services, US Department of Justice, September 2010, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Michael S. McCampbell, “The Collaboration Toolkit for Community Organizations: Effective Strategies to Partner with Law Enforcement,” Community Oriented Policing Services, US Department of Justice, September 2010, pp. 34 – 35.

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from “Authentic Dialogue Principles,” by BluOpal Consulting.

<sup>10</sup> Michael S. McCampbell, “The Collaboration Toolkit for Community Organizations: Effective Strategies to Partner with Law Enforcement,” Community Oriented Policing Services, US Department of Justice, September 2010, p. 39.

*This project is supported by Grant No. 2015-TA-AX-K033, awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*

© Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence, 2018  
[www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org) ♦ 617-951-3980/3981





We chose to use mosaics in the design of "Pieces of a Bigger Picture" because they are common to many faith and artistic traditions throughout history. The mosaics you see in these resources are from Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and secular communities. They remind us of the diversity of people and faith communities that partner with Safe Havens and with local domestic and sexual violence agencies to end abuse.

Beautiful mosaics are made of broken pieces. For this reason, mosaics also speak to the experiences of survivors, who describe feeling "broken," or "shattered," and speak of "putting the pieces back together" as they courageously rebuild their lives after abuse. Survivors are the inspiration for these resources. One woman commented, "I am not damaged goods. I am a mosaic of everything that couldn't beat me."

We also chose mosaics because faith communities, sexual and domestic violence service providers, law enforcement, schools, hospitals, Adult Protective Services, and other allied professionals each represent an important piece of the bigger picture of safety, justice, and healing that survivors of sexual and domestic violence so richly need and deserve. Every one of us is critically important to the bigger picture. As David Crystal says, "To lose even one piece of this mosaic is a loss for all of us."

We hope these resources will encourage you to include faith communities in your work to end domestic and sexual violence.