

# **Equipping the Church: Training Church Leadership on Domestic Violence**

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# Abstract

Pastors and lay leaders are a potential source of assistance to abuse victims, but are not adequately trained on the issue. Former strategies to reach clergy have been only moderately productive.

This presentation will focus on successful strategies utilized to promote training for church leadership across all levels of responsibility.

# Primary Emphasis

- Best Practices
- Advocacy/Policy/Prevention
- Faith Community
- Intervention/Collaboration

# Overview of the Problem

- Pastors and lay leaders not trained on domestic violence in seminaries and Bible colleges.
- Pastors and lay leaders are a potential source of assistance, and are often sought out when an abuse victim discloses for the first time.
- Former strategies to reach church leadership have failed miserably.

# Obstacles to be overcome

- Resistance to the topic of domestic violence is even greater in churches than in the community at large.
- Church leaders often have the misperception that people within their congregation only want to hear about positive, feel-good messages; not real-world challenges.
- Lay leaders within the church, as well as pastoral staff, need to be trained.

# ...and more obstacles to be overcome!

- There is an historical resistance and a mutual distrust on the part of religious communities and domestic violence agencies.
- It is difficult for church leaders to take a full day, or multiple days, away from their day-to-day responsibilities, to attend an intensive training on the issue.
- Many lay leaders work a secular job, and are likewise unable to attend a full-day training on the issue, particularly during the week.

# Training Rationale

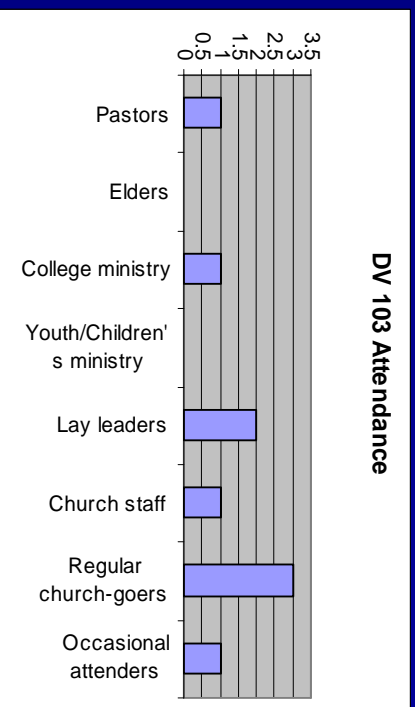
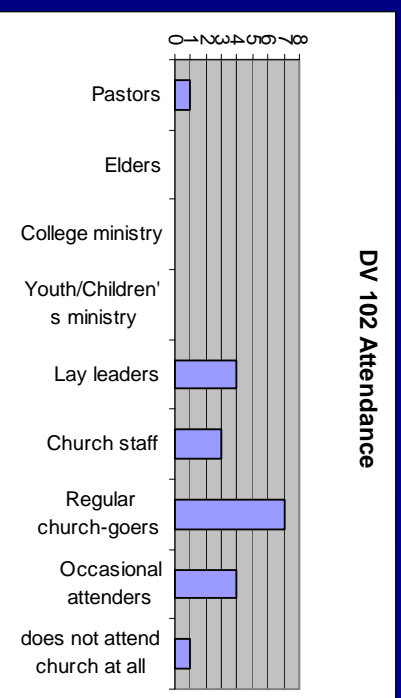
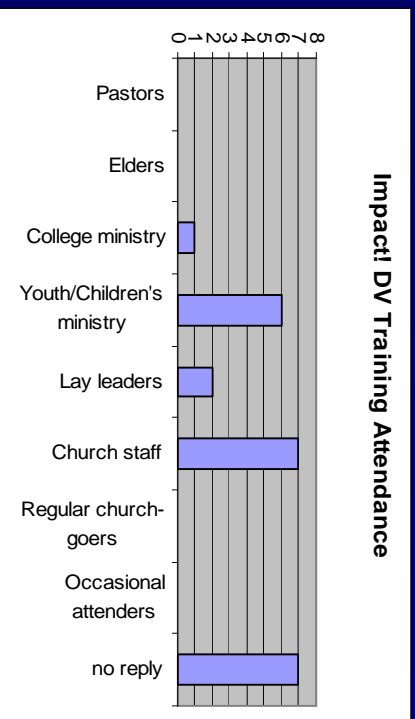
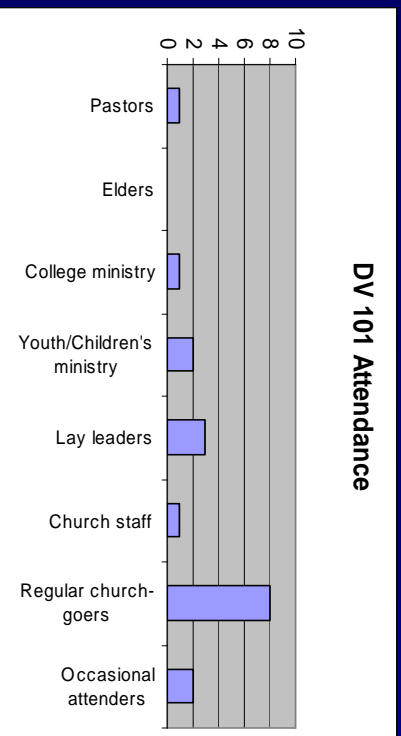
In order to address this lack of understanding, a series of half-day workshops has been developed to more adequately train pastors and lay leaders to recognize warning signs of domestic violence and to respond appropriately.

Titled "*Equipping the Church: Straight Talk on Domestic Violence*," the weekend workshops focus on how individual religious leaders, as well as their entire faith community, can work together to support victims of abuse in their churches and congregations.

# Strategies for Success

- Approaching the leadership from within the church has proven successful.
- Training approach and facilitation methods need to match the audience to which they are intended.
- Program development must include church leadership from the outset.
- Marketing must be done by church leadership, as well as by the agency conducting the training.

# Attendance by Level of Involvement in Ministry



# Defining success

- Each workshop was evaluated; incentives were given to enhance response.
- Evaluations consistently showed that the audience appreciated the training, and learned a great deal.
- The workshop series reached representatives and leaders of 10 local churches who attended.
- The facilitator partnered with other local domestic violence professionals, religious leaders, and elected officials in presenting information during the workshops.

# Program Objectives

- To educate lay leaders, clergy, and interested persons of faith about the dynamics of domestic violence play out in couples within their churches.
- To motivate congregations in various faith communities to support abuse victims and lovingly call the batterer to account.
- To illustrate ways congregations can work on prevention.
- To illustrate ways that faith communities can partner with secular groups to work toward the goal of bringing spiritual support and physical safety to both current and former abuse victims.
- To educate secular workers about spiritual issues of concern to abuse victims, enabling them to provide professional services in a culturally competent manner.

# PART I: Overview of the Problem

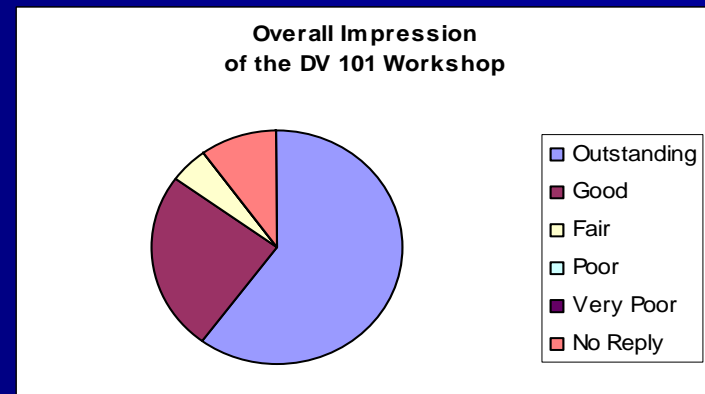
This workshop (DV 101) covers:

- the dynamics of domestic violence,
  - the six different types of abuse,
  - warning signs, and
  - instruction on how to effectively help abuse victims.
- 
- This workshop features the first part of *Broken Vows*, the award-winning video from the Faith Trust Institute.

Participants were asked to **"name two positive actions you can take to compassionately minister to domestic violence victims."**

*Participants' reply summary:*

- no reply (6)
- listen (6)
- be aware of/provide resources (6)
- understanding/compassion /be supportive (4)



# PART II:

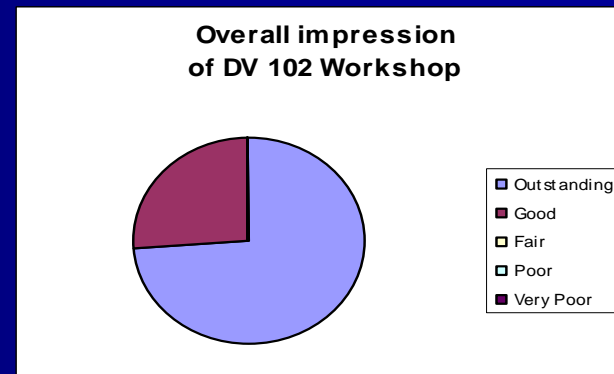
## Focusing on the victim

This workshop (DV 102) features:

- A survivor panel of former victims of abuse, telling their stories of how their church either helped them or hindered them in their quest for safety and support.
- This workshop includes the second part of the *Broken Vows* video.

Participants were asked to **"name two positive actions your church can take to compassionately minister to domestic violence victims."**

- *Participants' reply summary:*
- listen/assist victims (4)
- support and provision (6)
- educate/train staff/clergy (4)



# PART III:

## Focusing on the abuser

This workshop (DV 103) addresses:

- how the religious community can support abusers who are willing to change, and
- how to deal with abusers who are not.
- This workshop features a panel of providers of batterers' intervention programs locally.

Participants were asked, "in your own words, explain why is it important to differentiate between truly repentant abusers and unrepentant abusers."

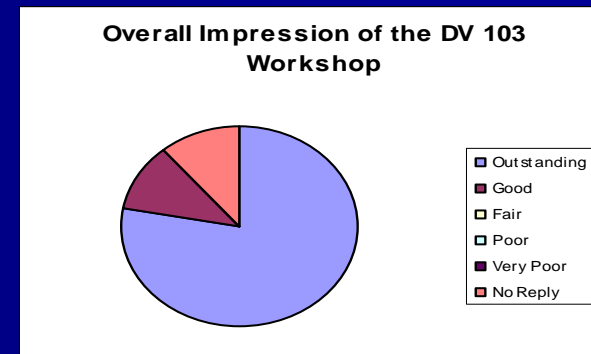
*Participants' reply summary:*

- unrepentant abusers will continue to hurt others
- repentant abusers are actively changing

Participants were asked to "name two of the innovative prevention strategies presented in this workshop which you believe your church could realistically employ to lovingly hold abusers accountable."

*Participants' reply summary:*

- Warriors for Peace
- sharing/teaching in cell groups and in men's ministry



# PART IV:

## Focusing on the children

This workshop (DV 104) has a dual focus:

- how the faith community can minister to children impacted by domestic violence, and
- helping youth pastors to address teen dating violence.
- This workshop features a survivor panel of adults exposed to domestic violence as children.



# Evaluation Questions

- Rate your confidence in your ability to identify the various types of abuse, dynamics of domestic violence, and origins of the violence before/after the workshops
- Rate your confidence in your ability to understand the role of faith in a domestic violence victim's experience before/after the workshops

Both questions were measured on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest; based upon the evaluations, most participants increased by 1-3 points from their BEFORE score to their AFTER score.

# Evaluation Questions

- Rate your confidence in your ability to understand the role of the faith community in a domestic violence victim's experience before/after the workshops.
- Rate your confidence in your ability to understand the relationship between social and cultural influences and domestic violence before/after the workshops.

Both questions were measured on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest; based upon the evaluations, most participants increased by 1-3 points from their BEFORE score to their AFTER score.

# Evaluation, con't.

Participants were asked, "As a result of attending this training, is there anything you plan to do differently when domestic violence occurs in your congregation?"

- Be more proactive – especially in listening.
- Know sources of help available – be willing to follow up in these (provide transportation to counseling, moving, child care, etc.).
- Implement more info into services.
- Share information – don't be silent.
- More practical immediate support for victims.
- Be more open and committed.
- Try to be more sensitive to victims of abuse and help refer to leaders!!
- Be more compassionate.
- No couples counseling!
- Yes. Expose it in the way God directs me to.
- Get involved if asked by victim.

# Evaluation, con't.

Participants were asked, "As a result of attending this training, is there anything you plan to do differently when domestic violence occurs in your congregation?"

- Identify and report to appropriate agencies.
- Determine the nature of the violence and intercede when appropriate.
- Educate myself more on the Word so I can speak with confidence.
- Making the church safe for abusers as well as victims to come forward!
- Urge acknowledgement in a more public manner to lower barriers to discussion.
- Create a safety climate, demonstrate leadership and commitment to the issue.
- Yes, be trained to educate my church.
- Using the men's ministry to effectively change hearts.
- Create parameters of safety and accountability.
- Consequences for continued abusive behavior.

# Immediate Outcome

- The first workshop was so well-received that it was repeated at Impact!, a local school of ministry, to train Bible college students.
- Information packets from the workshops were widely disseminated, not only locally, but were requested from other domestic violence professionals, theologians, and academics across the country, as well as graduate schools of ministry.
- Information from the first workshop was later presented at an interfaith conference on abuse to train imams, rabbis, priests, and leaders of other faith traditions how to effectively minister to members of their churches, parishes, mosques and temples dealing with domestic violence.

# Continuing Impact

- The workshop materials are being used as models for training modules for the local Catholic Diocese tailored to church staff and priests, as well as seminary students.
- Information packets from the workshops were requested for distribution to China, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia.
- In addition, we have been approached for an interview by a local television show that reaches 190,000 homes.

# Lessons Learned

- Working from within the church structure (rather than from without) was possible only through proven, well-established relationships.
- The messages of nonviolence, compassion for victims, and accountability for abusers were well-received because they were framed in the language of scripture, and in congruence with Christian values and culture.
- While senior pastors rarely attended the workshops, the church staff and lay leaders who did eagerly took back the information to their church communities, and gladly shared the information they had received.

# Lessons Learned, con't.

- Collaboration with church leadership in program development was very successful, although challenging at times (due to busy schedules).
- Marketing workshops to other churches can be a delicate undertaking, although it was not insurmountable.
- The church is hungry for this information; when handled in a non-adversarial, welcoming manner, it is very possible to develop a collaborative team between domestic violence agencies and church communities to join together in addressing the needs of hurting families.

# For more information

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