

Module 5 Workshop Guide

Violence Against Women and Girls

Pages 75-85 in Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations Toward a Social Statement

<http://www.elca.org/womenandjustice>

Opening Prayer – *See Suggested Prayers by Pastor Connie Winter-Eulberg on the ELCA Sierra Pacific Synod website or see prayers on pages 22-23 of the study guide.*

Prayer:

Healer of the outcast and the hurting, we ask for healing for all of the women, children and men who have been victims of sexual and domestic violence. The stories that we hear and the witness of others make us know that this is a huge problem. We want this violence to stop. We know that the healing will start today as we listen to each other. Helps us to find ways to end this violence. We ask for your blessing on the courageous survivors of violence who have become victors through their healing process. Your love changes us. Thanks. AMEN (Pastor Connie Winter-Eulberg, 2017)

Review Conversation Covenant – *See Pages 13-14 for more information and to copy the Covenant*

From her book **Silent Shame**, a poem by Martha Janssen, p. 74

“Family”

“Where were you when I needed you?
What you didn’t know you might have guessed.
But you chose to overlook because to see was painful.
I bore your pain plus all of mine while you ignored me.
Where were you?”

From her book, **Survivor Prayers: Talking with God About Sexual Abuse**, by Catherine J. Foote (pg. 5)

Talking to God About Abuse

What do I dare to tell you, God?

What do I dare to talk to you about?

May I speak of my anger? May I tell you of my shame? Do you want to hear about the ugliness of the assault, of all the ways it robbed me of my life? Do you want to know about the confusion, the betrayal?

What do I dare to say to you, God?

What do I dare to share with you?

My disappointments?

The loneliness, the fear?

May I tell you about what he did? May I talk openly? May I be frank? Do you want to hear about the pain of his assault? May I tell you about the blood and the brokenness?

Do you care about the nights I can't sleep? Do you care about the days when I struggle for the will to go on struggling?

God, what do you know about what happened? What prayers have you answered even before I speak? Did you know about all the times I tried to talk to others about the reality? Did you know how I longed to share this secret? Did you know about the pain? Do you want to know how much I doubted you, how often I've hid from you, how angry I've been? Do you remember the nights I wondered where you were? Do you remember when you were the only one I could talk to? Do you remember when you were the only one who listened?

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (NRSV)

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?^[a] ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Ephesians 5:22-24

²² For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. ²⁴ As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

AND THEN FOLLOWING THIS -

Ephesians 5:25-28

²⁵ For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her ²⁶ to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. ²⁷ He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. ²⁸ In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies.

Children and Parents

Ephesians 6:1-4

“Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord,^[w] for this is the right thing to do. ² “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise: ³ If you honor your father and mother, “things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.”^[x]

⁴ Fathers,^[y] do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

Definition:

Gender-based violence is “physical, sexual, psychological,

emotional, or other personal harm inflicted on someone for gender-based reasons.”¹

STATISTICS

Statistics help us to see the big picture of the problem of gender-based violence.

According to the United Nations, “In 2012, a study conducted in New Delhi found that 92 percent of women reported having experienced some form of sexual violence in public spaces in their lifetime, and 88 percent of women reported having experienced some form of verbal sexual harassment (including unwelcome comments of a sexual nature, whistling, leering or making obscene gestures) in their lifetime.”²

Seventy percent of all people trafficked are women and girls. Two out of every three child trafficking victims are girls.³

Almost half of the women killed around the world in 2012 were killed by intimate partners or family members, far fewer than the less than 6 percent of men killed by partners and family members in the same year.⁵

U.S. Statistics

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, about 4.8 million women in the U.S. are the targets of intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes annually. That is almost 13,500 women every day for a year. Fewer than 20 percent of them sought medical treatment following an injury.⁴

As you turn from your personal reflections on the ways gender-based violence affects your life and people in your life to a few statistics specifically about violence against women and girls, think about how common this violence is. The threat of such violence hovers over women and girls around the world. We know this violence is wrong.

One national study estimates that in 2006, more than 600 women were raped or sexually assaulted every day.⁶ These are a very few of the many examples of gender-based violence. These statistics demonstrate the scope of the problem.

Specific experiences of people help us personalize the overwhelming statistics and empathize with others.

Why do we deny or resist?

Denial or Resistance

1. This violence doesn't touch our family or friends.
2. Men are named as primary perpetrators. Some of these men we know.
3. We mistrust women and girls who report abuse or assault. We tell ourselves that they report falsely or exaggerate.

Why is this so?

STORIES

"On Aug. 8 [2015], David Conley allegedly broke into his ex-girlfriend Valerie Jackson's house in Houston, Texas, and killed her, her husband and her six children, methodically shooting each one in the head. Jackson had recently

dumped Conley and reunited with her husband after Conley allegedly smashed her head into a refrigerator.”

A 75 year old Lutheran woman in the Midwest was tied up and raped in a mid-western town. The man broke into her home as she took a nap one summer afternoon. She blamed herself and thought that God could have sent the man next door to rape someone else and not her. When pressed about why God did not use God’s power to protect her, she said that she was being punished by God because she had been thinking more of herself and not taking care of others much. Her pastor had no idea how to help her.

“My rapist was already on probation for sexually assaulting another woman when I reported him. He had admitted to sexually assaulting her and was simply put on probation. When the process began for my case, I immediately started having anxiety attacks almost daily. [I waited] for two months to find out if my rapist was going to be able to stay on campus for another year and a half (rarely being updated on the progress of my case). ... Quite possibly the most traumatizing encounter I had with an administrator was when I met with someone to discuss how unsafe I was feeling with my rapist living so close to me, that I was worried he would do something again. She told me that she had recently met with him and he ‘didn’t seem like the type of person who would do something like that.’”⁸

“On Aug. 14 [2015] the number of transgender people murdered in America this year hit a historic high of 15, according to advocacy organizations like the National

Center for Transgender Equality. This somber milestone was hit when the remains of Elisha Walker, 20, were discovered in a North Carolina field several months after she went missing. Like the majority of the other victims, Elisha was not just transgender but a young transgender woman of color.”⁹

Questions:

1. Where do I feel confronted by violence against women and girls?
2. Do I avoid listening to stories of violence against women and girls? If I feel resistance to this topic, what defenses are possibly triggered in me?
3. What might influence a survivor's willingness to share or not share their stories, to seek justice against their abusers, or to seek the care that could support them in their healing?
4. Do you feel uneasy empathizing with people who are hurt by this violence?
5. If you are affected by gender-based violence, in what circumstances have you felt like sharing your own story?
6. How would you feel if a man that you was accused of violence against a woman or girl?
7. If I feel resistance to this topic, what defenses are possibly triggered in me? Would it feel safer or more palatable to me if victims/ survivors were somehow to

blame or complicit in the harm enacted against them or were at least incidental and not targeted?

****Approach your resistance without judgment, only sincere curiosity and compassion.

3 Great Challenges for People of Faith

As people of faith, three great challenges must be overcome to begin to consistently and effectively curb the reign of violence against women and girls.

1) There is the problem of the insidious, **systemic nature of sin** – the structures in place that support a culture in which this violence is not only replicated but increased.

A patriarchal social system communicates that women and girls are supposed to be controlled or subdued. This idea pervades families, institutions and the media. We are all socialized to protect and enforce these values. To imagine that we are outside of the cycle perpetuating violence against women is false. If we fail to actively and consistently address harmful attitudes and beliefs about sex and gender in ourselves and others, the violence will continue to be excused or rationalized.

2) We face **our own discomfort** and even disgust with the reality of gender-based violence. Often without even knowing it, we employ our defenses against it: denial, avoidance, minimization, thinking this violence is only elsewhere, doubting or blaming victims/survivors, etc. We see these defenses active not only in ourselves as individuals, but in the systems that fail to prosecute perpetrators or to protect survivors.

As acknowledged earlier in this session, there is great pain

and trauma in this topic for many people. Targeted violence against women, girls, and people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender reminds us of a deep brokenness in humanity and a truly troubling deprivation of the basic right to safety and security.

Also, our justice systems, educational systems and even churches repeatedly fail to take seriously the issue of violence against women and often contribute to further traumatizing survivors rather than participating in justice or healing.

3) As a consequence of the first two challenges above, we often harbor resistance to name aloud the fact that perpetrators are overwhelmingly heterosexual men and boys.¹¹ There is a misconception that in doing so, people who speak this truth are encouraging hostility toward or denigrating all men. What we get as a result is discussion about the problem of women as victims of violence but avoidance of discussion about the problem of men as perpetrators of this violence. **The focus of conversation reinforces gender-based violence as a “women’s issue,” further protecting perpetrator culture.**

This is a male issue.

What Gifts of Faith help us address Violence Against Women and Girls?

1) We know scripturally and theologically that all bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Violence is rarely justifiable; it is particularly horrific when we permit its perpetuation against some people and their bodies because they are seen to matter less. The church as the body of Christ knows

that to harm any member of the corporate body is to harm Christ; to denigrate the temple of the Spirit is to denigrate the Spirit.

This sacred knowledge gives us not only ground in our holy conviction to end this violence, but also an awareness of how these injustices ripple beyond those immediately affected into all of our lives, and into God's heart as well. As significant a web as sin has woven in sexism, the web of the goodness of God's creation and our reconciliation in the grace of God through Christ is greater indeed.

2) We trust that justification by grace through faith frees us from our ego that throws up defenses against our engagement of violence against women. We have assurance of God's love and forgiveness for all our sin, and we are heirs to the promise of the kingdom. The freedom of God's grace in Christ compels us to act, even as we know we are still enmeshed in sin.

3) We have the commitment in the ministry of all the baptized to love and serve our neighbors – all our neighbors. This is a commitment to neighbor justice, both in the protection of the vulnerable and oppressed and in bringing justice to perpetrators of harm. It is an act of love to speak truth about the way we all participate in a culture of gender-based violence and to the fact that perpetrators of violence against people with devalued identities are overwhelmingly people with privileged identities. It is neither loving nor does it ultimately serve God or others to shy away from these facts.

Discussion questions

1. Does it feel natural to you to think of women and girls as bearers of the Holy Spirit who reflect God's image

- in the world? If not, what gets in the way? What associations to female bodies do you most readily make?
2. **Image if someone you care about is troubled by a gender-based comment you have made. What might be the first emotion you would experience?** First thought? Now, imagine releasing yourself to trust in God's grace covering all the sin in which you are bound up – there is no risk or danger, only ever-constant love in God's eyes. How are you freed to respond now?
 3. **What do we risk when we address perpetrators and perpetrator culture directly?** What do we fear, and how do you think that is part of the system that keeps violence alive?

Ending Prayer

Let us pray,

Fountain of love and giver of hope, we are filled with gratitude for all of your children in this circle. The love that radiates between us holds us up and gives us hope. We know that we are your children and you have made us beautiful, intelligent, resourceful, grateful, powerful human beings. AMEN (Connie Winter-Eulberg, 2017)

****Have participants fill out the RESPONSE FORMS for Module 5. An abbreviated version of the response form is on the Sierra Pacific Synod website.**

Collect them, and send to ELCA in Chicago.

Questions? Contact

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Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA Women and Justice Process Builders