

**Working with
Rural Faith Leaders
To Address
Domestic and Sexual Violence**

2025 OVW Rural New Grantee Orientation



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www.interfaithpartners.org

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About Safe Havens

- Works at the intersection of faith and abuse
- Multi-religious, faith-based
- Founded in 1991 by concerned women and survivors of faith
- Survivor- and safety-centered
- Local and national training and advocacy
- OVW-affiliated since 2003
- TA for rural communities since 2009



Faith: The Double-Edged Sword

- Faith community's past, current, and ongoing role in oppression and marginalization
- Spiritual trauma
 - Genocide and Native American Boarding Schools
 - Anti-GLBTQ+ teachings and conversion therapy
 - Purity Culture and sexual coercion
 - Enslavement and enforcement of Jim Crow
 - Support for IPV and many forms of abuse
- Faith as strength, resilience, connection, and hope for survivors



Why We Are Here ...

*uneven
comes and goes with the tide
no concerted, systematic effort
intermittent*

*inconsistent
choppy
haphazard*



*"We are very, very rural,
very isolated. People
are very isolated. The
church may be the
ONLY outside-the-home
connection, so if pastors
can do some education
it would be immensely
helpful."*





Advocates said the faith community leaders held these views of the shelter agency:
it "*provides abortion, is pro-choice and pro-divorce, breaks up families, and all the staff are lesbians.*"



The Need for Partnerships between Rural Advocates and Spiritual Leaders



Faith is especially relevant in older and marginalized communities

“respondents, especially minorities, often indicated that their ‘first stop’ would be a member of the clergy if they were to discuss their [abuse] with anyone.”

Richard Beaulaurier, Laura Seff, Frederick Newman, *Barriers to Help-Seeking for Older Women Who Experience Intimate Partner Violence: A Descriptive Model*, Journal of Women and Aging, Vol 20(3/4) 2008, 240-241



OVW-Funded Study of Rural Communities

“from our focus groups, regional TA meetings, interviews with clients, teleconferences, and statistical data, it is clear that matters of faith loom large in the lives of victims.”

US DOJ, Office on Violence Against Women, Faith and Community Technical Support, “An Interim Report,” 2006-WR-AX-K001, p. 6.



"Churches, scriptures, faith leaders, and traditions are manipulated by the abuser to control the victim. Faith is misused to support abuse."

The Georgia Commission on Family Violence



"Victims, survivors, and surviving family members consistently turn to their faith communities for support and safety."

Georgia Commission on Family Violence and Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2009 Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Annual Report, p. 15.



What Makes this Work Challenging in Your Community?

Great potential . . .

Spiritual communities and leaders:

- know their community,
- make home visits,
- are involved in life-cycle events,
- are trusted confidantes and gatekeepers,
- can push back on misuses of scripture, and
- educate and influence community norms.



Great Opportunity . . .

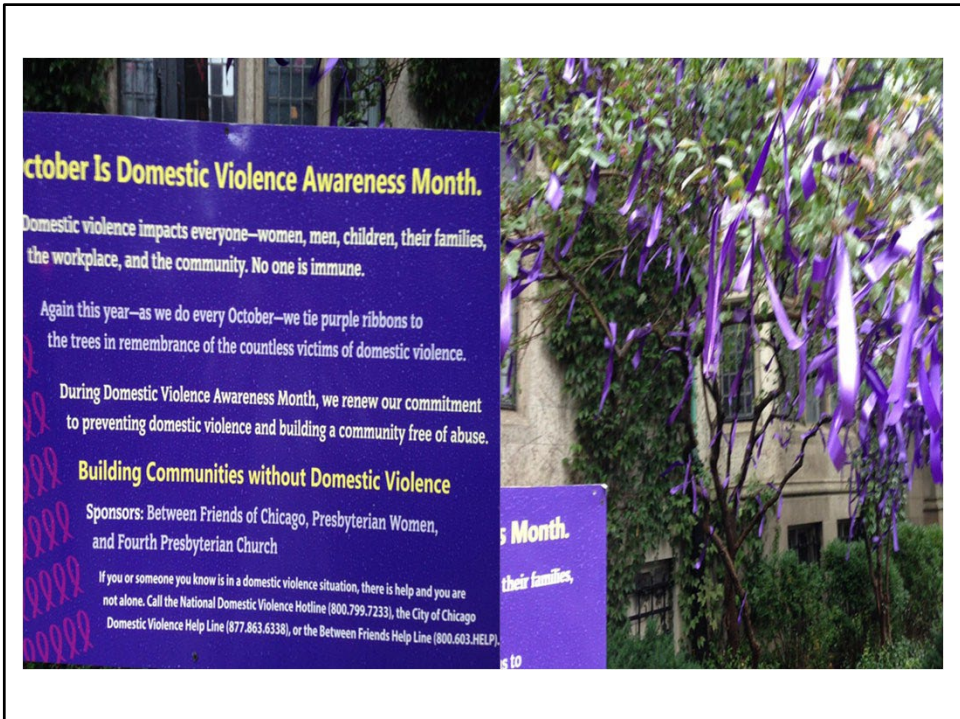
81% of faith leaders said they would
**“take appropriate action
if they had the training and
resources to do so.”**

(IMA World Health, 2014)

The Faith Community's Role



- (Earlier) Intervention
- Prevention
- Support for Accountability (when safe)
- Long-Term Social Change and Setting New Community Norms





Safe Havens Help

Hearts and Hands Toolkit

- Outreach Guide
- Partnership Guide
- Resources for faith leaders and advocates
- Many resources in Spanish and English through Safe Havens' partnership with Esperanza United



Safe Havens' Catalyst Trainings



Opportunities to Connect

- Community Conversations
- Webinars and Webcasts
- Work on rural campuses
- Conversations about spiritual abuse
- TA by phone, email, and zoom
- Safe Havens website and TA2TA site



Opportunities to Learn

- Awareness Month Materials
- Compassion and Accountability Guide/Trainings
- Constitutional Considerations
- Esperanza United/Safe Havens resources on engaging Latin@ Faith Leaders



What Is Your Vision?

- How could stronger partnerships with faith leaders help survivors of domestic and sexual violence in your community?
- Could faith leader involvement strengthen your community's responses to sexual and domestic violence? How could that work in your community?
- Would you like to know more about working with faith-affiliated survivors?



Safe Havens is here with you.



Questions

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