

Sacred Spaces

*a resource for faith communities
to prevent and respond to
sexual and gender based violence*



**“There are no unsacred places; there are only
sacred places and desecrated places.”**

—Wendell Berry

Introduction to Sacred Spaces

Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) is a *worldwide epidemic* that has been entrenched in global culture for centuries. In 2013, the World Health Organization officially classified violence against women as a “significant public health problem,” reporting that a startling **35% of women worldwide** have experienced either physical intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence¹. Further, a 2011 study conducted by U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention not only reiterated the World Health Organization’s findings but also broadened the diagnosis, reporting that **one in four U.S. men** will be the victim of intimate partner violence². It is an issue that transcends gender, culture, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and faith.



Curious about the Protestant Christian community’s understanding of and response to this violence, IMA World Health (secretariat of WeWillSpeakOut.US) and Sojourners co-sponsored a LifeWay Research survey of 1,000 US Protestant pastors to gauge their awareness of and response to sexual and gender based violence in their congregations. The resulting report, titled [Broken Silence](#), revealed that a majority of pastors estimated the prevalence of violence in their congregations to be lower than what national statistics would suggest, and that many failed to address SGBV from the pulpit or did so in a way that did more harm than good. Importantly, [Broken Silence](#) revealed that *most pastors would do more if they knew more*.

In response, WeWillSpeakOut.US has created **Sacred Spaces**, a five step resource for faith communities to prevent and respond to sexual and gender based violence. The intention of this resource is to provide faith and lay leaders with concrete, action points to speak out appropriately and effectively against SGBV. However, it is not comprehensive of the resources and perspectives available. We encourage you to continue educating yourself on the evolving best practices. Within each step you will find a link for the corresponding *Sacred Spaces* web resource page, which will provide you with additional information and resources for the topic.

For many religious survivors, one of the first responses to abuse by an intimate partner is to seek help from their faith leader. We are grateful for your commitment to breaking the silence, and improving the response to sexual and gender based violence in your community. Thank you for speaking out!

State and National Hotlines

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual and/or gender violence, please remember that you are not alone. Below we have listed national confidential hotlines that are staffed 24/7 with trained counselors to answer your questions and provide you with support.

If you are in immediate danger or need emergency help, please call 911.

Confidential 24/7 Support Hotlines

National Sexual Assault Hotline:	1-800-656-4673
National Domestic Violence Hotline:	1-800-799-7233
RAINN National Sexual Assault <i>Online</i> Hotline:	ohl.rainn.org/online
The ChildHelp National Child Abuse Hotline:	1-800-422-4453
National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline:	1-866-331-9474
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:	1-800-273-8255
Military "Safe Helpline":	1-877-995-5247

Helpful Websites

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence	www.ncadv.org
National Center for Victims of Crime	www.ncvc.org
Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network	www.rainn.org
National Sexual Violence Resource Center	www.nsvrc.org
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence	www.nrcdv.org
Darkness to Light: End Child Sexual Abuse	www.darkness2light.org
Male Survivor: Overcoming Sexual Victimization of Boys and Men	Malesurvivor.org
One in Six: Helping Men as Victims of Child Sexual Abuse	1in6.org

How to Create a Sacred Space

Step 1: Learn the Basics

Definitions

Statistics

Where to Learn More

Step 2: Know Your Role in Immediate Response

How to Initially Respond to a Victim or Survivor

Connect with Crisis Counselors and Advocates

Step 3: Educate the Faith Community

Pulpit Leadership

Equality and Respect Training for Youth

Step 4: Utilize Prevention Tools

Establish Policy

Train Your Staff

Step 5: Speak Out!

Be a Model in Your Community

Engage with WeWillSpeakOut.US

Step 1: Learn the Basics

The first step to developing a Sacred Space is to understand the basics around sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). Below we have provided introductory definitions and statistics that will give you a brief overview of the problem as well as recommended resources for learning more.

Definitions

Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is any sexual or physical act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. SGBV also includes any gender-motivated act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychosocial harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

SGBV can be further defined within three primary categories: sexual violence, physical violence, and emotional violence. Keep in mind that multiple types of violence can be present in the same situation at once. **Please note that some of these definitions may be graphic*

Sexual Violence

Rape/Marital Rape: The penetration of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration with genitals, without the consent of the victim.

Sexual Assault: Any sexual contact and/or behavior which occurs without the explicit consent of the victim. Including, but not limited to, forcible oral sex, groping, and forced kissing.

Child Sexual Abuse: Any sexual contact or sexual behavior (including rape or attempted rape) directed towards or with a person under the legal age of consent

Please verify state-specific laws for consent if you are unsure if an individual is a victim of child abuse: <http://www.ageofconsent.us/state-laws>

Sexual Harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances and/or requests for sexual favors

Physical Violence (aka. Intimate Partner Violence)

Physical Assault/Abuse: A physical attack from an individual or group, with or without use of a weapon, threats of physical attack, or acting in a threatening behavior towards the victim

Emotional (aka. Psychological Violence)

Humiliation: Consistent insults and engagement in verbally aggressive behavior which is intended to humiliate or control the victim

Controlling and manipulative behaviors: Non-physical actions meant to control and/or manipulate the victim into submitting to the desires or commands of the aggressor. Including,

but not limited to, using coercion and threats involving children, family, pets, job, finances, health or immigration.

Statistics

To help you understand the devastating impact of this health crisis, we've provided a fraction of the data available on the occurrence of sexual and gender based violence within the United States.

Remember that at least one in three people in your faith community have experienced some form of sexual and gender based violence.

Sexual Violence³

- There are an average of **237,868 victims** of sexual violence every year
60% of assaults are **never reported** to law enforcement
- Roughly **2/3** of all rapes or sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim
- Within their lifetime, **1 of every 6 American women** and **1 of every 33 American men** will be or has been a victim of completed or attempted rape
- 15% of sexual assault or rape victims are under the age of 12

Physical Violence / Intimate Partner Violence⁴

- **One in every four women** will experience intimate partner violence within her lifetime
- **75%** of instances of intimate partner violence are **never reported** to law enforcement
- 30% to 60% of perpetrators of intimate partner violence also abuse children in the household.
- 15% of victims of intimate partner violence are men
- Almost 1/3 of all reported female homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner

Emotional / Psychological Violence⁵

- During their lifetime, **48% of both men and women** have experienced psychological violence by an intimate partner
- 84% of women who are physically abused are also psychologically abused
- 19.3 million women and 5.1 million men in the United States have experienced stalking in their lifetime

Where to Learn More

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization.

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence is the national online resource center for victims and survivors of domestic violence

FaithTrust Institute is a multi-faith, multicultural training and education organization focused on ending sexual and domestic violence.

Step 2: Know Your Role in Response

For direct assistance, please see our Hotlines Sheet on page 2 of this resource

A faith leader is often one of the first people a victim of SGBV will tell about their abuse. This first contact can have a huge impact on their next steps and whether they will seek additional help. It is critical that you are prepared ahead of time. Below we have included resources that may be helpful, from immediate steps of action to connections with professionals for long-term support and care.

How to Initially Respond to a Victim or Survivor³

1. Get the Victim to a Safe Space

In the immediate aftermath of abuse, the most important thing is to get the victim to a safe place. This safety must be defined by the victim themselves, as a “safe space” is a subjective term that cannot necessarily be assumed by anyone but the victim; what you may assume to be a safe space (ex. a home, community center, the church sanctuary) may be a trigger for the victim.

Listen to the victim, and get him or her to a place where they feel comfortable, safe and are not at risk of further physical/emotional harm.

2. Listen Appropriately and Believe the Victim

Your next step as a faith leader is to listen. While most faith leaders are adept counselors, it is important to remember that in this setting you are a first responder to trauma, which sets different boundaries and priorities. Your main goal is **believe the victim and prioritize their agency in this process**. Here are some guidelines of what to do and what not to do in this situation.

DO

- Listen without interruption
- Connect the victim to appropriate resources - phone numbers, information, transportation, etc.
- Express support, but be aware that physical touch may make the victim uncomfortable
- Assure the survivor it was not their fault

DO NOT

- Give advice or make decisions for the survivor
- Tell the victim what you would have done differently
- Ask them why they didn't run, scream, fight
- Prod for more details than the victim is providing
- Ask what the survivor was wearing, if they were drinking, whether they were alone.
- Blame the survivor in any way

3. Suggest the Option of Seeking Medical Attention

If the individual has been a victim of domestic abuse, sexual assault, sexual abuse, rape, and/or any other act of physical violence, they should receive immediate medical attention at a hospital. Remember that **seeking medical treatment does not require the victim to report the crime to the authorities**. However, for the victim's health and self-protection, it is important to be checked and treated for possible injuries as soon as possible, even if none are visible.

In cases of sexual violence, victims are also encouraged to receive a forensic examination. This exam is important because preserving DNA evidence can be key to identifying the perpetrator in a sexual assault, rape, or sexual abuse case. **Victims have the right to accept or decline any or**

all parts of the exam, and should remember that consent to a forensic exam still does not mean a victim is obligated to report the crime. Even if the victim has not yet decided to report the crime, receiving a forensic medical exam and keeping the evidence safe from damage will improve the chances that the police can access and test the stored evidence at a later date.

In order to conserve any potential evidence, a victim should try to **avoid the following directly after the incident:**

- Bathing or showering
- Using the restroom
- Changing clothes
- Combing hair
- Cleaning up the area in which the incident took place
- Moving anything the offender may have touched

NOTE: [Your local rape crisis center](#) can provide information on the nearest medical facility that is equipped to collect forensic evidence. In some instances, the center can send an advocate to accompany victims through the evidence collection process.

4. Recognize Your Responsibility to Report the Incident

In most cases, it is the victim's choice to report the act of violence, particularly for domestic violence as reporting could place them in more danger.

However, in the case of child abuse, as a faith leader or church employee, you **may** be legally required to report an incident that is disclosed to you. These laws vary by state, and it is essential that faith leaders are aware of their legal responsibility to report sexual violence, domestic violence or child abuse. Below are two links which you can use to find your state's laws on **mandated reporting**.

www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state/index.cfm

www.rainn.org/public-policy/laws-in-your-state

Connect with Crisis Counselors and Advocates

Leverage your strengths; Gather your allies

While faith leaders provide essential spiritual and emotional support to a victim, crisis counselors and SGBV advocates are specially trained to walk a victim through the process of accessing important medical and law enforcement services, as necessary. This may include medical care, contacting law enforcement, creating a safety or escape plan, enrolling in professional counseling, and more. By joining forces with these professionals, you can ensure that a victim's spiritual, physical and emotional needs are being met in a coordinated way.

For your safety as well as the victim's, please do not try to intervene in an abusive situation without the close partnership and guidance of a trained crisis professional. Additionally, couples counseling is dangerous to everyone involved and should not be used in situation of domestic or intimate partner violence.

Finding your resources

Do not wait until a crisis arises to build relationships with the crisis professionals and shelters in your area. To find the resources near you, you can access:

- **RAINN** (The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), Directory of Crisis Professionals and Shelters by location by: <http://centers.rainn.org/>

- **Women's Shelter Directory**, to find domestic violence shelters and other resources for women: <http://www.womenshelters.org/>

Step 3: Educate the Faith Community

Preaching and Pulpit Leadership

While scripture can be used as a crucial resource in speaking out, many people never hear a message about ending SGBV from the pulpit. The 2014 *Broken Silence* report found that 65% of US Protestant pastors surveyed spoke to their churches once a year *or less* about the issue. Scripture has too often been misused: while biblical passages that directly reference SGBV are frequently ignored and left off of the traditional liturgical calendar, others have been misinterpreted to condone, justify or perpetuate SGBV. As a faith leader, you have the power to reclaim misused verses, raise awareness, and challenge your community to revisit their own assumptions and responsibilities as people of faith.

Ways to address SGBV from the pulpit:

1. Preach a sermon series

WeWillSpeakOut.US has worked with ordained ministers and theologians to create a sermon guide, using various texts, to get you started. Download your free e-copy at <http://wewillsspeakout.us/resources-tools/>, and feel free to use these sermons in whatever way is helpful for you. If you would like to submit a sermon you've written, we always welcome new contributions to our existing guides.

2. Participate in "Speak Out Sunday" or "Speak Out Service"

Each year, we call all congregations across faiths and denominations to dedicate at least one day in October to dialogue, teaching, prayer, and action around sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and while our official date is the second Sunday of the month, we are encouraging congregations to view the entire month as an opportunity to speak out and take action.

WeWillSpeakOut.US has a set of tools and materials to help you prepare for your *Speak Out Sunday* program. These are available for free download at <http://wewillsspeakout.us/speak-out-sunday/>

3. Host an Event

Consider hosting an event at your church to engage your congregation in the discussion around SGBV. An event might include a movie screening, a speaker or panel, an adult education class, or even simply an open space for themed discussion.

Equality and Respect Training for Youth

As young individuals begin understanding issues of sex, gender, and body image, it is crucial that their faith communities guide them towards healthy relationships, positive self-esteem, and a comprehensive understanding of their bodies to prepare them for a better future without violence. This section includes four ideas for what a youth program should include as well as a link to our Sacred Spaces microsite where you can find more in depth information as well as free curriculum and activity ideas for each.

- **Promoting Healthy Relationships**

Dating abuse affects almost one in every three adolescents in the United States, leading as the highest form of violence experienced by youth. Encouraging teens and young adults not to date isn't enough; faith communities need to engage their youth in discussions surrounding healthy and unhealthy relationships in order to help them recognize abuse and know where to go to seek help.

- **Encouraging Healthy Body Image and Self-Respect**

Promoting healthy body image can serve as a preventative measure to sexual and domestic violence within faith communities by encouraging self-respect in youth who may be receiving negative lessons in the media and other parts of their lives.

- **Practicing Consent and Respect for Others**

Teaching teens and young adults that they have a right to their own bodies, and that no one should be able to touch or use them without their explicit consent, helps them understand the boundaries of abuse.

- **Basic Sex Education**

While often a controversial topic in faith communities, providing basic sex education is crucial to the development of informed youth in the fight against sexual and gender based violence. A truly effective sex education curriculum should include information about wellness, disease prevention, consent within sexual activity, and physical anatomy. Providing sex education within faith communities can help prevent occurrences of sexual and gender based violence by teaching teens and young adults about healthy sexual relationships, introducing the concept of consent, and developing an autonomous respect for their own bodies.

Step 4: Utilize Prevention Tools

Create a Team

In order to create sustainable change, it's important to gather together a team of passionate advocates who are dedicated to combatting and preventing SGBV in your church and community. Shifting the culture around violence is hard work, and having a team of people specifically focused on this effort will help ensure your church remains a sacred space for all who enter.

Feel free to define your team in whatever way works best for your church and allies. Whether you would like to be an official group within the organizational structure of the congregation, or a freeform group that focuses on awareness raising through event hosting - it's up to you! Find out more about creating a Sacred Spaces team on our website at [INSERT LINK].

Establish Policy

Effective policy plays a critical role in creating a Sacred Space. Policies guide the way we interact within the church, establish clear expectations for staff and volunteers, and make difficult situations easier to navigate. They protect members from potential abuse and our churches from legal liability. Topics you may want to consider when creating and editing church policy are:

- **Counseling Guidelines**
 - Credentials and licensing: Unless the pastor is a licensed counselor, pastoral counseling should be limited to Biblical and spiritual counseling; the pastor should not provide medical or mental health counseling.
 - Couples Counseling: We recommend a strict "No Couples Counseling" policy in situations of abuse or domestic violence. For more information, check out FaithTrust Institute's policy statement on couples counseling in domestic violence situations here: www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/Policy-Statement-on-DV-Couples-Counseling.pdf
- **Stance on Abusers and Sex Offenders**
 - Churches often disagree about how to handle perpetrators of violence, and whether they should be welcomed back into the church. It is important that your church address this explicitly in policy.
- **Protection of Children/Vulnerable Adults**
 - Mandatory Reporting: Policy should include detailed rules about mandatory reporting for incidents of abuse with minors/vulnerable adults.
 - Avoid one-on-one situations: An adult should never be alone with a child or vulnerable adult. We recommend a policy which includes a minimum of two adults present with either party.
- **Background Checks**
 - Mandatory background checks for all staff, volunteers, or groups using facilities.

Train Your Staff

Clergy Training

Pastors are personally responsible for ensuring that their church sanctuary is a sacred space. While a pastor can focus on training their staff and creating safe policy, they must be accountable and ensure that they are properly trained to deal with difficult situations that may arise. We encourage pastors to contact their denominations and request additional Boundary Awareness Training for themselves and staff. While Boundary Awareness Training is especially crucial for the Pastor, this training is useful for all staff members.

Additionally, we recommend FaithTrust Institute (www.faithtrustinstitute.org) for clergy and lay leader training on specific issues of abuse, SGBV, healthy boundaries, and responding to misconduct.

ChildCare Training

Child sexual abuse inflicted within the walls of churches has scarred thousands of people who were victimized by those we assume to be most trustworthy. We owe our children every effort in our power to protect them from this type of harm. Predators are often highly charismatic, likeable people who are able to gain the trust of both adults and children in the process of grooming their victims. By training our church staff, we can better ensure that the church remains a sacred space for our youth.

Child care workers should be trained to prevent and recognize child sexual abuse, as well as to identify signs of grooming and predatory behavior in adults. There are affordable online training programs available that can help convey this knowledge as well as help you design policies, procedures and accountability that will keep the children in your congregation safe. We recommend MinistrySafe (<https://www.ministrysafe.com/>).

In addition to training, it is important to implement and enforce policies for the protection of children (see section above entitled "Establish Policy").

Step 5: Speak Out!

Congratulations! You've made it to the final step of transforming your church into a Sacred Space! We applaud your efforts and desire to respond to and prevent sexual and gender based violence in your community. Below you can find some ways to continue speaking out and engage in this critical work!

- **Encourage other Churches and Friends to Join WeWillSpeakOut.US**

Spread the word about your journey to transform your church into a "Sacred Space"! Encourage other faith leaders and friends to do the same with their churches, and help us to ensure that every church is prepared to fight sexual and gender based violence.

- **Speak Out on Speak Out Sunday/Service**

We're calling all congregations across faiths and denominations to dedicate at least one day in October to dialogue, teaching, prayer, and action around sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). Read more about Speak Out Sunday/Service on our website at wewillspeakout.us/speak-out-sunday/.

- **Encourage your Congregation to Sign our Pledge Against Violence**

Download our pledge to speak out against SGBV here [\[INSERT LINK\]](#) and print copies to distribute throughout your congregation. Collect signed pledges in an offering plate or designated basket and send them back to us at [\[INSERT ADDRESS\]](#) so we can add them to our growing count. Along with pledges, consider collecting donations to support WWSO.US or a local shelter!

- **Participate in 16 Days of Activism**

Don't forget that sexual and gender based violence happens around the world. From November 25 to December 10, participate in activism around sexual and domestic violence and speak out for our brothers and sisters around the world. Check out more information here: www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism

- **Write for us!**

We're always looking for new posts on our blog to help raise awareness for SGBV. Consider sending us a short post anywhere from 300 to 600 words about an issue surrounding SGBV that touches your heart. Feel free to draw inspiration from popular culture, current events, or even a personal experience.

- **Document and Share Your Events on our Website**

Make use of our open calendar to advertise any events you are hosting around sexual and gender based violence or gender equality to help get the word out in your community.

- **Reach out to Survivors Within your Community**

Reaching out for help can be difficult for those experiencing abuse, as web searches can often be discovered by the abuser and lead to further abuse. Download our hotlines resource sheet on our website, then print and post in both women and men's restroom stalls.

- **Follow WeWillSpeakOut.US on Twitter and Facebook.**

Social media consists of powerful outlets for making your voice heard. Please follow us and share our stories, Tweets and updates with your networks to amplify the impact of WeWillSpeakOut.US. Then send us yours to post! You'll find us at wewillSpeakoutUS on Facebook and @wwsoUS on Twitter.

Thank you again for your commitment to SPEAK OUT against sexual and gender based violence. Please contact us if you have any questions about this resource, and remember to check out the companion website for this Sacred Spaces resource [INSERT LINK].

Cited Sources

- [1] World Health Organization. *Global and regional estimates of violence against women*. 2013
- [2] US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey*. 2010
- [3] RAINN- Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network. 2015
- [4] National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey*. 2010.

Bibliography

NCADV - National Coalition Against Domestic Violence – www.ncadv.org
FaithTrust Institute www.faithtrustinstitute.org