



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Articles:

- 📖 Responding to Domestic Violence and Spiritual Abuse
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 71-74)
- 📖 The Disturbing Work of Resurrection
(*Patterns of Violence*, pp. 75-80)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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Responding to Violence

Victims of violence frequently turn to spiritual leaders and lay congregation members for refuge and support. How can faith communities respond in an appropriate and effective manner?

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for entering into this violent world with the gift of love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We thank you for those people who seek to counter hatred with love, who protect others in gentle and caring ways, who teach others to settle differences peacefully, and who bring hope to your hurting world.

We pray for all who are suffering because of violence in their lives and communities. We pray especially for children who are abused in their families, for little ones who are hurt by powers that put self-interest and profit before love, for women who live in fear of domestic violence, and for others who are hurt and manipulated by those who are stronger.

O God of peace, may we, your church, bring your peace into this hurting world. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 146

Reflection

There is no secret trick, or single stratagem, to preparing ourselves to address the victims of violence – to welcome, care for, and minister alongside them. The diverse paths into service to victims for Al Miles (to individual victims of domestic abuse) and Walt Draughon (to a community torn apart by racial injustice) support that conclusion. Al Miles kept meeting victims and survivors of domestic violence and spiritual abuse in his role as hospital chaplain, and so he thought long and hard about how to show Christian compassion to these individuals. On the other hand, Walt Draughon, was caught unprepared in the middle of “chaotic and sweeping race riots” in St. Petersburg, Florida, where he had just arrived as pastor of the First Baptist Church.

Yet in Miles’s and Draughon’s stories we discern some common patterns to their cooperation with God’s work. These patterns can help us and our congregations prepare to respond to the victims of violence who come to us for refuge and support.

- ▶ *We must identify with and support the victims.* The psalmist writes, “The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin” (146:9). Similarly, our response to violence is not to make all who are involved – victims and offenders – feel better, but to care for victims and to hold offenders accountable. This insight governs Miles’s differing relationships to the victims and the abusers.

Identifying with victims led Draughon “to build meaningful, cross-cultural relationships with the people and congregations of Midtown” where racial violence had torn civic institutions apart, and to deflect some of his congregants’ concern that doing so would change the demographics of First Baptist Church.

- ▶ *We must be patient.* Caring for the victims of domestic abuse is complex, Miles notes. It ranges from helping them quickly prepare a safety plan to accompanying them over several months to various



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court hearings. He warns about setting boundaries to one's emotional relationship with victims, in part because the process of caregiving to them is long and involved.

Draughon discovered that the ministry of reconciliation in Midtown would be for the long haul. His church and the nonprofit organization that it sponsored were involved for fifteen years, as one focus of caregiving led to another.

- ▶ *We must know our limitations and seek expert help.* Miles and Draughon discovered they were amateurs in the best sense of the word: they were motivated by love to care for victims of violence, but not experts who knew everything necessary to care for them well. "Seek education and training," Miles advises, but also realize you will never have "the knowledge and training to deal alone with all the complexities associated with these pervasive problems" of domestic abuse.

Draughon's church created a nonprofit organization, *Rise Up! St. Pete (RUSP!)* to bring together "governmental, civic, community, and religious leaders from Midtown," and church members with various expertise. *RUSP!* formed "action teams" to tackle specific needs "such as job development and training; health care acquisition; parental, filial, and marital counseling; provision of food; domicile renovations to meet city code requisites; public education support; and so on."

Al Miles and Walt Draughon are realistic about what our caregiving can accomplish. We will not eliminate the patterns of violence that are sending victims our way. (As Draughon admits, "Most of Midtown's challenges continue to this day.") But we can be faithful in preparing ourselves and then doing our best to care for those victims of violence who come to us, relying on the followers of the God "who keeps faith forever" (146:6).

Study Questions

1. What patterns of violence in the world, nation, or local community regularly send victims your congregation's way?
2. You probably identified more than one pattern in response to the question above. If so, for which one is God calling you to provide support and refuge to the victims? In what ways is your congregation well prepared to respond? How should it become better prepared?
3. Al Miles notes that "Victims and survivors of domestic violence... attend worship regularly; sing in our choirs, teach in our parochial and Sunday school classes, and preach from our pulpits. So do their offenders." What are the implications of this? Does it make his advice easier or harder to follow?
4. When it comes to supporting the victims of violence, "Most people, even concerned, invested people, prefer objectification over obedience, definition over devotion, analysis over action," Walt Draughon observes. How do some elements of Draughon's advice address this problem?

Departing Hymn: "O Christ, You Did No Violence" (vv. 1, 2, and 5)

Responding to Violence

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review the insights from Al Miles and Walt Draughon on how we can support and provide refuge to victims of violence.
2. To identify the patterns of violence that are sending victims your congregation's way.
3. To apply the advice from Miles and Draughon to become better prepared to support and provide refuge to those victims.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Patterns of Violence (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Walt Draughon was drawn into ministry to the victims of violence quite unexpectedly. He explains, "Following the shooting and death of an African American teenager during a traffic stop in the fall of 1996, the city of St. Petersburg, Florida, experienced what the national media described as 'chaotic and sweeping race riots.' I had been the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of St. Petersburg for one month."

"The day after the first 'riot,' I drove into Midtown where the shooting had occurred – a population block of approximately forty thousand people, which was a veritable seedbed of gang activity, poverty, and violence. The carnage from the night before continued to burn with a 'societal heat' that laid bare the obvious: the death of a teenager, while tragic, was not the only fatality of that dark night. In a real sense, our entire city, the seventeenth largest in the United States, had 'died.' Fragile relationships had been severed; accusation was the majority response, and blame was the weapon of choice."

Draughon immediately went into action. He thought he would "schedule a few meetings of church and civic leaders, provide a platform for the right people to 'be heard,' and voila, a resurrection we [would] have!" (*Patterns of Violence*, 75)

But the first lesson Draughon learned is that the "resurrection" of a community fractured by violence is a long-term project. Indeed he led his church to work with the Midtown neighborhood for the next fifteen years, until the end of his ministry there.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 146 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study, like the previous two – "Recovering from Moral Injury" and "Consuming Violence" – focuses on practical ways that individuals and congregations can respond to salient patterns of violence in our culture. Focus on one of the patterns in the articles – either domestic abuse or racial violence – or another pattern of violence that is sending victims your congregation's way. As appropriate, employ the insights from the other materials to help your congregation prepare to support and provide refuge to victims.

Study Questions

1. Use this question and the next to focus on one or two of the patterns of violence that impact your congregation. The pattern might be related to members' professions (for example, social workers, attorneys, armed service members, physicians, etc.), the church's location (it is near a military base, near an international border crossing, along an interstate highway, in a neighborhood troubled by racial violence, in an economically depressed neighborhood, near a correctional facility, etc.), or other factors (it is known for particular ministries to the community, has relationships with missionaries in war-torn countries, sponsors worship services for an immigrant population, etc.).
2. If your congregation currently has a ministry that addresses the pattern of violence, access that ministry and discuss how the congregation could bolster its response with more resources (prayer partners, volunteer workers, paid professionals, building space, equipment, relationships with government agencies and nongovernmental groups, financial gifts, etc.).

If your congregation does not have a ministry, brainstorm how you might start one, or participate in a ministry in another church or NGO. Sometimes a congregation's resources (in personnel, training, finances, etc.) do not match its call. How can you grow those resources or partner with others to meet the victims' needs?

3. That we already have close relationships with them seems to have different implications for victims and offenders. Regarding victims, these prior relationships may foster their trust that allows them to seek our help and receive our support. Because we know their situation, we may be better able to help them. It may be easier to enlist other members in sharing support for the victim. However, those prior relationships might make the victim uneasy in sharing the painful aspects of their story. They may fear that sharing their pain with us may disrupt those prior relationships that they value and need.

Regarding the offenders, these prior relationships may make it difficult for us to be objective. We may be reluctant to side with their victims – perhaps because we fear losing the relationship with the offenders, or are uncomfortable about confronting and correcting them. We may inappropriately share information with the offenders. We may focus too much on the shame the offender's actions bring to us (as fellow church members), and neglect the needs of their victims.

4. The "objectification" of victims and offenders, and distancing ourselves from the violence through "definition" and "analysis," reminds us of the patterns of voyeurism of violence that we discussed in the previous study. Perhaps we prefer these responses because they are more comfortable. Walt Draughon warns us to "expect a strong pull toward equilibrium, back to the previous status quo" before the violence erupted to reveal underlying problems.

Draughon responded by concluding planning "conversations and meetings with a simple question: 'Now, what are you going to do?' Then, and this is key, I waited until each person identified and committed to a particular action." He also encouraged folks to act in ways that were repeatable. "Many are the folks and entities who engage challenges among people-groups but soon are nowhere to be found; their absence becomes toxic to the personal relationships on which [the response] pivots!"

Departing Hymn

"O Christ, You Did No Violence" is on pp. 43-45 of *Patterns of Violence*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.