

Black Mountain Presbyterian Church, Black Mountain, North Carolina A Denominational Leader in Addressing Family Violence Issues A Decade in Review

Ten years ago, while serving the Black Mountain Presbyterian Church (BMPC), I gathered five members of the congregation who were all professional social workers, to help me to put together a Congregational policy addressing Domestic Violence and articulating the church's response to the issue theologically, educationally, and pastorally. That policy was adopted by the Session at BMPC in late 2003 and began to guide the congregation towards a process of educating children, youth, and adults with age-appropriate materials developed by the FaithTrust Institute. In 2005, the staff was trained on how to respond to a victim of domestic violence and how to implement the policy when faced with a variety of scenarios. By the time of my departure as an Associate Pastor in late 2007 we had begun the process of regularly lifting up the issue in worship and once a year in sermons. The membership of Black Mountain was supportive of this focus.

It has been gratifying to learn this spring of the ongoing commitment of BMPC to further develop this vital ministry. In 2008, Dr. James Poling, a retired Presbyterian Minister and Seminary professor from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, along with his wife, Nancy, who is also very active in addressing family violence issues, moved to Black Mountain and made Black Mountain Presbyterian their home church. The following year the congregation called a new pastor, Shannon Kershner, who is well educated about abuse issues and committed to the work of the committee. Each April the church lifts up the issue of Child Abuse or Elder abuse in worship, and each fall the church highlights domestic violence issues in worship. In addition, they utilize bulletin inserts, information sheets, local agency presence on bulletin boards, and the middle and high school youth groups have hosted programs on healthy dating, sexuality issues, and boundaries.

More recently, the original Domestic Violence Prevention Committee, under the ongoing oversight and support of Betsy Warren for the past ten years, took on a new name, The Family Violence Prevention Committee. They have expanded their focus to address child and elder abuse as well. Two years ago, the congregation was approached about developing a child safety policy and the membership was encouraging of the endeavor.

Dr. Poling reflects on the process. "A committee comprised of a lawyer, educators, and the church preschool director was formed in early 2012 to develop a policy. The policy was approved by Session in August, 2012 and can be found on the BMPC web site:

<http://bmpcnc.org/BMPC%20Response%20to%20Domestic%20Violence.pdf>. The policy calls for a Child Protection Committee, a separate committee, to administer the program, background checks and training for Approved Adults who work with children, guidelines for working with children and youth, reporting evidence of child abuse, and pastoral care of families affected by child abuse. The Child Protection Committee has received applications for approved adults from 62 people and most of them have received 6 hours of training. We are currently conducting background checks on these persons. In addition, we have done a lot of congregational education: Minute for Mission on Sunday morning, bulletin insert, information page, two articles in the church newsletter, and one in the *Black Mountain News*. We have also met regularly with staff to develop adequate administration for the program: records of who is an approved adult, locked cabinet for files of background checks, regular review of how the policy is going. In August we will meet with weekday teachers, parents and youth, Sunday School teachers, and others, in preparation for launching the program on September 1st. So far, this complex process has gone amazingly well and everyone is committed to making BMPC a safe community for children and adults.”

In the Presbytery of Western North Carolina the BMPC child safety policy has become a model for other churches in the Presbytery. There is currently a Child Safety Committee writing a policy for the Presbytery. In addition, local church leaders are invited to attend training on child safety. This year it will be offered three times. Hopefully, other congregations will also develop their own policies.

Reflections:

- Black Mountain Presbyterian Church is fortunate in being a church with a wealth of human resources, a substantial preschool program, and in having a pastor who is both knowledgeable about family violence issues and willing to keep these issues before the congregation in its worship and educational focus. Their trail blazing efforts are made accessible to all Presbyterian churches through the BMPC policies and by engaging the above mentioned actions.
- The FaithTrust Institute, a Seattle based agency directed by Dr. Marie Fortune, addresses Family Violence Issues and Clergy Misconduct and is the best resource for educational materials for congregational members of all ages, as well as church staff and officers. <http://www.cpsdv.org/>
- All congregations, both large and small, need to understand how prevalent family violence is in our society and in virtually all of our churches. We all need to address the issue both within our worship life and in educating our members, staff, and officers about the issues.

- Presbyteries all across the nation should serve as educators/leaders by studying these documents and by providing workshops and training for all church leaders to attend.
- The hard work of designing a policy for sessions to study and adopt has already been done by at least this one congregation. What is needed in every presbytery and in each church is a commitment by church leaders to addressing all forms of family violence.
- Each year since 2002, PADVN has compiled excellent resources in our annual Domestic Violence Awareness/Worship resources packet, available in September. Resources feature a variety of related topics including spousal abuse, elder abuse, and dating violence, to name a few. They are available at www.pcusa.org/PHEWA/PADVN and <http://www.phewacommunity.org/>
- We invite you to stay connected with, and to support the ministries of our Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (PADVN) and the Presbyterian Health, Education & Welfare Association (PHEWA) by taking out a membership and sending a tax-deductible donation. Your participation is important in helping PADVN/PHEWA to inspire, equip, and connect Presbyterians to engage in these ministries, offering hope that can lead to restoration. Scroll down to see Giving options at: <http://www.phewacommunity.org/>

The Rev. Dr. Kevin E. Frederick
Pastor of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese, North Carolina and
Moderator of the PADVN Leadership Team