

# Report on Faith Leader Listening Sessions

**Community Responses to Domestic and Sexual  
Violence and Safe Housing for Survivors**

February 2021

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**A joint report of**



**National Resource Center  
on Domestic Violence**

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# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV) partnered with Jewish Women International (JWI) to convene listening sessions and interviews with respected faith leaders from many traditions on July 21st, 22nd, 29th and September 2nd, 2020. As part of NRCDV's larger goal to increase understanding and collaboration between faith-based organizations and efforts to enhance survivors' access to safe housing options, these listening sessions and interviews aimed to enhance our awareness of the role faith leaders and communities play or could play at the intersection of faith, spirituality, religion and gender-based violence response and prevention, with a particular emphasis upon increasing safe housing options for survivors. Recognizing that faith leaders are often the first point of contact for those experiencing domestic and sexual violence<sup>1</sup>, we aimed to highlight the central role faith communities play in the lives of survivors and to learn of obstacles, gaps and needs we may address through the development of key resources, technical assistance and trainings. We particularly wanted to explore the possible roles of religious institutions and spiritual leaders in addressing survivor homelessness and housing instability.

The leaders we spoke with had remarkable histories of moral leadership, trust from their communities and as our conversations revealed, deep understanding of existing barriers for faith communities confronting gender-based violence and safe housing needs, as well as innovative responses that could serve as models for other faith communities to follow. It is an honor to present the complex, difficult and heart-filled work these leaders shared with us and the hope these stories hold for the future. Faith leaders have a unique role in creating safe communities in the modern era in which true community can be difficult to find, and we call for strengthened partnerships with them as they undertake this work.

<sup>1</sup> Hunter, A.M., & Adams, D. (2020, July). [How can partnerships with faith communities support accountability and hope for those who cause harm?](#) Harrisburg, PA: VAWnet, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence; Oyewuwo-Gassikia, O.B. (2020). Black Muslim women's domestic violence help-seeking strategies: Types, motivations, and outcomes. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 29(7), 856-875; Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence & FaithTrust Institute. (n.d.). [Faith and Intimate Partner Violence Handbook for Advocates](#). Tallahassee, FL; New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. (n.d.). [Domestic Violence and Faith Communities: Guidelines for Leaders](#). Albany, NY.

# Participants

This project was facilitated by team members from:

**NRCDV:** Heidi Notario, Vice President of Strategic Partnerships & Systems Change; Marium Durrani, Director of Policy; Brittany Eltringham, Program Specialist; Charlotte Zelle, Graduate Student Intern;

**and from JWJ:** Deborah Rosenbloom, Vice President of Programs & New Initiatives; Dorian Karp, Senior Advocacy and Policy Manager.

We spoke with a group of fourteen faith leaders representing diversity in religion, race, gender, sexual orientation and region. There were three members of the United Methodist Church, one from the Baptist Church, two from the Bahá'í faith<sup>2</sup>, one from the Catholic Church, three Islamic faith leaders, one faith leader from the Metropolitan Community Churches, one faith leader from the Jewish faith, one representative from the Evangelical Covenant Church and one faith leader from the Korean American Protestant Church.

## Faith Leader Biographies

**Rev. Neal Christie**, *Assistant General Secretary for Special Projects, General Board of Church and Society, The United Methodist Church.* Neal directs the agency's educational opportunities

<sup>2</sup> In the Bahá'í faith, the term "faith leader" does not apply. Communities are organized by local administrative bodies made up of volunteers.

including world-wide trainings and workshops. He also coordinates curricula related to the UM Social Principles. Neal has authored a number of publications and produced several educational videos on social justice for the church. He is an elder in the Greater New Jersey Conference. Neal has been devoted to the ministry with Church and Society for 20 years. Neal's first formative encounter with the work of justice and peace was as an Ethnic Young Adult (EYA) intern with Church and Society in 1985. Following the internship, Neal graduated from Yale Divinity School and Princeton Theological School and served as a trauma hospital chaplain and as a pastor in rural and urban communities. These experiences helped form a passion for exploring how people's spiritual journeys connect with experiences of marginalization and our common struggle for justice.



**Rev. Brandon Crowley**, *Pastor, Historic Myrtle Baptist Church*. The Reverend Dr. Brandon Thomas Crowley is an African American scholar in religion, theology, ecclesiology and queer theory. Since 2009, he has served as the Senior Pastor of the Historic Myrtle Baptist Church in West Newton, Massachusetts. Dr. Crowley earned a PhD in Theology and Society and a Master of Sacred Theology with a certificate in social justice from Boston University. He also earned a Master of Divinity from Harvard University where he was a presidential scholar, and a Bachelor of Arts in Religion with a certificate in religious and pastoral leadership from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Crowley's dissertation entitled "Inclusive Black Congregations and Black Ecclesial Queering" constructed a methodology to intentionally disrupt and dismantle oppressive forms of ecclesial and theological normalcy within Black churches. He has dedicated his clerical and academic careers to re-thinking the nature, mission and practices of the Christian church at large. In 2009, Dr. Crowley was ordained in the Progressive National Baptist Convention of America, Inc. and in 2010, he was honored by his alma mater as the youngest inductee into the prestigious Morehouse College Board of Preachers. He has written for the African American Lectionary and presently he is serving as an adjunct instructor in Ministry Studies at Harvard Divinity School and an adjunct professor in the history of Christianity at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago, Illinois.

**Mark Eghrari**, *Office of Community Administration, U.S. Bahá'í National Center*. Mark Eghrari serves in the Office of Community Administration at the national administrative offices of the United States Bahá'í community. As there is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, the affairs of Bahá'í communities are supported through local administrative bodies of nine elected individuals who are responsible for strengthening the spiritual and social fabric of their communities and offering direct support to families. Mark and his colleagues in the Office of Community Administration provide consultative support to these local administrative bodies located throughout the United States.

**Shaykh Yasir Fahmy**, *Islamic community leader in Boston; Instructor on Muslim studies at Harvard Divinity School*. Shaykh Yasir Fahmy is a respected Islamic community leader in Boston, former Imam of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center and instructor on Muslim studies at Harvard Divinity School. Shaykh Yasir began the study of Arabic and Islamic Sciences in his high school years under the guidance of local teachers. At the age of seventeen, he traveled to Amman, where he spent a year studying at the Islamic University of Jordan. He returned to the US and completed a Bachelor of Science from Rutgers University. After working in corporate America for three years in finance, he returned to the Middle East and enrolled in the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo. After seven years of intensive study, Shaykh Yasir received a degree in Islamic Studies from

Al-Azhar and attained numerous 'ijzas (independent certifications) in the subjects of fiqh, hadith, aqida, usul al-fiqh, sirah, tazkiyyah, mantiq, Arabic grammar (nahu), morphology (sarf) and rhetoric (balagha). In 2013, Shaykh Yasir Fahmy became the first American Azhari to teach in the renowned Al- Azhar Mosque. Through his teaching, lecturing, mentorship and religious leadership, Shaykh Yasir aims to foster love for the deen and appreciation of the vast richness of Islamic tradition in new generations of American Muslims.

**Rev. Miller Hoffman**, *Clergy, Metropolitan Community Churches*. White, queer and genderqueer, Rev. Miller Jen Hoffman was ordained by Metropolitan Community Churches in New York City. Hoffman's thesis, "Every Woman Who Will Make Herself Male: Genderqueer Expression in the Early Church" was deposited in the Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary in 2004 and earned the Roswell Dwight Hitchcock Prize in Church History. He has worked for LGBT civil rights with Lambda Legal Defense; for anti-violence justice and meditative practice at the Brooklyn-based Center for Anti-Violence Education; as a counselor and advocate for domestic violence and rape survivors with organizations in New York and Pennsylvania; as a mentor to local queer and trans youth in NY and PA; and as the pastor of MCC congregations in Binghamton, NY and Boyds, MD. Hoffman is currently supporting sexual assault centers state-wide at the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. Mind-body-spirit connections to social justice and the connectedness of physical, emotional and spiritual violence deeply influence

his thinking and ministry, and his writing explores the places where personal action meets and impacts social change.

**Rabbi Marla Hornsten**, *Temple Israel*. Rabbi Marla Hornsten came to Temple Israel in July of 2000 after her rabbinic ordination from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish institute of Religion, having attended both the Los Angeles and New York campuses. Rabbi Marla advocates for women and women's equality and roots for women every chance she gets. She is proud to have created a variety of women's programming including a monthly Rosh Chodesh women's spirituality group, mikvah tours and immersion experiences. She is also committed to preventing domestic abuse in families and to guiding couples in establishing healthy relationships. To that end, she served as a co-chair for the Clergy Task Force to End Domestic Violence for Jewish Women International based out of Washington DC, and on both JCADA (Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse) and the OCCCADV (Oakland County Coordinating Council Against Domestic Violence) boards locally. Currently, Rabbi Marla is the Co-Chair of the Coalition for Black and Jewish Unity, serves on the Board of Directors for Jewish Family Service, and is on the convention committee for the CCAR—the Central Conference of American Rabbis. She is the past President of the Michigan Board of Rabbis, and also previously served on the board of the Women's Rabbinic Network.



**Rev. Anne Marie Hunter**, *Executive Director and Founder, Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse*. Anne Marie Hunter is an ordained United Methodist pastor. She received her Master of Divinity from Harvard University in 1986 and a PhD in Religion and Society from Drew University in 1991. While attending Harvard and Drew, Anne Marie worked for domestic violence service providers in Massachusetts and New Jersey. She also served for six years as pastor of East Saugus United Methodist Church in MA. In 1991, Anne Marie linked her pastoral, seminary and domestic violence services experience and founded Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence. Anne Marie has testified at national legislative hearings on the Violence Against Women Act and attended White House events on domestic violence. Anne Marie has taught at Drew University and Tufts University and is published locally and nationally on both domestic violence and elder abuse. In 2011, Anne Marie was selected by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women as one of the Commonwealth's Unsung Heroines. She received the Humanitarian Award from the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Community Center of the North Shore in 2010 for "furthering interfaith understanding" and "extraordinary efforts to build bridges between different faith communities." Anne Marie also received the 2002 Heinz Family Foundation R.O.S.E. Award in honor of her innovative efforts and dedication to breaking the silence surrounding domestic violence in communities of faith.

**M. Kathryn Jewett (Kathy)**, *Office of Community Administration, U.S. Bahá'í National Center*. M. Kathryn Jewett is a member of the Virginia State Bar, having graduated from the University of Virginia School of Law. She clerked for the Fourth Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals and then worked for Southwest Virginia Legal Aid. She also had a private practice focused upon family law in Richmond, Virginia. During that period, she was the chairman and chief lobbyist of state-wide coalition of agencies and organizations that were able to overhaul Virginia law related to child sexual abuse. She has worked off and on for the office at the Bahá'í National Center that handles all matters related to family problems, including domestic violence.

**Sister Anne Kelley**, *Sisters of the Good Shepherd*. Sr. Anne is both a Registered Nurse (DePaul School of Nursing) and a Social Worker (St. Louis University, School of Social Work). She worked for ten years with teenagers who were runaways from violent and abusive homes and were placed by the juvenile courts in Good Shepherd residential treatment centers. Sr. Anne began working with battered women in 1984 in Los Angeles, after serving in the general headquarters of the Good Shepherd order in Rome. She went to Chicago in 1987 and served as Program Director in the Good Shepherd emergency shelter for domestic violence for six years. She then took her experience to Ireland which she shared with the Sisters who were establishing five domestic violence shelters in that country. Upon returning from Ireland, she came back to Los Angeles in 1994 and was



the Executive Director until August 2010. In 2010 she moved to Mexico to help two Sisters open their own shelter and returned to her role as Executive Director of Good Shepherd Shelter in 2013. Sr. Anne now works at Good Shepherd Gracenter in San Francisco, while at the same time remaining committed to the mission of Good Shepherd Shelter in Los Angeles. At Good Shepherd Gracenter, she is the community leader for the Sisters and helps with development as well as health and wellness goals for the women. She received a grant and is currently in the process of building an additional unit to house five more women for their comprehensive residential recovery program for women without resources who are determined to break free of drug and/or alcohol addiction and live a healthy and productive life.

**Rev. Lucinda Kent**, *Pastor, Van Buren United Methodist Church*. Rev. Lucinda Kent has a Master of Divinity degree with a concentration in Leadership Studies and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. Currently serving as the Pastor of Van Buren United Methodist Church in Washington DC, Rev. Kent also serves on several Baltimore Washington Conference committees to include the Seeds of Security committee, the Trustee committee, the Church Locations and Property committee and the Adrienne Terry affordable housing committee. She is a co-founder of the non-profit, Twin Towers Community Outreach, and a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated.

**Imam Mohamed Magid**, *Executive Imam of All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) Center in Sterling, Virginia*. Imam Mohamed Magid is the Executive Imam of All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) Center in Sterling, Virginia. He is the Chairman of International Interfaith Peace Corps (IIPC) and the former President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). He is also the Chairman of Muflehun, a think tank which focuses on confronting violent extremist thought through research-driven preventative programs within a religious paradigm. Imam Magid has a long history of commitment to public service through organizations, such as the Peaceful Families Project. Imam Magid has co-authored three books: *Before You Tie the Knot: A Guide for Couples*, *Reflections on the Qur'an and Change from Within*. He has helped in organizing training and workshops for Imams and religious leaders, domestically and internationally, on the issue of violence against women. Imam Magid is also leading an initiative to protect religious minorities in Muslim majority countries through seminars and Imam training workshops. He has written for the *Washington Post* and *Huffington Post*, and has been profiled in *Time Magazine* and *Wall Street Journal*. He is the recipient for the *Washingtonian* of the Year 2009 and the Human Rights Award 2005 from Fairfax County.

**Saima Mumtaz**, *Women's Auxiliary President at Hadee Mosque Ahmadiyya Muslim Community-Harrisburg Chapter*. Saima Mumtaz is currently serving as the President for the Women's Auxiliary of the Harrisburg Chapter of the Ahmadiyya

Muslim Community at Hadee Mosque. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is a dynamic, fast growing international revival movement within Islam spanning over 206 countries. She also serves as the Committee Chair of the Education and Prevention Team of the Community Responders Network (CRN), a grassroots organization preventing and confronting bias in Central Pennsylvania. Saima established the Humanity First Harrisburg Food Pantry. She stays actively involved in the community for promoting peace and understanding through engaging in and arranging interfaith dialogue with diverse spiritual organizations. Her true passion however is in education. Saima has worked on and continues to work on several projects to eliminate stereotypes and discrimination through education in the community. She has been happily married for 20 years with four wonderful kids and is currently enrolled in Marriage, Family and Couples Counseling Master's Program at Messiah College.

**Rev. Ramelia Williams**, *Director of Ministry Initiatives, Evangelical Covenant Church - Love Mercy Do Justice*. Rev. Ramelia Williams is passionate about creating environments for experiencing the compassion, mercy and justice of God through the Church. She currently lives this out in her role as the Director of Ministry Initiatives for the Love Mercy Do Justice mission priority of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Before accepting this call, she served as the lead church-planting pastor of New Creation Covenant Church, a multicultural church plant on the westside of the city of Chicago. Prior to leading a church plant, she was a

preaching pastor at a multiracial church plant in Chicago where she is a founding member. In her previous work as a hospital chaplain in San Diego and Chicago, she offered short-term pastoral care to families experiencing death, trauma and loss. This work prepared her for the ministry development of a network of spirituality groups that focus on inner healing for women who have survived physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Rev. Ramelia earned a Master of Divinity and Certificate in Spiritual Direction from North Park Theological Seminary. At the Seminary, she periodically serves as an adjunct professor and serves on a team of Spiritual Directors who facilitate spiritual formation groups for students.

**Joyce Woo**, *Family Advocate from Korean American Family Services*. *Joyce M. Woo is a Domestic Violence (DV) Family Advocate for Korean American Family Services (KFAM)*. As a DV Advocate, Joyce works with faith leaders in the Korean immigrant community to increase their awareness and ability to better respond to the needs of victims. She also works with families of domestic violence by providing direct services, which include psychotherapy, DV counseling and advocacy. Joyce holds a MA in social work from the University of Southern California and holds a BA in international development studies from the University of California, Los Angeles.

# Interview Questions



Faith leaders responded to the following set of questions:

- What have you done in your faith community to prevent and respond to domestic and sexual violence? (this can include strategies, responses to disclosures, responses to those who have caused harm, barriers to this work, etc.)
- What have you done in your faith community to respond to the housing needs of domestic and sexual violence survivors? (this can include strategies, barriers, etc.) How do members of your community rely on each other for housing in these situations?

- Does your community experience survivor attrition? If so, why do you think survivors leave or drift away from the community? Do you see this issue as connected to the absence of secure housing?

In the second listening session, we also had time to ask:

- How do you build partnerships to further support survivors in your faith community and in your community at large? (between organizations, etc.)
- Is there anything you have thought of that would help you and your faith communities tackle this issue and support survivors?

# Themes

In their conversations, it became clear that faith leaders refused to simplify the complicated issue of domestic and sexual violence, choosing instead to confront its complexity and honor its nuance. While each community had specific strengths and challenges, several themes emerged which for the sake of simplicity, we will divide into three groups:

- A. The actions of the religious institutions and religious leadership**
- B. Those taken in partnership with external organizations**
- C. Those of the faith community**
- D. Barriers to all**

Though in reality each theme is deeply intertwined with the next and resists clear categorization in the above areas, this will illustrate a clearer picture from which necessary complexity can find its foundation.

## **A. Religious Institutions & Religious Leadership**

### **A Theology of Solidarity**

In order to effectively accompany, refer and advocate for survivors, faith leaders need to make clear where they stand. Unfortunately, the participants spoke to the ways some who abuse can weaponize religion. One minister explained,



“In the hands of someone who is abusive, anything is a weapon... that anything can include scripture, the faith community itself, the faith leader... traditions, liturgies – anything! They will manipulate anything to use as a weapon against the victim. And often the faith community doesn’t realize that this manipulation is going on and so the survivor ends up alienated because her very community, her very faith leader, her scriptures, her liturgies, her tradition have all been used against her,”

and she noted that “The default value in many survivors that I’ve spoken with – they just assume that God is encouraging them to stay in an abusive situation.”

In the Catholic Church, it wasn't until 1991 that the Bishops put out a letter denouncing spousal abuse and allowed for marriage annulment. While the Sisters of the Good Shepherd had created a domestic violence shelter in 1977, until the 1991 letter they were seen as "pro-divorce" while they contended to be "anti-violence." Now the Catholic Church has come a long way in supporting survivors and in many Dioceses, annulments are granted "pretty easily" because abusers are seen as breaking their marriage contract.

Unfortunately, a message that blames the victim is still heard from the pulpit and individual pastoral counseling. One pastor remembered that when he was growing up, the routine practice was to pray with survivors and then send them back home to their abuser. Another pastor explained,

"There are pastors that have told survivors of domestic violence and intimate partner violence that this is their cross to carry — and that's not 20 years ago, that's still happening... Or that people are telling themselves this is redemptive suffering, I'm sacrificing myself for my family, for my children."

The faith leaders we spoke with wanted to send a different message. Indeed, some saw it as their job. One participant stated,

"If we're not talking about... consent and talking about mutuality and talking about sharing power and being vulnerable – if that's not happening on a regular basis, every day, I think that we're failing."

The leaders spoke of the myriad ways they tried to uphold healthy relationships and condemn violence. A member of the Bahá'í faith noted that equality of men and women is found in their scripture, with each symbolizing the "Two Wings" it takes for a bird to fly. One pastor wanted her congregation to know, "It is not God's will that you live in a violent situation."

A member of the Catholic faith spoke to the idea of a "shepherd God" who "loves, heals and guides," using this conceptualization of God as survivors in transitional shelter begin to reconnect to faith and rebuild their lives. Many faith leaders noted that they had sermonized on the topic of domestic violence – some several times. The leaders also spoke of other steps they have taken to show their community that their religion stands against violence. One reverend uplifted his community's Domestic Violence Contextual Bible Study, while a prominent Imam noted that his organization encourages Imams who have completed training to sign and hang a declaration against domestic violence in a prominent place in their mosque. Another uplifted an annual vigil against domestic violence that she started when she was a minister to a church, noting that it was held by a different church every year and involved partners from across the community. She explained, "We wanted to be clear that this was all of us." The Imam we spoke with used his voice, his moral authority, to speak up amidst tragedy and grief. When a prominent Muslim in the community leader killed his own wife, it shook the community. In response, the Imam wrote



an open letter to the community, urging others:

“Don’t second guess any woman who come[s] to you and says, ‘I’m in domestic violence, an abusive relationship.’ Don’t second guess them.”

Employing their powerful voices to actively promote a theology of love and solidarity, these leaders model what it can look like for a faith leader to stand openly against domestic and sexual violence.

One pastor with an extensive background in sexual violence prevention and response apart from his work in congregations noted that this theology was completely integrated into the life of his church community - in rituals, in sermons and even in his choice of language. He explained:

“I was talking about consent all the time — not just sexual consent, and so the sexual consent message was constantly being raised when I would say, ‘I’m going to ask you to do this thing, and I want you to know that I’m aware that it may be hard to say ‘no’ to the pastor, and so you can say ‘no’ to the pastor and ‘No.’ is a complete sentence — you don’t have to justify it or have a reason, you can just not want to do it, and you can say ‘yes’ to it and change your mind tomorrow – consent is temporary...’ I would just say those things all the time to people. Partly because I was deeply into the work of sexual violence but also partly because I was very aware of – and these are related

things – I was aware of the power that a pastor has and the deference that people give to the pastor, and I wanted to mitigate that upfront.”

Indeed, to truly advocate for healthy relationships and healthy theology, faith leaders must interrogate and dismantle the potentially harmful histories, assumptions and consolidation of power stitched into their roles. He spoke of an implicit message that pastors contend with:

“There’s this idea that we’re supposed to be infallible somehow. Or that if we acknowledge vulnerability or mistakes that somehow, we will lose something, and I think we don’t - I think we actually gain things.” By rejecting the “idea of what a pastor is supposed to be” and refusing to reproduce a power-over model, faith leaders can create a space more conducive to healthy communities and relationships. Indeed, this leader argued that freedom from sexual and domestic violence should be contextualized within a larger mission that actively confronts “racism, immigration, intimate [partner] violence, sexual violence.” He introduced us to “spiritual justice,” a broad term which involves creating spaces for and personal capacity to “understand difference and to not feel threatened by difference and to engage with each other and learn from each other.”

Theological difference and all forms of difference are acknowledged and

celebrated. Within an overall context of spiritual and social justice, the faith leader would naturally speak to freedom from violence in everyday life.

## Training/Protocols



In order to take such a prophetic stance and advertise themselves as allies, faith leaders first must complete training that prepares them to respond effectively to disclosures of harm as well as take steps toward prevention and cultural shifts. Some participants spoke to undergoing training themselves, while others spoke to their own experiences training faith leaders. Sometimes the training was created by their denomination and thus seamlessly integrated into their theology while other times the training came from outside agencies. One pastor shared an innovative model within her own denomination. Using a “train the trainer” model, [AVA \(Advocacy for Victims of Abuse\)](#) advocates are trained together and then sent back to their own communities and local congregations to find community partners, to work

with their local religious and lay leaders, and to educate the community. A pared down online version of the training is also available to pastors and other leaders. She explained,

“It really is a model that is scaled in a way that it comes down to the local community to resource itself contextually.”

Intentionality around culturally specific strengths, resources and obstacles surfaced as a theme throughout these discussions.

Other leaders noted the importance of protocols. About 20 years ago, the Bahá'í community created domestic violence guidelines, which they then trained their local branches to use. A Bahá'í member also noted that if they discover someone is engaging in abuse, they restrict that person from leadership positions. The Women's Auxiliary of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community developed a presentation that they disseminated across all their chapters. The presentation has now taken the form of a resource book, available online. They also created protocols that detail how to respond, such as designating a point person. A nun who worked at a domestic violence shelter shared how the shelter itself was used as a teaching tool - local high school students every year did a three-week service project helping in the shelter, tutors from five universities acted as tutors for the children in the shelter and seminarians



did field placements for a semester at the shelter. She recalled that many of the students who volunteered at the shelter were deeply impacted by their work, becoming social workers, teachers or advocates.

## Internal Resources



Survivors may have a variety of interconnected needs, so a discussion of faith institutions' internal resources for survivors is an important prelude to a review of their housing work. In addition to some limited financial resources, the leaders spoke of social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists they have on staff to provide mental health counseling and referrals. One reverend of an Evangelical church discussed her congregation's use of the [Mending the Soul curriculum](#), which harnesses theological and social science perspectives to

“Help the victim-survivor to understand biologically things that were happening... but then also what God says about the abuse.”

Within the Bahá'í faith, the national office offers their resources (lawyers, mental health clinicians, etc.) to local institutions and works to otherwise support them as well. The pastor of a historically African American Baptist Church noted that in addition to providing limited mental health counseling and referrals, their Health and Wellness Ministry provides seminars in the community around domestic violence. A sister also mentioned that she traveled within her community to speak to high schools and other faith groups about healthy relationships. The pastor noted that his staff has often found that for the usually Black survivors that come to them,

“That's actually why they came to us. Because they saw us as a community of power and as a source of agency for them to be able to be a voice in a situation in which they may feel that they don't necessarily have a voice.”

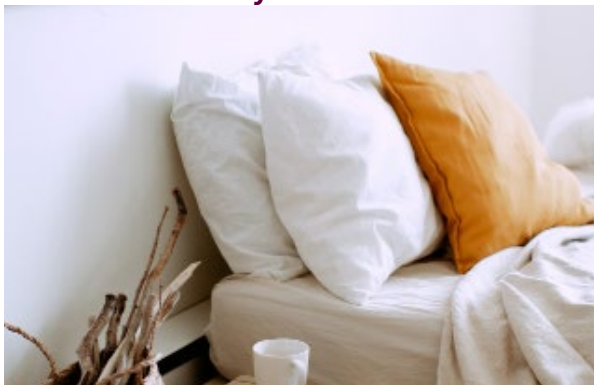
The leader of a branch of the Women's Auxiliary of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community pointed to educational and awareness projects they have undertaken, workshops for men and their creation of a Quranic wheel of control. She noted that it is important to deconstruct the Qur'an, taking care to see how others may use it to control. One minister explained that prevention and intervention must be paired with advocacy, and though that

piece is under attended, he knows that faith leaders have powerful voices that could make a difference in legislation.

The former faith leader of two predominantly queer-identifying Christian congregations discussed his role as a resource to his congregants. He has had congregants come to him about their own experiences as well as child sexual abuse they suspect may be happening in their families and their friends' families. He listens and helps them find the words. He noted,

“There’s some tension, there’s some play between letting folks define and describe their experiences and talk about their experiences and also helping folks to recognize violence as violence... Presenting possibilities and opportunities for folks to take experiences that are normalized or minimized and naming them as violence.” As a faith leader, “It felt important to me that folks felt safe coming and talking and asking. It felt like something positive was happening in the way that we were talking about it in that space that folks were able to get resources that they needed.”

### A Place to Stay



The faith leaders we spoke to detailed their creative responses to the safe housing needs of survivors in their community, and some discussed their responses to housing needs not directly tied to domestic and sexual violence. Indeed, housing and survivorship are intertwined; sometimes survivors become homeless due to domestic violence, and sometimes homelessness increases their risk of experiencing gender-based violence. An imam explained,

“A person might not be in a domestic violence situation but [homelessness may make them] ... vulnerable [and] that may lead to them being taken advantage of.”

Indeed, speaking to this intersection, a pastor to a historically African American Baptist Church noted that his congregation received federal funding to build affordable housing units on their church property for women of color with children, not limited to those escaping dangerous contexts. Indeed, he shared his awareness that redlining<sup>3</sup>, racism and domestic violence intersect.

Notably, many faith leaders explained that they have been able to directly offer housing to survivors, while two faith leaders spoke to experiences running shelters. One pastor noted that clergy tend to stay in their own homes these days, declining the opportunity to live in

<sup>3</sup> Redlining is the process of refusing a loan or insurance to someone because they live in an area deemed to be a poor financial risk See Richard Rothstein, *The Color of the Law* (2017).

the parsonage. In her own church, their parsonage had been vacant for decades. She explains,

“We committed to restoring the house and dedicated it to having the doors open to women with young children leaving domestic violence situations... We wanted to be able to provide an environment that felt welcoming and like a home while they were in transition.”

For those with a more temporary need, her church offers their fellowship hall as an overnight space.

A sister who used to run domestic violence shelters through Sisters of the Good Shepherd spoke directly to her work in Los Angeles leading a transitional shelter where women and families are housed for 8-10 months before seeking permanent housing options. The shelter provides not only accommodation, but also school for all of the children, counseling, art therapy, referrals for immigration needs and other services. Interestingly, she spoke to being able to provide remarkable language access for survivors since Sisters of the Good Shepherd are in 72 countries. She said, “God always seemed to provide just the language we needed at the time we got that referral” - having a nun who worked in Hong Kong for six years when a Cantonese speaker was in shelter, and a sister from Egypt who spoke fluent Arabic and French when two Arabic speaking women (one from Syria and one from Lebanon) were in shelter, and a sister who had spent 18 years in Korea when a woman from Korea was in shelter.

A rabbi reported that through a partnership and an angel fund, her synagogue offered an apartment, primarily available to women leaving domestic violence situations. In the same hospitable spirit of the above pastor's church, this rabbi recounted the apartment showers they used to have:

“We would buy sheets and place settings and everything that an apartment needed. It was kosher, so it was accessible to everybody.”

Unfortunately, with the loss of funding came the loss of this safe place.



Each chapter of the Women’s Auxiliary of the Hadee Mosque Ahmadiyya Muslim Community designates one volunteer community member’s home as a safe house to be kept confidential. These homes were all reviewed by leadership for their safety. This grassroots effort allows communities to support survivors directly, offering the safe place they need in the midst of difficult decisions and other painful obstacles to the life they are working toward. Local communities in the Bahá’í faith often take money from their local budgets and put survivors up in hotels. In 1977, after years of working

with runaway teens, a group of nuns from Sister of the Good Shepherd created a domestic violence shelter run solely on private donations up until 2019. While recently purchased by Catholic Charities, this transitional shelter can serve as a model in providing wellness and spiritual care as well as the secular wrap-around services women and families need in their healing journey.

The leaders also discussed their housing advocacy work. One UMC minister explained that while he cannot speak to every UMC community, he was able to think of three different avenues in housing advocacy taken within his denomination:

- (a) Helping formerly-incarcerated women survivors of gender-based violence transition into affordable housing;
- (b) Investing in affordable housing that prioritizes women and children coming out of abusive situations; and
- (c) Helping undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers leaving abusive situations and in need of housing.

An imam spoke also of one-on-one advocacy, pointing survivors in a helpful direction in cases where they may not have to leave their home and may instead seek legal protection from their partner, requiring the abusive partner's departure from their living space.

While these institutional responses are remarkable in and of themselves, the work faith leaders do with community partners and with the power in their own communities make up much of their work

in supporting survivors and helping them to find safe housing.

## B. Partnerships with External Organizations



Partnerships between faith communities and local community organizations allow the best of each to benefit survivors. Several of the faith leaders spoke of referring survivors to and partnering with local transitional houses, shelters and domestic violence organizations, many of which are culturally-specific, serving members of their religion. Sometimes these partnerships produced services by combining their resources to positive effect. During the time she led a congregation, one minister asked a local domestic violence organization to facilitate a support group in the basement of her church. She had space, they had the expertise, and by working together, survivors were able to have a support group implicitly and explicitly supported by their faith community.



Another Methodist minister recalled the partnership cultivated between his former rural congregation and the adjacent town's domestic violence center, which benefitted survivors and allowed both partners to approach the other broad issues facing the community. The participants also spoke of sitting on committees or creating events that brought together key community partners such as medical staff, lawyers, police, judges, government officials, superintendents and clergy to discuss, learn and advocate. Finally, the leaders noted interfaith partnerships as well as notable organizations that approach the issue of domestic violence from a religious angle, such as [Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse](#) (directed by Rev. Hunter), [Peaceful Families Project](#) (Imam Magid serves on the Advisory Board and as a Trainer) and the [FaithTrust Institute](#) (Imam Magid serves on their board).

A member of the Bahá'í faith asserted, "Partnerships are pretty essential." He believes embracing the strengths of the larger community allows for greater resources and stronger responses. In fact, partnerships are not just fruitful, they are safer. A reverend with a strong background in domestic violence prevention explained that as domestic violence is both complicated and dangerous, bringing in domestic violence service providers is crucial.

The leaders had different experiences in the process of partnering. A member of the Bahá'í faith noted that relationships

and partnerships grew naturally from the shared experience of providing support to survivors and celebrated the fact that they learn through that process. A rabbi also noted a level of ease in cultivating partnerships, while acknowledging that it does take work:

"They're a community organization, and we're a community organization... We have the same goals." She pointed out, "Sometimes, it really does just begin with a phone call... Sometimes, it's just about looking outside your immediate community or your comfort zone."

A former pastor of MCC congregations spoke to the importance of "warm introductions." He would connect survivors with people he knew in other organizations instead of just referring them to the organization itself. These were organizations he and his congregations had strong relationships with:

"We weren't just handing folks off for resources... we were engaged with each other's work but then on additional common goals that we had often around spiritual justice, gender-queer social justice, immigrant justice."

Again, these common goals tied them together in a generative way. One pastor explained the importance of a strategic partnership:

"I'm definitely always having an eye toward organizations that have a national reach so that it can be relatable to our different churches and their different contexts."

However, others noted the difficulty in forging beneficial relationships. Another pastor shared the struggle of confronting a separation of Church and State atmosphere in Washington DC and a sense that even within the “Church” others will not join new initiatives until they prove successful. Meanwhile, these relationships are the ticket to some of the important national conversations happening around domestic violence, and when religious leaders lack access, communities such as hers lack the opportunity to share their stories, strengths and needs. Her congregants go unrepresented in national conversations.

### C. Faith Communities



A majority of the faith leaders we spoke with lifted up the power of close communities to respond to need. One rabbi and a pastor of the MCC church noted that their communities lay beyond their congregation as well – the distinction between the faith and community was porous, so its power was greater. Many times, congregants, often friends or family, open their homes to survivors or offer a place to live at a reduced rate.

“The housing solutions were often internal, informal and again, part of what I experienced as a very positive community network of being present for one another and making these really very generous offerings of resources, of their homes.”

Sometimes, the network in the community provides other services. One pastor of a historically African American Baptist church noted that the co-chair of their affordable housing ministry also heads an organization that can provide housing and several other resources and services to women leaving abusive situations with their children. This connection facilitates a more seamless referral. His congregants volunteer at this organization during the summer, providing childcare and summer camp.

The power of community lies not only in what members share but in the social support they provide. These bonds vary in strength but are always complex and set in a culturally-specific context with culturally-specific challenges. While we noticed several themes emerge across traditions, we would be remiss if we did not highlight the need to support communities in a culturally-specific way. It must also be noted, however, that each denomination has a great diversity within it, and each small faith community may differ in important ways from its sister institutions in other areas.

One pastor spoke to his experience at two small, predominantly queer-identifying MCC congregations of about

30-40 people in regular attendance with broader community involvement. As MCC Churches are predominantly attended by queer-identifying congregants,

“There are folks who will come to the congregation looking for community and so the faith can become secondary to that... [They are looking] to find a comfortable place to plug in for social support.” Therefore, these communities were particularly close. He explained, “One of the things that the community did really successfully for each other... [was] providing safer space for each other through crises like family crises, sexual assault, partner violence, that sort of thing. Folks who were aware, discussed with each other, supported each other... [They did] a pretty decent job of not victim blaming, isolating those folks.”

In such a space, they were able to provide housing for each other in times of need. “I can’t think of a time when it wasn’t resolved within the community.” These congregations cultivated a closeness born out of shared experience and desire for community, a bond which was then easily harnessed to respond to the needs of survivors, including housing needs.

However, such close community is not a given. In the listening sessions, a rabbi explained that the level of support survivors find in her community varies depending on the depth of their roots and relationships. Some find support in their community, but others look for a fresh start elsewhere. While her community

has now accepted that domestic violence does happen in their circles and acknowledgment are now more willing to step up, they may only do so if prompted.

Other faith communities have a more ambivalent view of domestic violence in their circles. They can count on each other for specific forms of help but less so for solidarity and emotional support. A respected Muslim leader detailed challenges in finding support specific to his community:

“We have one very big community in Boston, it’s a very diverse and very large community, and the challenge of that is you can find yourself whittled into obscurity. The intimacy component is actually missing when you don’t have monolithic communities... There’s a lot of good, nice, cordial relationships, but [fewer] intimate bonds where people are connected on deeper levels.”

Despite the fact that members of his community tend to be generous and committed volunteers, when it comes to the issue of domestic violence, people are less likely to get involved. He notes that even if survivors are not judged explicitly, they may not feel “embraced, or loved, or brought in.” Similarly, a pastor explained that those in her conference are ready to help in some ways:

“Those that have pantries and food resources, they send food. Those that have certified social service members, they send them to come and check in on the families in that way... People come



and they love having the opportunity to bring their gifts and transform in a one-on-one tangible way.”

Yet she also stated that in her predominantly Black and Latinx community, a sense of shame may keep people silent and hurt their spirit.

Others spoke more explicitly of stigma and shame. An imam explained that a survivor may also leave their community because nobody believed them, because of the social pressure and trauma of such a situation or because the person who caused harm won in court:

“They feel shame that everyone believe[s] they have lied about this and the guy is [like]... a hero, a victim... No matter what you scream at the top of your lungs, still he won in court.”

He noted that sometimes, they may receive greater support outside their own community. Another leader noted that in the Korean Immigrants' Church, domestic and sexual violence are not spoken of, but instead are considered family matters. In fact, she noted that “men have dominated women” in Korean marriages and that some women consider violence at home normal. Yet in the midst of shame, stigma and victim-blaming, each connection matters in its own right. She explains,

“It's extremely difficult for a woman to talk about what they are suffering... The reason they are asking me for help... the biggest reason is trust. Having a personal relationship with them. Being a leader, a woman they trust, they are

willing to bring me into their confidence. It's not just because they know that I'm the domestic violence counselor but because I am a trusted insider.”

A nun who works closely with Latina survivors in Los Angeles spoke of the concept of “God as a batterer” dominating women's understanding and relationship with religion, and the work she does at deconstructing that understanding to move beyond the stigma and shame.

A leader in the Ahmadiyya Muslim community also highlighted the importance of trust. She noted that in her predominantly South Asian community, shame and family honor institute secrecy, and thus survivors need to be assured of confidentiality. The more invisible forms of abuse (psychological, sexual and emotional) are even more likely to be kept quiet. She also pointed to particular challenges of being an immigrant or refugee survivor, a large population in her community. The cultural shifts, new working roles for women, and children all heighten tension, while the language barrier becomes an accessibility issue in finding services. A member of the Bahá'í faith echoed this need for services available in multiple languages, as many in the faith are also immigrants and refugees.

The pastor of a historically African American Baptist Church detailed the complicated discourse around domestic and sexual violence in his community. He explained that while no member of his

church has ever disclosed intimate partner harm to him or his staff, he knows that this is unlikely to mean no one in his flock suffers from violence. In fact, research has helped him discover that in the context of his upper-middle class African American congregation, it is status - spiritual, social, religious capital - and stigma that keeps survivors silent. He explained that the

“Total resistance towards having discussions around aspects of violence, aspects of oppression, aspects of violence both domestically and those that happen through racial microaggressions”

is due to the trauma of these aggressions and the fact that they haven't been taken seriously in the past. That said, Black people from outside his immediate community do seek out his church for help. In fact, as a particularly inclusive church, many LGBTQ survivors seek his church out as a safe place. When he and his staff explain that they are mandated reporters, he shares that they are pleased. His church carries an authority that they feel lifts their voices up:

“[T]hey saw us as a community of power and as a source of agency for them to be able to be a voice in a situation in which they may feel that they don't necessarily have a voice.”

Communities contend with domestic and sexual violence within their unique cultural locations, encountering different obstacles and using different strengths. However, stigma and shame are common. A few faith leaders also pointed to the

complexity of a survivor and their abusive partner belonging to the same faith community. It can be difficult for their friends, and it can make a survivor leave that space for good. Relationships are messy and they reflect the complicated nature of the issue. Prevention and response measures must be tailored to the needs of each group.

## D. Barriers



### Financial

The most obvious barrier faith leaders face in responding to domestic and sexual violence is their limited financial resources. This obstacle came up again and again. They rely on grants, donations, government funds, and sometimes “Angel Donors” who contribute substantial amounts. Yet the loss of an Angel Donor may then signal the loss of services, as in the case of the apartment the previously mentioned rabbi spoke of. They also listed legal challenges and the need for increased education and community volunteerism. As mentioned above, they spoke to the need for services to be available in multiple languages for immigrant communities as well as the advocacy and job training they might need.

## Gender-Based Assumptions



Most of the faith leaders discussed domestic and sexual violence from a heterosexual framework with the gendered assumption of male harm and female survivorship. Though statistically most common, this is not always the case.

One minister, who has pastored congregations attended mostly by queer-identifying people, explained that this assumption, though, is something he has usually been able to avoid:

“In the communities, it’s something that would come up and that folks I work with – we would redirect. Usually, redirection wouldn’t be a direct correction, so much as then as we started to talk, we would add broader language, more inclusive language about who survivors are and what folks look like... That’s always something that happens with professionals, community partners, folks who are doing the work – it comes up all the time.”

## Bias, Discrimination, and Systems

One reverend shared that their transition house was not welcomed in their current

neighborhood. Neighbors frequently complain about residents and their children to the police. She stated,

“They feel like we are bringing a less than quality of people into our community. We have a predominantly African American and Latino demographic that we care for and some don’t speak English, and nor do we require that they be a member of the church.”



A pastor of a historically African American Baptist church also spoke to racism as a barrier on a systemic scale. He explained,

“For us, the issue of housing at our congregation intersected with matters of not only victims of domestic violence but also persons who are victims of redlining and race which often go hand-in-hand.”

Their affordable housing ministry seeks to serve not just those leaving violent homes but also strives to provide a space apart from the traditional system which often regulates what individuals are able to do in their housing and has strict rules. Indeed, some faith leaders recognized the traditional system as something to be avoided for the safety and well-being of their faith community. A former minister to predominantly queer-identifying

congregations noted with relief that his community successfully avoided systems by supporting each other. One such system is the criminal justice system. As discussed in the Partnerships section of this report, many faith leaders describe relying upon and even partnering with police and the criminal justice system. Some representing more prosperous communities enjoyed a relatively fruitful partnership, while others saw these relationships as a mandatory, necessary reality.

## Trust



A few faith leaders spoke to an important barrier: the issue of trust. A domestic violence advocate and member of the Korean immigrant community was able to gain the confidence of survivors because she is “a trusted insider,” and folks have good reason to think they can only trust those in their community when outside services can lack cultural competency. A respected Muslim leader courageously spoke to the heart of the issue:

“Especially around the Muslim community in particular... there seems to be a discourse around violence and the Muslim community... Islam certainly does not advocate or endorse any form of violence... In the discourse around These issues, it somehow centers around Islam rather than around Muslims... Islam is an ideal, Muslims are less ideal in their practice and character, they are charged with all sorts of cultural dynamics and realities.”

Yet with the pervasiveness of this stereotype around people’s faith, the heart and soul of their lives, a hesitation to be vulnerable could only be expected. He notes a

“Fear that these services or that these initiatives are not as benign or as ‘innocent’ as they come off as. So, there’s always the fear of subversion... They have a skepticism that ‘you’re actually trying to brainwash me somehow; you’re trying to brainwash community members into believing in some other reality’... Who do you partner with and who do you empower to ensure that there is a level of safety and security not just externally but also safety, security around your theology and your belief that you’re not going to be compromising your religious identity?”

Secular organizations and advocates must rise to this call – a call to create the type of welcome that invites each survivor and each faith partner in with respect for exactly who they are.



# Next Steps

## Reliance on Traditional Systems

Historically, domestic and sexual violence responses have not always met the needs of many marginalized people. The use of law enforcement to respond to instances of domestic violence can harm Black, Indigenous and other people of color, survivors, their families and their communities, often leading to a reduction in reporting, mandatory and dual arrests, and recidivism<sup>4</sup>. In cases where, for example, a survivor relies on their abuser completely for financial support, a legal entanglement could compromise the financial stability of the whole family and a survivor may choose to use a different intervention. These discussions with faith leaders demonstrated that no faith community is a monolith -- some rely on these traditional solutions, while many referenced the harm they can cause and chose other solutions. It is difficult to disengage with a system without delineated new processes available, but some faith leaders already highlighted the work of their community (outside of the traditional criminal system). The Ahmadiyya community's safe house model and practice of community

<sup>4</sup> Durfee, Alesha. Situational Ambiguity and Gendered Patterns of Arrest for Intimate Partner Violence (March 2012) *available at* [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221697141\\_Situational\\_Ambiguity\\_and\\_Gendered\\_Patterns\\_of\\_Arrest\\_for\\_Intimate\\_Partner\\_Violence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221697141_Situational_Ambiguity_and_Gendered_Patterns_of_Arrest_for_Intimate_Partner_Violence); Maxwell, Christopher. The Effects of Arrest on Intimate Partner Violence: New Evidence from the Spousal Abuse Replication Program (July 2001) *available at* <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/188199.pdf>.

engagement to keep survivors safe and hold harm-doers accountable offers a promising practice for community-based accountability. The majority of the faith leaders we spoke with agreed with the power of community-based support.

As a next step, we should actualize the wisdom of leaders already doing innovative work by tailoring survivor-centered advocacy beyond leaving perspective to faith-specific contexts. While faith communities may still find reasons to utilize the criminal legal system and law enforcement for response, they should also consider the individual needs of survivors and focus on survivor-centered responses.

## Accountability



Flowing naturally from a disengagement from punitive systems comes space for us to investigate and celebrate work done on accountability structures. Faith traditions are uniquely positioned to embrace this work as they traditionally uphold the inherent worth and dignity of all peoples, even those who have caused harm. One minister noted,

“[We are] just beginning that conversation about what does it look like to hold people accountable, to refer them to services, but to be very realistic about how much work it’s going to take to change as well as bringing compassion and hope to the situation... I think now we’re getting to a point where we can also talk about what does it mean to work with those who abuse and how can we do that in a way that supports survivors?”

Others have already been working on confronting toxic masculinity. One reverend is exploring the question,

“What does it mean for men to form and claim their own identity as men in a way that is not based on power over and that is not based on abuse and that is not predatory? What does it mean to do that work with men?”

## Gender and Sexuality



The majority of the faith leaders we spoke with did not discuss the needs of LGBTQ congregants. Indeed, research on domestic and sexual violence has a void around the nexus of faith communities, LGBTQ congregants and interpersonal

harm. An expansion of understanding relationship norms and sharing those with their faith communities could help faith leaders increase the comfort and safety of survivors who may have been hesitant to reach out to their leaders and congregations for support. Researching within this framework would be a powerful addition to the work faith communities can do in responding to and preventing gender-based violence.

## Housing and Promising Practices



We know that one of the most pressing concerns for survivors of domestic and sexual violence is their need for safe, affordable and stable housing<sup>5</sup>. The faith leaders we spoke to shared the variety of ways their congregations have responded to the housing needs of survivors both directly through their religious institution and through their community.

<sup>5</sup> Clough, A., Draughon, J. E., Njie-Carr, V., Rollins, C., & Glass, N. (2014). "Having housing made everything else possible": Affordable, safe and stable housing for women survivors of violence. *Qualitative Social Work*, 13(5), 671-688.

We also saw that offering other supports, such as:

- Financial assistance
- Counseling
- Treatment
- Employment assistance
- Childcare
- Transportation
- Advocacy support

can also help survivors maintain their existing housing.

The experience of the reverend at the African American Baptist Church who used federal funding to build affordable housing units on their church property sheds light on the creative ways that congregations can leverage the funding and tools available on a federal, state and local level to actually offer housing to their members and survivors. A pastor, rabbi and Muslim leader shared their respective solutions of using a parsonage home to house survivors, angel investor funds to purchase affordable housing units, and community-based safe houses. In fact, many faith leaders shared how their communities opened their own homes or were able to offer housing options at reduced rates to those that needed a safe place to stay. In some cases, collaboration with local domestic violence programs also streamlined the ways in which survivors were able to access housing and related resources. As shared before, collaboration between a congregation and a local domestic violence shelter

allowed for the facilitation of a survivor support group which was supported by their faith community and the expertise of advocates. Faith communities are positioned to provide support in a powerful way. These creative solutions can help survivors recover and heal from their abuse while being safely housed. One pastor explained,

“I work with a conference-level affordable housing committee, and we, two and a half weeks ago, dedicated our first house... There are people watching that are grassroots as we are... I serve a modest community... People were surprised we did something like this, but it also provided hope... Surely, if we could have done it, then it’s something they can do.”

### **Uplift and Work with Faith Communities**



Finally, we need to uplift the voices of faith leaders who are doing the work of gender-based violence response and prevention as well as facilitate deeper partnerships between faith communities and domestic and sexual violence organizations. Indeed, faith leaders are uniquely positioned to respond



to the needs of a culturally-specific community and with each success, other groups take note. We must contribute expertise, resources and platforms to increase the positive spiral of concern and hope in faith communities. By amplifying faith leaders with strong domestic and sexual violence expertise as well as organizations dedicated to supporting faith communities' work on gender-based violence, we magnify the positive work they are already doing and provide survivors with more options. These partnerships would help faith communities capitalize on their unique strengths while more clearly defining those areas where consulting someone with domestic violence expertise is necessary. There is an unspoken hesitancy around collaborations between secular domestic and sexual violence organizations and faith communities on both sides, but in order to successfully support and advocate for survivors and prevent violence, we must work together.

“...faith leaders are uniquely positioned to respond to the needs of a culturally-specific community and with each success, other groups take note.”

# Conclusion

The work of preventing and responding to sexual and domestic violence is painful and in order to effectively engage with the issue it must be contextualized within a larger picture of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and other interlocking forms of oppression. However, there is also tremendous hope. As those individuals with moral authority and access to community build on their traditions of prophetic wisdom and speak truth to power, advocates can collaborate with these faith communities in mutually beneficial partnerships which build on the best each has to offer. In the midst of this challenge, the faith leaders hold on to the spiritual practices and teachings that give them strength, and we offer them now to you:

- Memorize hymns appropriate to the moment and sing them
- Prayer
- Fellowship over video conferencing
- Walking through neighborhoods, look for street art. In those creative acts of resilience, noticing the spirit of God
- Reading sacred texts. Refocus and connect back to humanity
- Love for All, Hate for None
- Reading the poetry of ancestors
- Have love in your heart for every soul you come across
- Centering in the sacred moment described in the religious calendar
- Loving surrender, spiritual commitment, sacrifice, and spiritually orienting around the Haj, regardless if you can go
- Shabbat
- To sit with family and be with them
- Slowing the pace and quieting things down
- Trail walking around the lake. Moving through that space, see God at work, continuing to sustain life and move it forward
- Studying the book of James on Sunday
- Trust in Jesus
- Being present in the moment. To just do one thing and to be available is something that requires practice and work

# Further Resources

- A. [Sojourners' 100 Sermons](#)
- B. The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence's [Special Collection: Domestic Violence and Religion](#)
- C. [Advocates for Victims of Abuse - The Evangelical Covenant Church](#)
- D. [Mending the Soul Curriculum](#)
- E. [Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse](#)
- F. [Peaceful Families Project](#)
- G. [FaithTrust Institute](#)
- H. [Interfaith Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)