



Supporting Victims of Sexual Violence in Our Faith Communities

Help for Faith Leaders and Congregations



Pieces of a Bigger Picture

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



Dear Faith Community Leaders and Members,

Sexual violence can be difficult to talk about, especially in our congregations. Like everyone else, people of faith struggle to understand sexual violence and its effects on survivors, families, and communities.

And so . . . we have mostly been silent.

People in our congregations and communities who have experienced sexual violence hear our silence loud and clear. These survivors often ask:

- ❖ “I’ve never heard anyone here talk about this before. Am I the only one this has ever happened to?”
- ❖ “Where can I find hope in this anguish?”
- ❖ “Why did this happen to me?”
- ❖ “Am I being punished?”
- ❖ “Is this part of a bigger plan for my life?”
- ❖ “Am I supposed to just forgive and forget?”

Sexual violence is any type of sexual contact or behavior committed against someone without that person’s explicit, freely given consent. Sexual violence includes a continuum of behaviors from verbal harassment to assault and rape.

Sexual violence affects more people than we think, and our silence does not help the survivors among us. These are the 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys who will be sexually abused by age 18, the 1 in 5 women and 1 in 33 men who experience a completed or attempted rape in their lifetimes, older adults who are particularly vulnerable, the college student who is sexually assaulted on campus, the woman who has been raped by her husband, or the employee who is sexually harassed or assaulted by a manager, boss, or someone in a position of authority.¹

Victims and survivors² of sexual violence are not just statistics. They are our siblings, our grandparents and cousins, our co-workers, friends, and neighbors, and beloved members of our congregation and community. Each of us knows someone who is affected.

Faith-affiliated victims of sexual violence need the support of their congregations. They need us to acknowledge that sexual violence happens within our communities. We all need to begin a conversation about it.

We hope that this booklet and the accompanying resources will help us begin a conversation that will lead to healing, justice, and peace for faith-affiliated victims and survivors of sexual violence in congregations across America.

Thank you for your work to keep our communities safe from sexual violence.

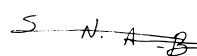
Sincerely,



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Director



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Project Coordinator

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence

“Sexual violence . . . is a violation of a human being's right to safety. The effects can be devastating . . .”³

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.

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For additional copies of this resource, please contact:

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You can download this and other resources for free at
www.interfaithpartners.org.




While it can be difficult to talk about sexual violence, faith communities already talk about healing, justice, and peace, which are all critical to victims and survivors.

“ *The longer you keep it to yourself, the harder it is.*⁴ ”

In the aftermath of sexual violence, **survivors can find healing** if they can talk about what happened, find support and safety in their congregations and communities, receive referrals to sexual violence services, connect to their spiritual resources, and feel empowered to move forward with their lives. Many survivors will have spiritual questions or crises. They may wonder whether to report the crime or confront the perpetrator. They may feel unclean or unworthy. Faith leaders and communities have a unique role to play in responding to these spiritually based questions and providing pastoral care that promotes healing, empowerment, and wellbeing.

Survivors can find justice when they are believed and not blamed, when they have the support they need to overcome the fear, trauma, and shame, and when perpetrators are held accountable. Many victims feel pressured to forgive, but forgiveness without accountability is hollow and certainly does not lead to justice. Faith leaders and communities have a unique role to play in supporting victims, allowing victims to forgive or move on in their own time, prioritizing accountability for perpetrators, and promoting justice for victims. Most of all, victims need to feel that their faith leaders and congregations stand with them.

“ *Community denunciation of the crime was of great importance to the survivors because it affirmed the solidarity of the community with the victim and transferred the burden of disgrace from victim to offender.*⁵ ”



And **survivors can find peace** if their community helps them be safe in their schools, neighborhoods, homes, and congregations. Faith leaders have a unique role to play in raising awareness about sexual violence, identifying spiritual resources that promote safety, and emphasizing the importance of safety to spiritual wholeness, peace, and wellbeing.

Survivors need faith community support to find healing, justice, and peace. In our communities and congregations, we need to talk about this. To start the conversation, let's look at some surprising facts.

“ *It was difficult for me to try to live a normal life again after the rape. There are simple daily routines people do that I was terrified to do. For example, I didn't feel safe walking anywhere, whether it was day or night.* ”⁶

Surprising Facts about Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is most often committed by someone who knows the victim, not a stranger.

People who perpetrate sexual assault usually attack someone they know – a friend, date, classmate, neighbor, coworker, or relative. Of adult victims, 73% knew the attacker, 38% were friends of the attacker, 28% were in an intimate relationship with the attacker, and 7% were a relative of the attacker. Child victims knew the offender before the attack 93% of the time.

About 50% of sexual assaults take place in the victim's own home. Another 20% occur in the home of a friend, neighbor, or relative.⁷

While most perpetrators of sexual violence are men, most men are not perpetrators.

Most men do not perpetrate sexual violence. However, those who do usually have multiple victims. They are also more likely to commit other forms of interpersonal violence.

Perpetrators of sexual violence may avoid using extreme violence in order to escape detection and punishment.

Fearing repercussions, assailants most often avoid extreme physical force during the assault to make it easier for them to deny the rape in its aftermath: "Instead of using weapons . . . or extreme physical force or violence, most undetected rapists premeditate their attacks, identify and isolate victims, and deliberately use only as much force as necessary, such as psychological weapons [threats, manipulation, coercion, intimidation, fear, and guilt] and alcohol."⁸

Whether weapons are used or not, most victims fear for their lives during an assault, especially if the attacker is larger and more powerful.

This means that victims may or may not be physically injured during an assault. The lack of physical injury does not mean that someone has not been assaulted.

Sexual violence is NOT about sex.

Sexual violence is "a crime not typically motivated by sexual desire but by the desire to control, humiliate, and/or harm."⁹

“By their nature, these crimes are displays of raw power, intended to subordinate the victim and to teach her to know her place.”¹⁰

Sexual assault is NEVER the victim's fault.

No one deserves to be sexually assaulted. "It doesn't matter what someone is wearing or how they are acting. No one asks to be raped."

Sexual violence can and does happen to "people of all genders, ages, races, religions, incomes, abilities, professions, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. However, social inequalities can heighten the risk."

Sexual violence affects all of us across the lifespan: from children and teens to adults of all ages.¹¹

Even within a marriage, rape CAN happen.

While many faith traditions encourage marital partners to meet each other's needs, being married does not imply that a partner is obligated to consent to sex at any time and in any situation. People who perpetrate domestic violence may also perpetrate sexual violence within an intimate relationship or marriage as part of a wider pattern of power, control, and abuse. Marital rape is a crime in the United States.

In general, religious traditions recognize the value and dignity of every human being, and the right of all people to live "free from threats, intimidation, force, pressure, or abuse of power or authority."¹² All victims of sexual violence deserve to be heard and supported and to seek safety, justice, and healing. As Maya Angelou (herself a survivor of sexual violence) said, "There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you." Faith communities have an important and unique role to play in making sure that survivors of sexual violence are heard with compassion and empowered to find the safety, justice, and healing they deserve.


So, What Is Sexual Violence?

Sexual violence is first and foremost violence. It is a crime that misuses human sexuality in order to control, humiliate, and harm. Sexual violence occurs whenever a person is forced, coerced, and/or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activity. This includes when the victim is unable to consent due to age, illness, disability, religious strictures, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Sexual violence includes rape, incest, child sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and unwanted sexual contact or touching.

Sexual violence violates a person's humanity and dignity and destroys their trust and feeling of safety on the most profound level. It affects all of us: survivors, loved ones, congregations, and communities. Sexual violence causes profound trauma that requires healing on all levels: physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual.

Sexual violence also violates the core values of the religious community, which include human dignity, justice, and peace. Unfortunately, even within faith communities, the sacred bonds of human relationship can be broken when someone perpetrates sexual violence. The congregation may then be faced with the dilemma of responding to the needs of both the victim and the perpetrator. The need to prioritize the safety and healing of the victim may require that the perpetrator is referred to a different congregation.¹³

Sexual violence perpetrated by a religious leader also occurs. This is a violation of sacred trust and an abuse of religious power and authority. The harm done to the survivor is compounded by the religious leader's power, authority, and standing in the community. Many faith



communities have developed ethical guidelines for religious leaders that condemn such misuse of religious power and authority.¹⁴

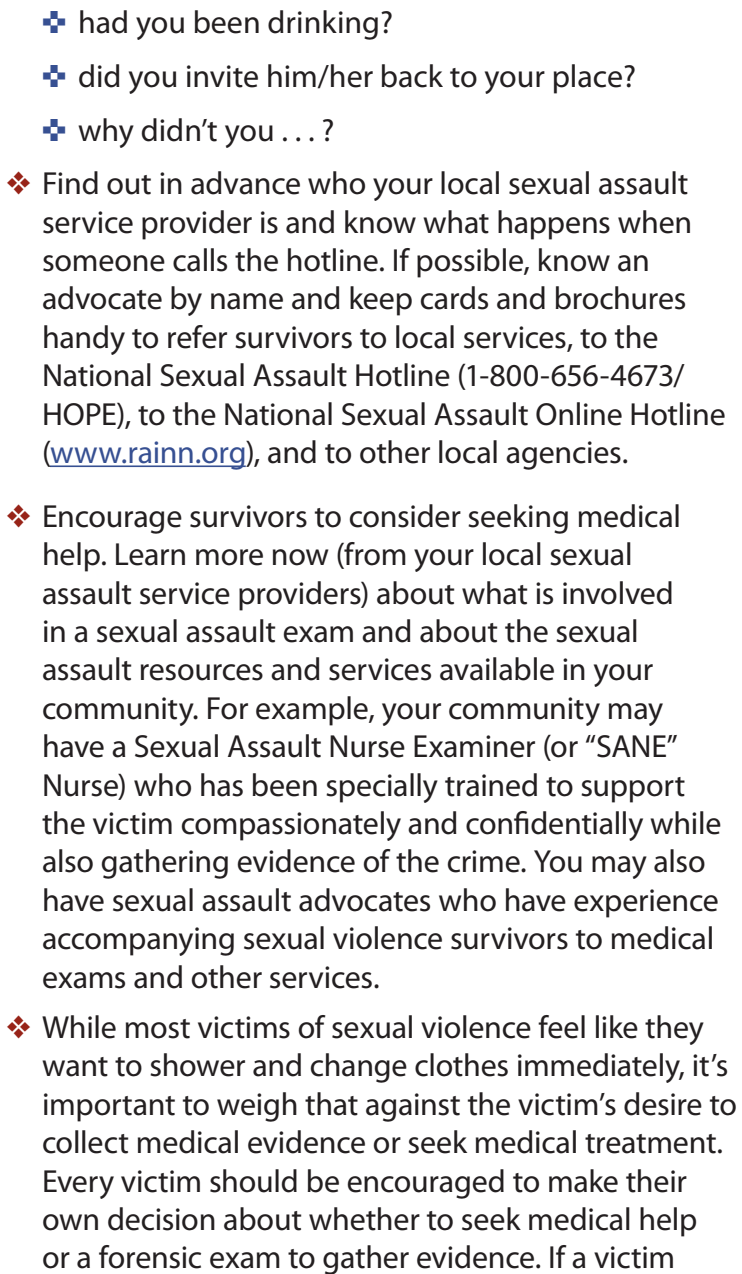
The actions of a perpetrator of sexual violence should never be condoned, and the survivor should never be blamed for the crime.

Anyone in the congregation could be called upon to help, so we all need to know how to provide compassionate support.

I'm a Member of a Congregation . . . How Can I Help a Survivor of Sexual Violence?

If a sexual assault has recently occurred, you can consider any of the following possible ways to support the survivor.

- ❖ Encourage survivors to get to a safe place and to prioritize their own safety.
- ❖ Believe the survivor. Many survivors fear that no one will believe them or that their experiences will be trivialized.
- ❖ Reassure survivors that they are not alone and not to blame – anyone can be a victim of sexual violence.
- ❖ Encourage survivors to make decisions for themselves, and honor those decisions.
- ❖ Use helpful phrases such as “how can I help?” or “I’m here to listen.”
- ❖ Avoid unhelpful questions or suggestions that, even when well-intentioned, implicitly blame victims, such as:
 - ❖ did you fight back?
 - ❖ did you call for help?
 - ❖ did you say no?
 - ❖ what were you wearing?

- 
- ❖ had you been drinking?
 - ❖ did you invite him/her back to your place?
 - ❖ why didn't you . . . ?
 - ❖ Find out in advance who your local sexual assault service provider is and know what happens when someone calls the hotline. If possible, know an advocate by name and keep cards and brochures handy to refer survivors to local services, to the National Sexual Assault Hotline (1-800-656-4673/ HOPE), to the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline (www.rainn.org), and to other local agencies.
 - ❖ Encourage survivors to consider seeking medical help. Learn more now (from your local sexual assault service providers) about what is involved in a sexual assault exam and about the sexual assault resources and services available in your community. For example, your community may have a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (or "SANE" Nurse) who has been specially trained to support the victim compassionately and confidentially while also gathering evidence of the crime. You may also have sexual assault advocates who have experience accompanying sexual violence survivors to medical exams and other services.
 - ❖ While most victims of sexual violence feel like they want to shower and change clothes immediately, it's important to weigh that against the victim's desire to collect medical evidence or seek medical treatment. Every victim should be encouraged to make their own decision about whether to seek medical help or a forensic exam to gather evidence. If a victim

chooses to have an exam, it is recommended that they do not shower, douche, change clothes, eat, drink, or smoke before the exam.

- ❖ Suggest that survivors talk to an advocate at your local sexual violence services agency or on the National Sexual Assault Hotline (1-800-656-4673/ HOPE) or the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline (www.rainn.org) for answers to questions about the criminal justice process. Many forms of sexual violence are crimes.
- ❖ Offer to accompany survivors to the hospital, police station, local sexual violence services, etc. Help survivors connect with local advocates who are trained to support survivors.

Over time, these are some other things you can do to help.

- ❖ Ensure enough time and a safe, private place to talk. Listen from your heart with compassion.
- ❖ Know your state's laws on mandated reporting. Assure the survivor of confidentiality unless:
 - ❖ what they disclose involves a situation that you are mandated to report (for example, sexual or physical violence perpetrated against a child, an older adult, or an adult with disabilities), OR
 - ❖ they suggest they might harm themselves or someone else.
 - ❖ For more information on mandatory reporting laws in your state, see <https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice/elder-justice-statutes-0#SL3> or <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/state/>.

- ❖ Be calm, compassionate, and nonjudgmental. Don't press for details. Allow survivors to tell the story in their own words.
- ❖ Reassure them that they can regain control of their life.
- ❖ Help faith-affiliated survivors talk about their faith. Survivors may be angry, confused, or feel betrayed. Listen to and honor the questions; you don't have to know all the answers. If appropriate, assure the survivor of your support and of the survivor's own strength and courage. Be a supportive presence. Provide hope, spiritual care, and resources.¹⁵
- ❖ Continue to support survivors throughout their recovery and/or the prosecution of their case. Offer both tangible support and spiritual resources.
- ❖ Take care of yourself. Talking about sexual violence, supporting survivors, and doing something to make your congregation's response more effective takes spiritual strength, determination, and courage! Stay connected to your resources, traditions, and spiritual disciplines.

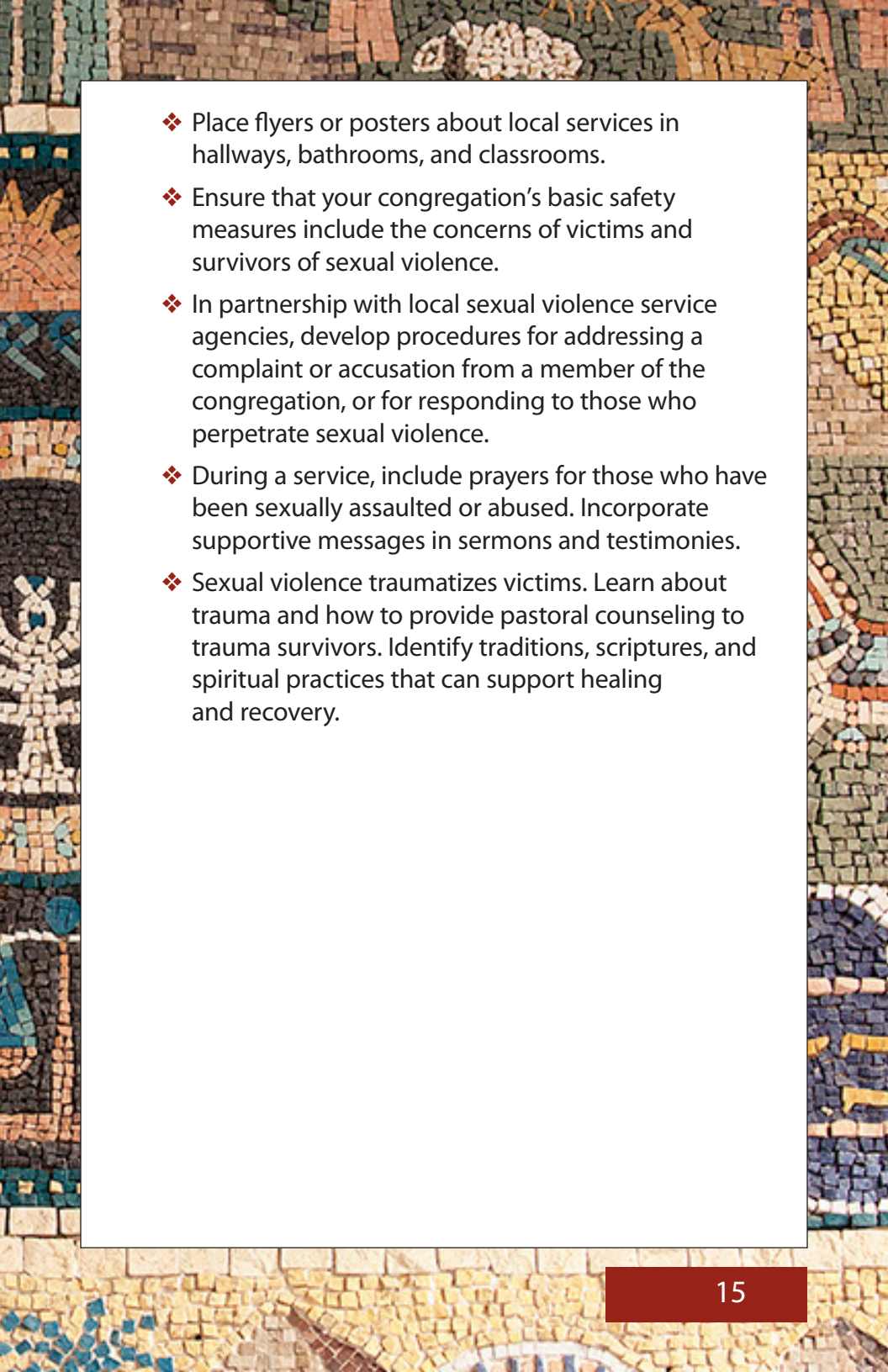
“ *[For survivors] the most important object was to gain validation from the community. This required an acknowledgement of the basic facts of the crime and an acknowledgement of harm.* ”¹⁶

How Can My Faith Community Prepare to Support Victims and Survivors?

Even before someone reaches out for help, you can act now to make your congregation a safe haven.

Faith communities cannot respond to victims of sexual violence alone. Work with your local sexual violence services agency to respond to individual victims, to address prevention, and to tackle the larger societal issues, such as racism, sexism, ageism, or homophobia, which can be used to justify sexual violence. The list below will give you some ideas.

- ❖ Develop partnerships with local sexual violence agencies, get to know the advocates, and collect brochures and referral cards to distribute in your congregation. Build a list of trusted resources and referrals for crisis response and long-term healing.
- ❖ Ask advocates to provide training to as many members of the congregation as possible. Survivors of sexual violence may disclose to the faith leader, but could also disclose to a trusted person within the congregation or someone on the staff. The more people who are trained, the better chance a victim has to receive effective support.
- ❖ Co-host events that break the silence and raise awareness, such as a film screening and discussion, a vigil, or a book group. Sponsor a guest speaker from your local sexual violence program. For example, you could invite an advocate to speak to parents in your congregation about how to talk with their children about sexual violence in age- and developmentally-appropriate terms.

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- ❖ Place flyers or posters about local services in hallways, bathrooms, and classrooms.
 - ❖ Ensure that your congregation's basic safety measures include the concerns of victims and survivors of sexual violence.
 - ❖ In partnership with local sexual violence service agencies, develop procedures for addressing a complaint or accusation from a member of the congregation, or for responding to those who perpetrate sexual violence.
 - ❖ During a service, include prayers for those who have been sexually assaulted or abused. Incorporate supportive messages in sermons and testimonies.
 - ❖ Sexual violence traumatizes victims. Learn about trauma and how to provide pastoral counseling to trauma survivors. Identify traditions, scriptures, and spiritual practices that can support healing and recovery.



*"The horizon leans forward,
offering you space to place
new steps of change."*

*Maya Angelou,
"The Rock Cries Out to Us Today"*

FOR IMMEDIATE HELP

Call your local police, sheriff, or Public Safety Officer, or dial 911 where available.

Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline
1-800-656-4673/HOPE | Visit the National Sexual Assault
Online Hotline at www.rainn.org

The National Sexual Assault Hotline is free, confidential, and available 24/7. Language translation is available. Anyone can call. You do not have to give your name or identifying information to receive help.

Add local service provider information.

*If there is no local information here,
call the National Sexual Assault Hotline
(1-800-656-4673/HOPE)
and ask for services in your area.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Sexual Violence Resource Center
www.nsvrc.org | 877-739-3895

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network
www.rainn.org | 202-544-3064

Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence
www.interfaithpartners.org | 1-617-951-3980

REFERENCES

¹ Adapted with permission and with many thanks from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Fact Sheet: What is Sexual Violence?" See www.nsvrc.org for additional information.

² Victim/Survivor: At the beginning of the domestic and sexual violence movements, those who had experienced domestic and sexual violence referred to themselves as "victims." It was important to convey to the wider community that domestic and sexual violence is a crime with an identifiable perpetrator and victim. However, the consciousness of the wider culture has evolved. Some victims now prefer to be called "survivor" because they have not been overcome. Safe Havens uses "victim" and "survivor" interchangeably while recognizing that every victim/survivor is much more than their experience of sexual violence, and that most victims and survivors do not want to be defined solely by their experience of violence. We recognize victims and survivors as whole human beings, and we are deeply grateful for the insight and wisdom of victims and survivors that have been shared with us over the years.

³ Adapted with permission and with many thanks from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Fact Sheet: What is Sexual Violence?" See www.nsvrc.org for additional information.

⁴ Rape Treatment Center, Santa Monica, CA, Poster No. 14, 2004.

⁵ Judith Herman, "Justice From the Victim's Perspective," *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 11, No. 5, May 2005, p. 585.

⁶ Lisa Frank, "Walking in the Darkness, Then Finding the Light," in Sarah Deer, Bonnie Clairmont, Carrie A. Martell, and Maureen L. White Eagle, eds., *Sharing Our Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence*, Altamira Press, 2008, p. 116.

⁷ Material in this section quoted and/or adapted with permission and with many thanks from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Fact Sheet: What is Sexual Violence?" See www.nsvrc.org for additional information.

⁸ Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, Sexual Violence Statistics, www.barcc.org/information/facts/stats.

⁹ National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Fact Sheet: Impact of Sexual Violence." See www.nsvrc.org for additional information.

¹⁰ Judith Herman, "Justice From the Victim's Perspective," *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 11, No. 5, May 2005, p. 572.

¹¹ Material in this section quoted and/or adapted with permission and with many thanks from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Fact Sheet: Impact of Sexual Violence." See www.nsvrc.org for additional information.

¹² National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Fact Sheet: Impact of Sexual Violence." See www.nsvrc.org for additional information.

¹³ For guidance on what to do when the perpetrator is in the congregation, see Carol J. Adams, "When the Abuser is Among Us: One Church's Response to a Perpetrator." FaithTrust Institute, www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/When-the-Abuser-Is-Among-Us.pdf.


¹⁴ For more information on sexual violence perpetrated by a faith leader, see Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*. Pilgrim Press, 1988. Also see FaithTrust Institute's Clergy Abuse Bibliography: www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/bibliographies/clergy-sexual-abuse.

¹⁵ Material in this section quoted and/or adapted with permission and with many thanks from the Georgia Network to End Sexual Assault (GNESA), "Practical Recommendations for the Church's Response to Sexual Assault." For more information, please contact GNESA at 866-354-3672 or see www.gnesa.org.

¹⁶ Judith Herman, "Justice From the Victim's Perspective," *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 11, No. 5, May 2005, p. 585.

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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 you and your congregation will put yourselves into the picture, learn more about sexual and domestic violence, and become a piece of community-wide efforts to build a mosaic of healthy and happy families, congregations, and communities where abuse is a thing of the past.