

Articles on Domestic Abuse
Lutheran Woman's Quarterly
Summer 2015



HER OWN STORY

The following story features a woman who speaks and writes often about domestic abuse. This is the first time she is publicly sharing her story.

Her upper Midwest childhood was one of those white-picket-fence kind of worlds with a loving family and a church-centered home.

But after graduating from college, she got married and that picket fence started falling.

"I knew as soon as we walked out of the sanctuary, I had made a huge mistake."

As guests were eating wedding cake and she was supposed to be blissfully happy, she thought, "I just have to make the best of it now."

And for the next eight years, until the fateful night when her life was threatened, she walked on eggshells — one of the characteristics of an abusive relationship — wondering what might make her husband angry.

Sadly, she ignored some red flags: the times he chased her around the house or when she was forced to hide in the bathroom.

"I didn't realize I was being abused until the day I left," she explained. "It wasn't your typical Hollywood movie abusive relationship. He is a big guy, so he didn't need to hit me. All he needed to do was threaten."

For a long time, she attributed his behavior to his upbringing. "He grew up a farm boy and said it was perfectly normal for kids to get into fights. So when he had an incident of road rage, threatening to fight the other person and kicking the car, I thought he's just not used to living in the city."

So she tried harder.

"I did my best to be a good Christian wife. I was going to be the buffer between him and the big bad world. Everyone said he

was a better person because of my influence, so I was getting reinforcement. I thought it was working . . . but it wasn't."

Listening to others when she was dating may have helped. "Other people knew his volatile temper," she said. Her advice for those seeking a life partner? "If your parents and friends and family members are saying they have concerns about your relationship? Listen to them."

One Sunday evening, her perspective finally changed. After a tense day arguing about her faith, which he didn't share, her husband did something he'd never done before. "He picked me up by the neck and held me over his head. I remember bumping into the popcorn ceiling. I didn't pass out. His mouth was moving, but I don't remember hearing anything. Then he let me down."

This, she couldn't ignore.

So, she packed a bag, took her son, and walked out of the house. Thankfully, he didn't try to stop her.

"I didn't go to a shelter. I probably should have. I didn't call the police. I probably should have."

The next nine months were almost worse than the abuse. "I had to process and experience it again as abuse."

She spent much of her time looking over her shoulder, wondering if he was following her. "I did not feel safe," she remembered. "That's often the most dangerous time for a victim because the abuser is desperate."

Divorce wasn't her first choice. "I didn't want to give up on my marriage. The right thing to do was to reconcile, but I didn't know how."

Continued on page 8

Her Own Story from page 4
by Beth Foreman, Associate Editor

She learned that would be a long process. “I got an apartment with my brother, got a job, and tried to fix my messed-up marriage. I insisted that he go to counseling for abusers, and I went to the accompanying program for victims. We also started seeing my pastor for counseling.”

Unfortunately, her pastor was unaware of the best way to counsel couples in abusive situations. “He counseled us together, which is a huge mistake. He meant well, but it was painful to hear him say, ‘Your husband’s sorry now. When are you going to forgive him and go home?’”

She knew she wasn’t perfect. “I did all sorts of things I shouldn’t have done, but none of them justified abuse.”

Especially with this counseling experience, she learned the importance of educating pastors and lay people. “It’s the really big task,” she said, “and I’m very honored to be a part of doing that.”

After almost a year of working to heal her marriage, she saw no lasting fruits of repentance or reconciliation in her husband and, to protect herself and her son, she ultimately filed for divorce.

“To be seen as Christ sees the church as beautiful, spotless, sinless, holy, pure and not even any wrinkles or blemishes. To know that is how I am seen in Christ and that’s how a husband should see his wife! That’s what a marriage should be like.”

The one thing she held onto throughout was God’s promise to her in Baptism.

“I’m baptized.” She repeated this comforting phrase often. “Everything else had turned upside down, but I knew that historical fact was true.”

She continued to find comfort in her faith and in Ephesians 5: 22–33, which she admits may seem strange. “So many people get worked up about submission, but God does not want that kind of submission. I was trying to do the wrong kind of submission. The husband part — the Christ part — was not what I was experiencing either.”

After years of living in an abusive relationship and hearing so many negative words, she came to see that marriage can and should be a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church. “It is this gorgeous, beautiful, trusting relationship. To be seen as Christ sees the church as beautiful, spotless, sinless, holy, pure and not even any wrinkles or blemishes. To know that is how I am seen in Christ and that’s how a husband should see his wife! That’s awesome and that’s beautiful. That’s what a marriage should be like.” **Q**

Bearing Burdens from page 7

The place where God’s gifts are freely given, church, can be painful for people in traumatic relationships. Everyone else seems so happy sitting in their pretty families. You can remind her to keep her eyes on God’s grace and mercy for her, not on other people. The Word, Sacraments, hymns, and liturgy are God’s Means to provide her strength and comfort.

Encourage her to remember her Baptism; it was in that Font that our Lord drowned all her sins. Point her to the Cross on which all the blame and punishment for her sin was executed. Remind her that every time she receives the Lord’s Supper, she is forgiven and strengthened anew. Give her God’s Word so she is sustained with the sure promise of God — that He will never leave her or forsake her. Abuse is Satan’s weapon to tear apart God’s good gift of love and marriage. The darkness of abuse is swallowed up by the Light that no darkness can overcome (John 1). God has pronounced the victim His perfect, precious child. That is the message you can provide over and over again as you care for someone being abused. The Lord is faithful; He will strengthen you to walk alongside. **Q**



Helpful Resources

***The National Domestic Violence Hotline 24/7**

1-800-799-7233

www.thehotline.org

LCMS resources

www.lcms.org/socialissues/domesticviolence



REFLECTIONS OF A PARISH NURSE

by Karen Hardecopf, RN

Nineteen years ago when I began as a parish nurse, I listened to one woman's story and learned the stark reality that many people in our pews are suffering in silence.

Abused as a teenager and young woman 40 years before, she came to me as a woman without hope. She still trembled as she shared her story. Through the years of abuse, she thought no one would believe her. She felt the abuse would be worse if she did speak out. For years after the abuse, her heart would race whenever she saw a closet door that was slightly ajar, as that was where her abuser would hide. She lived with a wall of deep sorrow, self-deflating life, and loneliness.

Quietly, I listened and asked God for guidance. He put this verse on my heart: *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans* (Romans 8:26 GWN).

How could I help? What should I say? I did not know what to pray, but the Holy Spirit groaned in my stead. This woman's heart was heavy.

We sat without words, tears in our eyes. Finally I said, "I have no words or answers today. What I do have is my love and willingness to walk with you."

And to myself I said, "Lord, I do not have words, so I am very thankful that the Holy Spirit is groaning in our stead. Lead us as we continue this walk together."

Our conversation made me realize that so many carry this weight alone and that they might not know help is available. I wanted to help. For starters, I posted the hot-line phone number of our local abuse shelter in every bathroom stall in our church and school. As a parish nurse I can make referrals, I can walk alongside, I can drive them anywhere, and I can pray for them and with them; but I could not provide safety if they were in the midst of abuse. That's where the local shelters are invaluable.

More recently, I was saddened to see the painful long-term effects of abuse as I listened to another story. Staring at the floor, shoulders slumped in defeat, the woman shared, "I started to talk about what happened to me years ago because I think that is why I am the way I am, but my pastor changed the subject. When I first got to his office, he seemed to want to hear about what had saddened my heart, but when I started to share about the abuse, he seemed very uncomfortable with me. I thought he would help me through a difficult time in my life, but I guess not. So, I stopped talking, as it seems to me that I am not worth the trouble."

I am not worth the trouble, she had said. Even though the abuse had occurred more than 45 years ago, her pain that day was real. She might have been safe from the danger of abuse, but the abuse lived on inside.

"I don't know why I feel this inward struggle. Why can't I let it go? It was not as bad as other people's abuse. It could have been much worse." She did not want to go to a counselor, and she did not want this information made public, as people involved were still alive and it "might hurt them."

I offered my listening ear, my caring heart, prayer, and continued connection in hopes that someday she will find the courage to talk to a professional counselor.

As a parish nurse, I do not need all the answers, but I do need to know how to make referrals and where to get resources. I am thankful The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is being proactive by supplying new materials and hands-on training for church workers. **Q**

Karen Hardecopf, RN, with 32 years' experience, serves as the Parish Nurse within her congregation. She also serves as the Ministerial Care Coalition Partner for the Northern Illinois District Ministerial Care and as the Coordinator for the LCMS Parish Nursing Program, along with Dr. Marcia Schnorr, who serves as the LCMS Parish Nursing Education Coordinator.



BEARING BURDENS: Walking Alongside Someone Being Abused

by Deaconess Kristin Wassilak

It is happening all around you. Domestic abuse and violence occur in the lives of your friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors. Victims are adults, teens, women, men, poor, and rich; they have skins of every color. Look around you in worship, in LWML meetings, in Bible studies, in youth group, and at work. They are there. It may even happen in the marriage of your pastor or church worker.

In this article, the term partner is used to include husband, wife, boyfriend, and girlfriend; abuse happens in all stages of intimate relationships. For simplicity, gender-specific pronouns will be used even though abuse is not a gender-limited sin. Reported abuse incidents are higher for males towards females, but there are also many male victims.

As Christians, the body of Christ, we know we are to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). However, by the abuser's design, the victim will often be isolated from support systems such as church, family, and friends. How can we bear the burdens of those abused if it's happening in secret?

Be Observant. There are often subtle clues that belie the isolation and pain happening in a relationship. Someone being abused may:

- be quiet or timid around her partner
- change what she says to agree with her partner
- receive belittling comments from her partner in public
- mention the partner is jealous or has a temper
- check in frequently with her partner to report her location or activities
- receive frequent texts and calls from the partner
- have noticeable changes in personality, confidence, or outlook
- be late or always in a hurry to get home
- miss or cancel commitments
- respond to an invitation with "I want to come, but I just can't"
- have limited access to money, checks, or credit cards
- be restricted from seeing family and friends
- have frequent injuries or complain of clumsiness
- wear clothing or sunglasses to cover cuts and bruises
- be anxious, depressed, or suicidal

Speak Up. Once you suspect there may be abuse, don't let your fear stop you from acting. It's okay to ask a gentle, kindly-worded question. You may not receive an honest answer, but your question will convey you care and will cause her to think. It may even save a life. For the victim's safety, speak only in complete privacy away from the partner's eyes. Things to say or ask:

- "I'm concerned. Is something wrong? Do you feel safe?"
- "I sense something's wrong. When you're ready to talk, I'm ready to just listen."
- "I've been praying for you. Something has changed. You used to ____."
- "You seem different. Is everything okay at home?"
- "If you need to talk, it will stay just between us."
- Give her an excuse for talking to you. "If anyone asks, you can just say I asked about ____."

Walk Alongside. Your primary concern must always be the safety of the victim and any children. Communicating with you might endanger them. Ask, “Does he know you are here?” and “When do you need to be home?” and “How can we communicate safely?” Let the victim tell you where and when to meet. It might be in the church bathroom, public library, grocery store or school. Do not give a victim a copy of this *Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly*. If the abuser discovers it, she will be endangered. [If possible, invite her to read it online at www.lwml.org on your device, so her phone, tablet, or computer history cannot be tracked.]

You may be tempted to confront the abuser, passively or aggressively. Avoid giving the abuser dirty looks. Avoid direct confrontation. At this point in time, your role is to support her and not to rehabilitate the abuser. Confrontation may come later and should come from someone else. Forcing confrontation endangers the abused person.

You may be tempted to fix the problem and take charge. Don’t! Do educate yourself. Read. Research online. Abusive relationships are very complex, but you do not need to understand everything in order to support someone. Become a safe person in whom the victim can confide. Assure her you will not act or talk to anyone without her permission, and keep that promise.

A tremendous gift you can give a victim is to believe her. If anything, she is minimizing the abuse. It takes courage to tell you, and it makes everything more real, big, and scary. People who have been abused may be emotionally drained, ashamed, and confused. Give her space and time without pressure.

The victim will need more help than you can provide. Give options, not advice. The victim must choose how or when to act. When she is ready to act, offer her the use of your phone and your computer so that the abuser cannot track her. Provide The National Domestic Violence Hotline*, so trained staff can guide her through options, including development of a safety plan. Offer to accompany her to talk with a pastor, church worker, or counselor who understands domestic violence. Offer to keep essential documents, a packed suitcase, or an extra set of keys in case of emergency.

She may make choices with which you disagree. You may think she should leave. Most spouses don’t want a divorce; they want the abuse to stop. Allow her time to make decisions. With the Lord’s strength and your love, she may eventually have the courage to take action.

You may be tempted to avoid or abandon the one abused during the journey of months and years. At some point, shame and embarrassment may keep the victim from maintaining contact with you. Be patient and consistently let her know you keep praying and you’re still there. You may grow weary. Christ will not grow weary. Christ, not you, sustains His troubled child. Christ, not you, bore the ultimate burden of abuse on the cross. Rest in the sure confidence that He is at work.

Continued on page 8



Helpful Insights

As you continue to provide love and support, there are some insights that may prove helpful.

- **Keep anger and judgments about the abuser to yourself.** The victim may truly love the abuser.
- **Don’t recommend couples counseling.** Both parties will need individual therapy to wrestle with their own issues and patterns. After many months, they may be ready for counseling together.
- **Assure her that she does not deserve to be treated this way.** God never withholds His mercy from her the way an abuser does.
- **She has learned from her abuser to mistrust her own perceptions and judgment.** You can provide assurance that she is not crazy and her thoughts have value.
- **Her every sin, thought, and action has been criticized by the abuser.** She has been crushed by the Law delivered in a way that seeks to manipulate and control. She desperately needs the pure sweet Gospel.
- **Assure her of the Gospel!** God does not despise her. God will not punish her, abandon her, or stop loving her. God promises to be with her always (Matthew 28:20). God’s love for her is not conditional. This is the opposite of the abuser’s message.
- **Pray with her.** Read the Bible with her. Ask how you can safely encourage her with God’s Word.

Her Own Story from page 4
by Beth Foreman, Associate Editor

She learned that would be a long process. “I got an apartment with my brother, got a job, and tried to fix my messed-up marriage. I insisted that he go to counseling for abusers, and I went to the accompanying program for victims. We also started seeing my pastor for counseling.”

Unfortunately, her pastor was unaware of the best way to counsel couples in abusive situations. “He counseled us together, which is a huge mistake. He meant well, but it was painful to hear him say, ‘Your husband’s sorry now. When are you going to forgive him and go home?’”

She knew she wasn’t perfect. “I did all sorts of things I shouldn’t have done, but none of them justified abuse.”

Especially with this counseling experience, she learned the importance of educating pastors and lay people. “It’s the really big task,” she said, “and I’m very honored to be a part of doing that.”

After almost a year of working to heal her marriage, she saw no lasting fruits of repentance or reconciliation in her husband and, to protect herself and her son, she ultimately filed for divorce.

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Helpful Resources

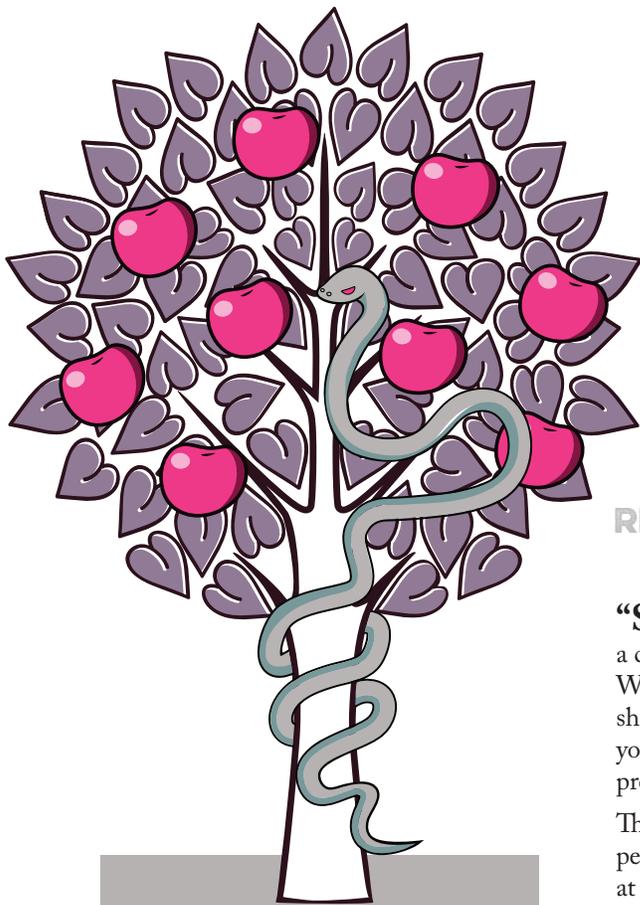
***The National Domestic Violence Hotline 24/7**

1-800-799-7233

www.thehotline.org

LCMS resources

www.lcms.org/socialissues/domesticviolence



SHAME

RECOGNIZING AND NEUTRALIZING THE TOXICITY

by David A. Muench

GROUP STUDY SUGGESTIONS ...

Opening

Sing or speak together verses 1–2 and 6–7 of “Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” (LSB #528; LW #276; TLH #360), adding “Amen.”

Closing

Sing or speak together verses 3–5 of “Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”, closing with “Amen.”

“SHAME ON YOU!” Perhaps you have a memory of hearing this phrase as a child. Maybe you (like I) have used it in attempting to guide your children. Would it shock you to discover there is no research to support the premise that shaming a child is a helpful tool in changing behavior? Would it further surprise you to learn that shame is toxic and has been identified as much more likely to promote destructive behaviors?¹

The destructive nature of shame is not only connected to relationships in our personal and family lives, but the negative impact can also be seen in relationships at work and school, in our community, even in the Church. The importance of understanding the antidote for shame can hardly be overstated. That antidote is the bedrock of our Christian faith. Shame loses its power in the certainty that we have righteousness by grace through faith in Jesus.

Consider **Romans 3:21–24** and **Romans 9:33**. Reflect upon how the message of these texts neutralizes aspects of shame with which you may be struggling.

Let’s look a little more closely at shame and the toxic impact it has on people and relationships. Please review the scriptural account presented in **Genesis 1** and **2**.

Here we recognize that the Creator’s divine design was all about relationships. In God’s original intention, every created entity was functioning at an optimal level and in perfect relational harmony with every other created entity. All of this was happening to the glory and honor of the Creator.

Then, reading further, we come upon the familiar events of **Genesis 3**. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and fell into sin. Which of the relationships of God’s perfect design were impacted by the fall (**Romans 8:22**)? _____

Please note one result of the fall into sin which is described in **Genesis 3:7**. _____

Adam and Eve knew they were naked. In truth, they had been naked since the time of their creation. That reality was not new. What *was* new to them, and the reason they sewed leaves to hide themselves, is that they were now experiencing shame. This new feeling of shame is connected to the fall into sin and loss of the perfection in which they had been created.

It was the toxic nature of shame that caused them to hide when they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden, in the cool of the day, and shame that led Adam to turn against Eve, the helper corresponding to him, created from his own rib! It was shame that damaged their relationship, their relationship with God, and their relationship with every other created entity. List specifics from **Genesis 3:8–19**: _____

Shame is capable of the same toxic impact on relationships today. The definition I find to be helpful is this: “Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and, therefore, unworthy of love and belonging.”²

Who among us does not struggle from time to time with the painful realization of our own shortcomings? We each know our own faults better than any other person knows them because we know our private thoughts, temptations, and desires that mostly remain hidden to others. The toxic impact of shame is that our “better” knowledge of all the ways in which we have fallen short of God’s expectation tempts us to feel unworthy of relationship connection. As was true of our first parents in Eden, the natural reaction is to lower our vulnerability. That can happen by shifting blame to someone else, by criticizing, disengaging, or otherwise hiding our shortcomings.

Relationships suffer when this kind of disengagement is happening. It often leads to further feelings of unworthiness and further hiding. This unhealthy cycle tends to feed on itself. We begin to assume things about what others are thinking of us and are not relationally engaged enough to know differently.

Brené Brown is a leading researcher on the topic of shame. She suggests that some categories of shame are more likely to be experienced by women in our culture, whereas other categories more threatening to men.³ She also identifies twelve shame categories as more universally threatening. At the top of this broader list is “appearance and body image,” followed by “money and work.”⁴ How do you define the category in which you are most vulnerable to shame? _____

Enter again the good news of a Messiah, first delivered to Adam and Eve by God, who was not content to let them hide or otherwise disengage from a relationship with Him. It’s the only message that brings lasting relief from the toxicity of shame. The message declares that righteousness is by grace through faith in Jesus. Righteousness and perfection will never be achieved on our own; never do we have any hope for righteousness by getting our behavior correct.

Romans 4:5 _____

Romans 5:1 _____

Philippians 3:9 _____

The antidote to the toxicity of shame is this Gospel truth: I have nothing to be ashamed of because Jesus is my substitute in righteousness.

When considering the topic of shame, we do well to be mindful of the distinction between shame and guilt. While it’s true (as referenced earlier), there is no research to demonstrate that shame motivates to positive behavioral change, this is not the case for guilt. An individual’s acceptance of his/her guilt is known to be a significantly helpful motivator.

The difference is in the reality: guilt deals with action, with behaviors. Shame, on the other hand, is about one’s value. Another way to clarify is to understand that guilt is about what I’ve done and shame is about who I am. I can accept responsibility for something I’ve done which is wrong, seek to make appropriate amends, and take steps to avoid repeating the wrong behavior. It’s an entirely different challenge to change what I believe in my heart and private thoughts about who I am and what is my value.

Once again, the reception by faith of Jesus’ righteous life and innocent death, serving as my substitute, is the only antidote. His death on the cross (passive obedience) paid the penalty for all guilt, for all people, for all time. But do not fail to remember: Jesus has not ever sinned. His righteous earthly life (active obedience) is also credited to all who receive it by grace, through faith. This “restored” value is referenced with His declaration in **Revelation 21:5**.

That restoration of all things to the Creator’s original design includes an existence in which shame is no longer a factor in our lives. But His work of making all things new is not yet completed. It will be so only in heavenly glory. Until we experience that reality, we live in the certainty that the righteousness of Jesus that is ours by grace, through faith, is sufficient to neutralize the toxicity of shame, restoring our value and validating our worthiness for relationship with God and others.

God grant it, for Jesus’ sake.

David A. Muench, Director of Ministerial Care for Concordia Plan Services, is a graduate of Concordia College, Seward; Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; and The University of Nebraska, Lincoln. An ordained minister in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, David and Mary, his high school sweetheart and wife of 42 years, have six children and thirteen grandchildren.

¹ Brown, Brené, (2012), *Daring Greatly—How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. Gotham Books, New York. p. 73.

² Ibid. p. 69

³ Ibid. p. 85–93

⁴ Ibid. p. 69



LWML North Dakota Tackles Human Trafficking

The Time Is NOW to talk about the social issues of your district. The **LWML North Dakota District** partnered with the **LCMS North Dakota District** to put on a *Witness, Mercy and Life Together* luncheon on the topic of human trafficking. After a Bible study by North Dakota District President, the Rev. Dr. James Baneck, Rebekah Grimm from Minneapolis spoke on the topic “Sex Trafficking: a Global Crisis.” Following lunch, Dawnya Underwood, from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, addressed “Faith Rooted Efforts for Survivors of Trafficking.” To end the day, ninety women and men joined discussions about the local-based agencies to support and how a church can get involved followed by joining together in prayer.

Fall 2015 theme: **Friends=Sisters**
 Winter 2015 theme: **Then Sings My Soul**

NEWS! Please send LWML news (and photos!) to:
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 997 NE Hood Street,
 Hillsboro, Oregon 97124
newseditor@lwml.org

by July 1, 2015. Include name, address, phone, and email address.

The LCMS and Survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse

by Kim Schave, Task Force Chairman

What does The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have to offer survivors of domestic violence? The one thing they need the most — the Gospel!

The Gospel transcends the most traumatic of afflictions by offering hope, healing, and restoration. Through the loving reminder of Jesus’ atoning work on the cross, a victim of abuse can be made to feel secure in his or her place in the body of Christ. Understanding the boundless love that God has for the survivor can bring reassurance to someone who is feeling broken and unloved.

Through the Gospel, hopelessness is turned to hope. Shame is turned to esteem. Fear is turned to courage. Isolation is turned to fellowship. Worry is turned to trust. Doubts about God’s love and protection are replaced with confidence about His provision. Walking alongside a survivor of domestic violence is one way the church demonstrates its commitment to love and care for the neighbor in need. It also upholds the church’s corporate function as outlined in Romans 12:4-5 (ESV): *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.* As the body of Christ, the LCMS is poised to offer assistance to survivors of domestic violence.

LCMS Convention resolutions in 2007 and 2010 tasked Synod with providing “materials and trained individuals to assist districts, congregations, and schools in addressing abuse and ministering to the spiritual needs of those struggling with the effects of abuse.” The **LCMS Task Force on Domestic Violence and Child Abuse**, comprising diverse professionals, was convened.

The task force is striving to bring greater awareness to the issue as well as offer hope and healing to those who have suffered at the hands of an abuser. Care has been taken to ensure that the materials developed proclaim the Gospel with great clarity so that no additional burden is placed on a person already afflicted with unimaginable pain.

To date, the task force has developed a website on lcms.org from which free, downloadable resources for church workers and laity are available. These resources include a theological statement on domestic violence and abuse, rites and prayers pertaining to abuse, a helpful resource sheet that lists informative literature and links to websites and phone apps, a prayer booklet for survivors, and an illustrated booklet for children and youth. (Some resources have also been translated into Spanish). A comprehensive training program for church workers and laity has been developed and is available to districts, circuits, congregations, RSOs, LCMS academic institutions, and other interested church-related entities.

In addition to caring for its own, the body of Christ is called to welcome and care for those outside its fold. By embracing survivors of domestic violence and offering a clear proclamation of the Gospel, our church is positioned to be a beacon of light in the midst of the dark world where abuse victims find themselves living. This mission field extends outside of our borders to far-away places where our international church partners are laboring to bring Christ to all nations. In countries where domestic violence is problematic, the LCMS is poised to bring resources to bear for addressing needs.

Our heavenly Father does not wish for His children to be separated from Him. We find assurance of this in Romans 8:38-39 (ESV): *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Not even an abuser has the power to separate us from the steadfast love that is ours through Jesus Christ.