



ANTI-DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DAY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. Introduction

I talked to my pastor. My pastor knew the guy was abusive. He's like, "He's your husband according to the Bible. Maybe things could work out." Wrong advice. I'd been a member of the church since my son was 3

months old. I am a member of another church now.... Obviously it was the wrong advice....Somebody should have helped, done something, even if they just prayed.”¹

— Cassandra

The Violence Policy Center, a national non-profit organization that conducts research on violence in the United States, stated in its annual report, “When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2006 Homicide Data,” that 551 African American women were murdered by males that year. Of those homicides where a murder weapon could be identified, 305 of the victims were fatally shot and most during the course of an argument. The study also stated that there were 1,818 race-identified females murdered by males. And while white women accounted for the largest total of those killed—1,208, African American women were killed at a rate nearly three times higher. In the National Alcohol Survey done in 1999 that included 1,440 black, white, and Hispanic couples, male-to-female partner violence was 23% higher for black couples than whites.² In the year 2000 National Crime Victimization Survey that reviewed 876,340 intimate partner assaults which occurred in 1998, black women’s intimate partner victimization was 35% higher than that of white women.³

Carolyn West, PhD, of the University of Washington, wrote in a 2004 article: “Murder by intimate partners is the leading cause of death among young African American women between the ages of 15 and 45. Most often, these women were killed by intimate partners, usually with a firearm during the course of an argument.”⁴ Dr. Hillary Potter points out, quite importantly given that so many pastors and other entities need assistance in helping women of color who are victims of domestic violence, that “Research on intimate partner violence must more directly target women of color to determine effective prevention, detection, and intervention strategies. This is particularly important given the research that has emphasized the increased and unique risks of intimate partner victimization for more marginalized women.”⁵ Potter also indicates, “Religious leaders have often been found to provide advice that supports the male batterer, whether the batterer’s behavior is publicly substantiated or rests solely on the accounts provided by the battered woman (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Horne & Levitt, 2003; Horton et al., 1988; Knickmeyer et al., 2003; Pagelow, 1981). There is evidence that this is particularly the case for conservative evangelical and fundamentalist Christian clergy (Alsdurf, 1989; Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Rink, 1990).”⁶ This is a critically important point given all of the historical and empirical information that points to historically black churches being conservative and fundamentalist.

Unfortunately, the research comports with the fact that the sin of domestic violence continues as a scourge that is all too often either ignored, swept under the rug, or facilitated by either acts of omission or commission by African American clergy and churches. Throughout this cultural resource unit you will hear from women who went to the African American church for help and the results they obtained. It is now time that we hear—and feel the hurt, pain, and cries for liberation—from victims of domestic violence.

II. What You Can Do

I went to the [Army base] chaplain. I told the chaplain that I was in an abusive relationship, I wanted to go home, I had all kinds of witnesses that will tell you that he beat me all the time. We lived in a housing area. They told me, “If you go home, and you get back with him and we have to send him overseas again, you will never be able to travel with him again.” [The pastor] told me, “Now you go home and you think about it.” He went on to tell me some other things; he was trying to encourage me to stay with this man. By this time I was so worn down and tired, I just said, “OK, I’ll stay.” He was telling me, “. . . You better hang on to him . . .” When the questions came to me, “Was he a good provider?” I had to say, “Yeah,” because he was. “Was he good to the kids? Has he ever hurt the kids? Has he ever been abusive to the kids?” No, he wasn’t. Then he wanted to know what my freakin’ problem was! I was tired of getting’ beat up!⁷

— Wendy

What You Can Do When a Fight Breaks Out

- Move away from the kitchen, bathroom, or any place where there are dangerous sharp objects.
- Plan the easiest escape. Decide on a door or window to exit quickly and safely.
- Find a neighbor, friend, or family member you can trust to help you and your children or to call police.

What to Do If You Decide to Leave Your Partner: Plan for Safety

- Every situation is different. Contact anti-domestic violence agencies for information on how to plan for safety. Leaving may be risky for you and your children to attempt alone.
- Put some money away. Even if you save only a little bit every week, you need to have some money of your own. If you are asked your preference concerning gifts for the year, opt for gift cards that you can use to buy clothes, toiletries, and food after you leave.
- Make copies of keys and important papers and leave them with a trusted friend, neighbor, or church. Some important items to have include: driver’s license or passport, birth certificates, legal papers, and special toys if you have children.

What You Can Do If You (or an Adult Friend) Suffers Domestic Violence

- Call 911 immediately. Your abuse should be on record with law enforcement agencies. Experts say that women are beaten about five times before they ever dial 911.
- Try to give police all available information and make certain that the police listen and write down your statements, their observations, and direct quotes of what your abuser said while attacking you.

- Never refuse medical evaluations and medical services! Never clean up the house or location after a domestic violence attack, so that critical evidence of harm or injury is not removed. Keep some type of camera and film on hand to photograph your injuries and any damage to property, etc. Remember, “a picture is worth a thousand words” and is a good sign of evidence.
- Call domestic violence resource agencies in your community or call the National Domestic Violence hotline at 800-799-SAFE. This hotline was initiated in 1996 with cooperation from the Justice Department. Through this hotline, a woman anywhere in the United States can be connected to resources to help her get away from a violent abuser.
- Get a protective order against your abuser. A protective order can be issued by civil and criminal courts against anyone who is a threat to your safety. The 1994 Federal Violence Act against women specifies that protective orders are recognized and enforced from state to state. Call the various domestic violence organizations and agencies for information and advice about a protective order.

What Children Can Do If They (or Another Child) Suffers Domestic Violence

- If you are harmed by a parent, guardian, or other adult, if you cannot tell a parent, immediately tell a teacher or someone at your school;
- If you or an adult you trust has access to a camera, take pictures of any scars or injuries you suffer; and
- Know that you are NEVER to blame for the actions of a violent adult.

What Men Can Do to Help Stop Domestic Violence⁸

- Be a role model to other men. Men are more likely to listen to other men when it comes to the perpetration of violence. Let a violent young man know, “You need help, and I want to help you. Your behavior is not acceptable.”
- Take a vocal stand against violence toward women when you see or hear it depicted in video games, popular music, or in others’ behavior.
- Reach out to a family suffering from domestic violence. Chip away at the walls that isolate families living with abuse.
- Be a role model to a child who lacks a positive male figure in his or her life.
- Speak out against domestic violence in civic organizations, churches, neighborhood associations, and sports teams.

III. Denominations and Others Taking a Stand against Domestic Violence

. . . come to find out, the whole pulpit was full of homosexuals. . . . [The pastor would] accept gay men, but wouldn't accept what he called domineering women. . . . He was on my ex-husband's side and we [women] were just making stuff up and we were just too strong, dominant women. . . . We probably needed to be beat up, put in our places. That's exactly what he said.⁹

— Mariah

(A) United Methodist Resources—The United Methodist denomination's General Board of Church & Society (GBCS) and Commission on the Status & Role of Women offers resources to help congregations deal with the issue. To mark the October observance of domestic violence awareness month, GBCS has released a new downloadable resource, Breaking the Silence, to equip United Methodists to speak up and speak out about domestic violence. Online location: www.umc-gbcs.org

(B) WOMANSPACE—A leading not-for-profit agency providing a comprehensive array of services since 1977 to individuals impacted by domestic and sexual violence and dedicated to improving the quality of life for women and their families. The group is located in New Jersey (Mercer County) but provides a variety of services nationally to faith communities in need of anti-domestic violence training. Online location: www.womanspace.org

(C) FaithTrust Institute—A national, multifaith, multicultural training and education organization with global reach working to end sexual and domestic violence. Founded in 1977, FaithTrust Institute offers a wide range of services and resources, including training, consulting, and educational materials. They provide communities and advocates with the tools and knowledge they need to address the religious and cultural issues related to abuse. They work with many communities, including African Americans, Asian and Pacific Islander, Buddhist, Jewish, Latino/a, Muslim, Anglo, Indigenous, Protestant, and Roman Catholic. Online location: www.fatithtrustinstitute.org

IV. Songs for This Moment on the Calendar

Unbeknownst to many, the song “Yesterday” by Mary Mary, which has reached the top five on the Gospel music charts, was a song about overcoming domestic violence. Unlike so many rap songs that denigrate women and aid in violence against women, “Baby Momma” by Biggie Irie calls for men who impregnate women to treat them with respect as the mothers of their children. “Ask Me” by Amy Grant is atypical in that it is a Gospel song by one of the top-selling Christian pop artists and it contains a strong anti-domestic violence message.

Yesterday

By Mary Mary

I had enough heartache and enough headaches
I've had so many ups and downs
Don't know how much more I can take
See I decided that I cried my last tear yesterday
Either I'm going to trust you or I may as well walk away
'cause stressing don't make it better
Don't make it better, no way
See I decided that I cried my last tear yesterday

Yesterday, I decided to put my trust in you
Yesterday, I realized that you will bring me through
There ain't nothing too hard for my God, no
Any problems that I have
He's greater than them all, so
I decided that I cried my last tear yesterday.

Baby Momma

By Biggie Irie

Yeh yuh know,
A woman is the most beautiful creation in this world,
Yet some brothers just don't appreciate it. (Ad lib)

To all the women in the world, Respect and Honour.
I wonder what some brothers are thinking,
When they raise their hands to hit their women,
Don't you know a woman is the greatest gift to this world, ah yeh.
For nine months she toils and she labors,
It's her mission to become a mother.
So don't you disrespect, cos we can't be here without her. Oh no.

(Chorus)

So you'd better not beat her, and don't you mistreat her,
She's your baby momma, so u gotta love her, love her.
So you'd better not beat her, and don't you mistreat her,
She's your baby momma, so u gotta love her, love her.

How ya doing baby I love you,
Your girl's gonna love it when u call her boo.
Roses and chocolates she likes them a lot,
Shower her with affection; give her all that you got.
Take her to the movies take her shopping,
At night, to fancy restaurants, dinner by candlelight.

A woman is a treasure all men should hold dear,
Treat her right every day of the year.
(Chorus)

(Bridge)

GOD Bless you woman for what you've done for me,
Without you I know I'll never have this family.
I'll cherish this love for all eternity,
Thank you JAH for giving her to me.

Every woman is special you know,
They're gonna fuss and give you some pressure,
Be a man my brother and take it slow,
She ain't gonna be fussing forever.
Sometimes you'll feel like you're going insane,
Don't raise your hand to cause your woman pain.
Cool off take a drive, or even take a walk.
Sit down with your woman and talk.

(Chorus)

But don't you beat her, and don't you mistreat her,
She's your baby momma, so u gotta love her, love her.
You'd better not beat her, and don't you mistreat her,
Cos she's your baby momma, so u gotta love her, love her.

Ask Me

By Amy Grant

This song is about a girlfriend of mine. If you or someone you love has been a victim of sexual abuse, they're waiting for you to call 800-4a-child.

I see her as a little girl hiding in her room
She takes another bath and she sprays her momma's perfume
To try to wipe away the scent he left behind
But it haunts her mind
You see she's his little rag, nothing more than just a waif
And he's mopping up his need, she is tired and afraid
Maybe she'll find a way through these awful years to disappear

Ask me if I think there's a God up in the heaven
Where did he go in the middle of her shame?
Ask me if I think there's a God up in the heavens
I see no mercy and no one down here's naming names
Nobody's naming names

Now she's looking in the mirror at a lovely woman face
No more frightened little girl, like she's gone without a trace
Still she leaves the light burning in the hall
It's hard to sleep at all
Still she crawls up in her bed acting quiet as a mouse
Deep inside she's listening for a creaking in the house
But no one's left to harm her, she's finally safe and sound
There's a peace she's found

Ask her how she knows there's a God up in the heaven
Where did he go in the middle of her shame?
Ask her how she knows there's a God up in the heavens
She said his mercy is bringing her life again

Ask me how I know there's a God up in the heaven
(How do you know?)
Where did he go in the middle of her shame
(Where did he go?)
Ask me how I know there's a God up in the heavens
(How do you know?)
She said his mercy is bringing her life again
She's coming to life again

He's in the middle of her pain
In the middle of her shame
Mercy brings life
He's in the middle
Mercy in the middle

So ask me how I know
Ask me how I know, yeah
Ask me how I know there's a God up in the heaven
(How do you know?)
Ask me how I know there's a God up in the heavens
(How do you know?)
Yeah, ask me how I know
(How do you know?)
Ask me
Ask me
Ask me how I know
(How do you know?)
There's a God up in the heavens
Ask me how I know there's a God up in the heavens

V. Books and Articles about Domestic Violence and the Faith Community

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There's two ways to get close to God. You can get close to God in a church or you can do it one-on-one. . . . But the church ain't like it used to be. Maybe the church was never like that. But when your people are having problems, take care of your people because they take care of you. The church is not taking care of people any more. . . . I'm closer to [God] one-on-one. . . . I'm at the point where I won't ask the church for nothing.¹⁰

— Kim

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Notes

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2. National Alcohol Survey (Cunradi, Caetano, Clark & Schafer), 1999.

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6. Potter, Hillary, 266.

7. Ibid., 273.

8. These suggestions are from the Family Violence Prevention Fund. Online location: www.familyviolenceprevention.org

9. Potter, Hillary, 273.

10. Ibid., 274.