

"WHAT IF..."

WHAT IF YOUR CHURCH HELD A CANDLELIGHT VIGIL TO HONOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Vigil: *A peaceful event to show solidarity and support for a cause or issue.*

"I go to vigils to draw oil for my lamp."

Rev. Thelma Burgonio-Watson, FaithTrust Institute

Domestic Violence Awareness Month evolved from the first Day of Unity, observed in October 1981 by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The intent was to connect battered women's advocates across the nation who were working to end violence against women and their children. The Day of Unity soon became a special week with a range of activities that were conducted at local, state and national levels. These activities were as varied and diverse as the program sponsoring them but had common themes: mourning those who have died because of domestic violence, celebrating those who have survived, and connecting those who work to end violence.

In October 1987, the first Domestic Violence Awareness Month was observed. That same year the first national toll-free hotline was begun. In 1989, the first Domestic Violence Awareness Month Commemorative Legislation was passed by the U.S. Congress.

What IF Presbyterian Churches around the country took the leadership in their communities and organized vigils during Domestic Violence Awareness Month? As people of faith, we know how to do this well. It is through our faith and our commitment to Jesus Christ that we continue to work for justice. It is through our faith communities that we work and struggle together. This is a positive message we have to offer our brothers and sisters working against violence.

So many of us have been impacted by domestic violence and it is a time to come together to raise awareness and show support, not only for victims, but for all who work to end violence against women and children. Vigils can also give us the passion and energy we need to continue this difficult work.

What IF we worked together with the local shelters, law enforcement, social services, survivors and families that have lost members due to domestic violence? We could include other faith communities, local musicians, poets, artists, to help with planning, etc.

What IF we used some of the following strategies in our planning?

- Plan as far ahead as possible and involve the voices of battered women.
- Work with your local and state domestic violence programs and coalitions. They will be thrilled that you are willing to take this on!

- Be creative. Include music, poetry, dance, and moments of silence and be sure to have the voice of a battered woman! It is best that most of these be shared by women.
- Purple is the color of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Wear purple ribbons all of October. Consider wearing purple clothes all month. By wearing the ribbons, you will have an opportunity to educate others about domestic violence.
- Light candles to honor victims. Participants can possibly name out loud those they have known and light a candle in honor of that person. Candles represent HOPE.
- Display the Clothesline Project to honor victims/survivors. See www.clotheslineproject.org.
- Use the Silent Witness Display to remind those attending about those that have died. You can make your own. www.silentwitness.net.
- Study *Turn Mourning Into Dancing, A Policy Statement on Healing Domestic Violence* approved by the 213th General Assembly (2001). This policy is an excellent resource with education, scripture, resources and a study and action guide.
- Use *Anguished Hearts* in your church, a seven-session study guide on domestic violence that goes along with *Turn Mourning Into Dancing*. It was developed in partnership with The Presbytery Peacemaking Program, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, and the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA).
- Tell others about PHEWA and the Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (PADVN). Become a member and share in our work – www.pcusa.org/phewa/padvn.
- The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence has additional resources for Domestic Violence Awareness Month – www.ncadv.org.
- FaithTrust Institute www.faithtrustinstitute.org will have faith-based related resources.
- Check the website of PADVN for past years' resources for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Each year has a different focus.

As we know, it takes us all to spread the word that domestic violence hurts everyone—and that it will not end until we **all** take responsibility for speaking out when we see or hear violence around us.