

Minutes from Tri-County Batterer Intervention Network Meeting
February 4, 2003

Members Present – Paula Manley (Manley Interventions), Stacey Womack (ARMS), Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), Courtenay Silvergleid (Portland State University), Songcha Bowman (Private Practice), Elsie Garland (Multnomah County – Juvenile), David Houston (Men's Resource Center), Don Voeks (Gresham Urgent Care)

Minutes taken by: Courtenay Silvergleid

Topic for today: Techniques to address the role that religion plays in domestic violence

One member began by saying that if religion is part of men's belief systems and is therefore supporting their behaviors, then it needs to be addressed. If they are using faith or religion to support their abuse, it can be helpful to actually go to the scripture that they are using to justify their behavior and provide a different interpretation. For instance, if men draw on scripture to justify their wives subservience, you can remind them that the bible suggests that you love your wife like Christ loves the church. Look at what Jesus' life represented. Gave up his power, position in order to be a benefit. We are asking them to actually lay their lives down for the other person. Another scripture talks about how the husband is the head of the wife like Christ is the head of the church. How did Christ lead? He said that he came to serve, not be served. SO I guess that makes you the head servant – you are to lead in patience, compassion, and kindness. It is not your job to tell her how she is not a good Christian woman, it is your job to lead by example. Point out that submission isn't something you can demand from someone. Submission is a gift that someone gives because they trust you. If it is out of fear it is oppression, not submission. Co-leaders can point out that they can choose to defer or submit to one another, but that it can never be demanded.

One of the concerns expressed is that there are men in the groups that have strong religious beliefs and don't voice them. To what extent is that a blind spot for most providers? A key part of stopping abuse is addressing people's belief system. Religion can be some of the strongest beliefs and yet most providers avoid talking about religion. Therefore, it may be one of the places that problematic beliefs remain unaddressed.

Given that it may be important to address issues of power and control, violence and abuse from within a man's religious belief system and yet very few programs explicitly address religion, what are some options for the BI community?

1. Offer men a chance to come and talk about spirituality independent of the rest of the group.
1. Encourage clients to get one on one counseling with someone from their faith who will hold them accountable for their violence. A wonderful service would be

to identify counselors within the faith community who are responsive to issues of domestic violence.

1. Add a question to the intake process that asks about men's religious backgrounds so that providers can better assess the role this background might play in their abuse.
1. Spend a special meeting focused on the role of religion in their beliefs/values. When we think about cultural differences, religion isn't on the radar as clearly as it perhaps should be. We think some about ethnicity and sexual orientation, but very little about religion.
1. Encourage men to do some studying about their religion's position on violence against women independently and have them bring in to group what they are learning.
1. Ten Lies that the Church Tells Woman is a good book to read because it dissects the scriptures in the bible pretty well.
1. Get permission from religious men to be in contact with their faith leader to communicate about how the man is doing. It is helpful for them to encounter accountability on every front.
1. Encourage men to seek mentors in their religious organization. Perhaps even be in contact with that mentor. Encourage them to become accountable to their religious communities.
1. There was a 4 page handout developed in July 2001 that lists traditionally identified biblical scripture and rebuttals. To request copies, contact Stacey Womack at 503-846-9284. Additionally, in August 2002, CADV publicized a reference guide for clergy and faith communities in Multnomah County, Oregon Addressing Domestic Violence.
1. Organize a training for providers on dominant religion so that providers can be more sensitive to how religion might be impacting the attitudes and beliefs of the men in their programs.