

Men stopping violence materials

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Why Should Male Ministers Preach On Domestic Violence?

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Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (PADVN) Leadership Team

For years many church leaders have operated from the basic orientation that Domestic Violence is a women's issue. Within the Presbyterian Church (USA), the issue emerged through the Office of Women's Ministry. In a rather subtle and dismissive way church male leadership has frequently assumed that within our denomination there are women specialists who address the cases of domestic violence that emerge from time to time around the denomination. In so doing, we make the assumption that family violence is adequately addressed within our congregations. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

1. The problem of Domestic Violence is not just "a women's issue." DV affects the whole family including children and the perpetrator. Family violence impacts the whole congregation and the larger community and it is reaching epidemic proportions. Currently, one-in-five women will become victims of violence in their lifetime and most of this violence occurs within the context of intimate family relationships. The odds are very strong that in every congregation there are families that have been impacted by domestic violence. The larger the church, the greater the number of families that are impacted.
2. The presence of family violence is more wide spread within our churches than pastors can easily recognize. Five years ago when my congregation designated a local domestic violence center as the recipient of the local share of the PC(USA) Peacemaking Offering, the director of a local shelter spoke as part of the Sunday Worship Minute for Mission. That afternoon five church members independently made contact with the shelter director asking for help as victims of DV. I learned that day that victims of DV do not assume that the church will help them if they never hear about the issue in worship.
3. Preaching and praying about domestic violence as a justice issue and as a violation of the covenant of marriage builds a level of trust between the pastor and the membership of the church and gives members permission and comfort to share this issue with their pastor as it arises.
4. Currently a majority of churches, in our denomination, have male pastors as solo pastors or as heads of staff. Pastors of all congregations need to address the issue theologically as a violation, both against the covenant of marriage and the victim and other family members. Amongst members in our churches a high degree of trust and authority is placed in the pastor of the church and when the pastor addresses this issue from the pulpit, family violence is widely understood as an issue worthy of the faith community's full attention and focus.
5. It is not enough for a well-meaning pastor to launch into addressing domestic violence from the pulpit unless he or she engages in adequate educational training. Domestic violence has many levels to it, each which must be explored and understood including social, psychological, legal, and the theological dimensions of the issue. A well-informed pastor must know how the Bible and theology have been misused by pastors in

counseling and preaching, most dramatically to the detriment of the victim, but even for the perpetrator. They must know why couples counseling and anger management courses are not only inadequate but may actually have dangerous implications if used in addressing family violence with victims and perpetrators.

6. Victims and family members where domestic violence is present have significant needs for support, safety and wellbeing. The pastor must also recognize that the perpetrator needs a whole set of pastoral needs including accountability, restorative justice for the victim, and forgiveness and healing for himself as a perpetrator. In all probability, male ministers with a clear sense of the justice and reconciliation issues surrounding Domestic Violence are in a stronger position to effectively connect with male perpetrators.

Ten Things Men Can Do To Prevent Gender Violence

1. Approach gender violence as a MEN'S issue involving men of all ages and socioeconomic, racial and ethnic backgrounds. View men not only as perpetrators or possible offenders, but as empowered bystanders who can confront abusive peers.
2. If a brother, friend, classmate, or teammate is abusing his female partner -- or is disrespectful or abusive to girls and women in general -- don't look the other way. If you feel comfortable doing so, try to talk to him about it. Urge him to seek help. Or if you don't know what to do, consult a friend, a parent, a professor, or a counselor. **DON'T REMAIN SILENT.**
3. Have the courage to look inward. Question your own attitudes. Don't be defensive when something you do or say ends up hurting someone else. Try hard to understand how your own attitudes and actions might inadvertently perpetuate sexism and violence, and work toward changing them.
4. If you suspect that a woman close to you is being abused or has been sexually assaulted, gently ask if you can help.
5. If you are emotionally, psychologically, physically, or sexually abusive to women, or have been in the past, seek professional help **NOW.**
6. Be an ally to women who are working to end all forms of gender violence. Support the work of campus-based women's centers. Attend "Take Back the Night" rallies and other public events. Raise money for community-based rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters. If you belong to a team or fraternity, or another student group, organize a fundraiser.
7. Recognize and speak out against homophobia and gay-bashing. Discrimination and violence against lesbians and gays are wrong in and of themselves. This abuse also has direct links to sexism (e.g. the sexual orientation of men who speak out against sexism is often questioned, a conscious or unconscious strategy intended to silence them. This is a key reason few men do so).
8. Attend programs, take courses, watch films, and read articles and books about multicultural masculinities, gender inequality, and the root causes of gender violence. Educate yourself and others about how larger social forces affect the conflicts between individual men and women.
9. Don't fund sexism. Refuse to purchase any magazine, rent any video, subscribe to any Web site, or buy any music that portrays girls or women in a sexually degrading or abusive manner. Protest sexism in the media.
10. Mentor and teach young boys about how to be men in ways that don't involve degrading or abusing girls and women. Volunteer to work with gender violence prevention programs, including anti-sexist men's programs. Lead by example.

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How do I know that I am a Batterer

Rev. Anne Sayre, Tucker, GA

Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (PADVN) Leadership Team

It is a widely held belief that battering is always physical. In order to recognize that we are batterers, we first need to widen our understanding of what we mean by domestic violence. It can include the following:

1. **Physical:** punching, kicking, denying sleep, biting, choking, pulling hair, denying good nutrition or medical care; forced sexual activity.
2. **Emotional:** use of derogatory or degrading names; threats of physical abuse; denial of the victim's feelings and abilities; blaming the victim for the violence; threatening to abuse the children; accusations of promiscuity, etc.
3. **Material:** keeping the victim economically dependent; destruction, misuse, theft or extortion of another person's money, property or possessions.
4. **Social:** teaching that women are not as capable or important as men and need to be protected and controlled; isolation or denial of any freedom; driving away friends and family.

Understanding the scope of domestic violence makes it easier for us to identify the characteristics or behavior in us that can be classified as abusive behavior. No list of characteristic behavior can ever be complete or include all the nuances of individual attitudes and behavior. If we are honest, however, in our desire to know if we are batterers, the following list of behaviors will be helpful:

1. We have unrealistic attitudes. We have rigid ideas of what we expect of ourselves as men and what we expect of our partners.
2. We try to always be in control. We fail to realize that our partner experiences us as frightening and intimidating.
3. We become explosive. When we try to control others, we lose control over ourselves and this results in abusively explosive behavior.
4. We hide our feelings. We either hide our feelings or are totally unaware of them. We think this is manly, but buried feelings often build up and surface as anger at our partners.
5. We are poor communicators. We either don't respond or we come across as too strong.
6. We don't listen. We don't listen to our partner's feelings, ideas, and opinions. We tend to tell our partners how they are thinking and feeling.
7. Fear of intimacy. We see intimacy as a threat when we allow someone to get too close to our real feelings.

If you recognize yourself in any of the above, please seek help before the situation escalates and is beyond repair. Contact "Men Stopping Violence" at www.menstoppingviolence.org or call the national domestic violence hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE to find resources in your community.

Domestic Violence Intervention Programs

Rev. Carl W. Mangold, retired ELCA pastor
Licensed Clinical Social Worker
Licensed Independent Substance Abuse Counselor

My story: During the 1973-74 academic year I was a Lutheran seminarian doing a pastoral internship in an Ohio congregation where I first became aware of domestic violence. The offender was married with two daughters. He was also a member of the congregational governing board. In short, he was a leader of the local church, a pillar of the congregation. In those days the pastor counseled the married couple and I, as the intern, worked with the children. It may have been best practice then, but it is considered to be bad practice now, unless there are absolutely no other alternatives; e.g., solo pastorate in rural community without any social service supports.

Over the years since then I have served: a blue collar congregation in the Cleveland, Ohio area where I discovered 36 cases of domestic violence within a 33 month period of time both in the church and the community; an upper Midwestern campus ministry in a rural area where the three major social issues facing that community were alcoholism, incest and domestic violence; an urban upscale congregation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and a small congregation in a small town in Arizona. I have had the task of following sexual misconduct by previous pastors in two of these congregations. While a campus pastor, I served for several years on the local shelter board and provided counseling to the women who were there in shelter.

In 1994, I moved from Milwaukee to Arizona to enroll in the masters of social work program at ASU. Following graduation, I found part-time employment at a Catholic Social Service office leading domestic violence groups for court-mandated offenders, all males. This work has become my specialty by default, not by design. In the last ten years I have worked in several different settings or agencies with almost 3,000 culturally diverse men. My particular specialty is with female victims and their children, and the male abusers who terrorized them. Although there are female abusers, I have not worked with this population.

The overwhelming number of those arrested for abusive behavior and also true abusers are male. In fact, approximately 90% of all violence committed in the USA is perpetrated by males. Although recent years have seen the rise of violent females in juvenile detention and also the rise of adult women arrested for domestic violence, the reality is that most violence is still committed by males. Male violence is typically seven times physically more damaging than that done by a woman because the average male has greater upper body strength. Because most offenders are male and most victims are females, the masculine pronoun is typically used when referring to abusers and the female pronoun for victims.

Marital therapy as the primary or only intervention will NOT be effective because the offender will take everything said in therapy to use it against the spouse. Effective interventions work with the abuser first to hold the abuser accountable. If the abuser begins to change, then marital therapy might be warranted. Most clergy and a significant number of therapists are not qualified or set up to intervene constructively with abusers. Victim safety is the primary goal of all such work in any format. It is against this yardstick that all else must be measured.

Pointed question to consider: How is a therapist or pastor to distinguish between a relatively healthy family in conflict, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a family terrorized by an abuser? Diagnosis is the first task. Treatment must follow, based on the diagnosis. The wrong diagnosis will probably lead to incorrect treatment. Think of it this way: medical doctors prescribe medications called antibiotics for colds but not for the flu because antibiotics do not cure/help the influenza virus.

Likewise, marital therapy has the possibility to help healthy families in conflict but not families wracked by power-and-control abuse. Simply referring to arrest records will not be especially conclusive. Today men may be arrested but not be abusers. Today, nationwide, there is an upswing in the number of women being arrested for domestic violence, but most of them are not abusers.

Almost all of us have done something abusive at one time or another. That does not qualify us to be labeled as an abuser. In those situations, a few folks are also arrested for violating state domestic violence laws because our society has lowered the bar on violent behavior within intimate partner relations, in order to provide early interventions, which have a higher probability of success. Indeed, domestic violence intervention is most effective with low-level abusers or those who have done something abusive and have been arrested. High-level abusers have lower probabilities for change.

Normal conflict: It's where the differences between people meet. Arguments revolve around money, job, children, household chores, unclear roles, health challenges, the unexpected event. Healthy conflict focuses on communication and respect in the process of resolving differences. Listening is more important than talking; God gave us two ears but only one mouth. Feelings can be identified and expressed in relatively appropriate ways. People are not afraid to express themselves and believe that others love them enough to not twist their words or intentionally harm them. "I statements" are used. The problem is named. Solutions are brainstormed. "Time outs" are allowed and encouraged. The family environment is a safe place to be truly one's self. Today's event is not fodder for the next explosion in someone's face.

Abusers are those who have a pattern of abuse that dates back over longer periods of time, using power, control, and manipulation to get their way: Intimidating, denying, blaming others, not accepting responsibility for one's behavior, shaming, undermining a co-parent, playful put downs later denied, self justification, minimization, disrespect, isolation, monitoring, demeaning, guilt tripping, rationalization, a good facade in public. These are an abuser's techniques and trademarks. Author and interventionist, Lundy Bancroft, aptly describes these men as magicians who can shift responsibility away from them by blaming others - current spouse, past girlfriend or parents. Look carefully at children who wince when you would not anticipate it, at women who are never able to keep appointments or have no access to a vehicle.

To properly diagnose an abuser is the first step. Abusers are different from others but not always in evident ways. Their victims are usually the most accurate source of information about them but may not be forthcoming with it because they are scared about being blamed, shamed, disbelieved, or discredited. What they start to tell you is usually just the tip of the iceberg. If they sense that you are worthy of their trust, they will continue to disclose to you. If they sense disbelief, they will shut down.

Some abusers are triggered by feared infidelity, while others are triggered by a perceived disobedience of their authority. In both cases, it is their issue and not the behavior of the victim that is responsible for their behavior. It is their issue. It is their problem. They would have a similar response to any woman, and, indeed, many of them are abusers of multiple women over time. Their behavior is always out of proportion to the situation. The former are sometimes called Pit Bulls and the latter Cobras. Both can kill. Pit Bulls are co-dependent on women and Cobras are dismissive of women. Pit Bulls have low self-esteem and Cobras have high self-esteem. Pit Bulls usually have little or no criminal record, while Cobras may be sociopaths with a long criminal record.

Success rates among quality substance abuse programs are accurate at 11%. Anyone claiming higher rates is either inaccurate or misinformed. Likewise, among domestic violence intervention programs, completion rates are deemed good at 55%. Longitudinal studies of successful completers are few in number, but my reading of those studies and my own experience would lead me to believe that a maximum of 50% of those 55% who completed might have changed. That would be about 27.5%, and that could be on the high side.

The program in which I work has a variety of referral sources. One has a 75% completion rate, another 35%, one less than 11%. Mandatory clients have a much higher rate of completion than do voluntary clients, also known at times as "mandated by spouse." Voluntary participants have no one, with enough authority, to hold their feet to the fire. Successful programs are not an island unto themselves. They exist within the context of a legal system and society that holds them accountable or not. Some court systems do better at this than others.

Those courts, probation officers, and judges who provide consistent negative consequences for nonattendance or re-offense have better completion rates. Dropouts are far more likely to re-offend. Accountability is necessary. The legal system, not the intervention program, needs to provide the culture of compliance first and foremost. Then the intervention program is free to do its work and to also require compliance, knowing the court will back them.

What promotes change? A good intervention program, set within the context of a legal system, which holds offenders accountable. Systems where men are confronted with their behavior and its consequences: legally, personally, familially, socially. This is known as a coordinated community response team approach where all parts of the community are on the same page, working together to never excuse intimate partner violence.

With some variation between programs across the nation, programs tend to be based on a pro feminist perspective that abuse is about power and control, that it is learned behavior; programs and state requirements vary, but the norm seems to be 26 sessions of a cognitive behavioral, psycho-educational nature, with some that are more process oriented rather than curriculum based.

Our society has not fully settled many issues relative to intimate partner violence. There is a wide variety in the number of treatment sessions required. Some states require only 16, others 26 and some as high as 52. In some states, all domestic violence charges are felonies, while other states require intervention only for misdemeanors. We have not yet reached a level of sophistication where we can accurately assess an individual and make an appropriate recommendation for treatment. Doctors do not prescribe 52 days or weeks of antibiotics under normal conditions but might do so in the extreme case. What is right for one person might be wrong for another.

Domestic violence intervention is about 30 years young. Indeed, the first real domestic violence shelters have been around for only about 33 years. This is a frontier waiting to develop and, in some ways, we have come a fair piece while, in other ways, not much has changed. The pro feminists have provided the impetus for this movement and we all owe them a great debt of gratitude. This field is in need of research, training of interventionists, new blood.

Some of us are beginning to feel like dinosaurs and eagerly await the next generation to take us into what could be the third wave of programming. The first was voluntary and ineffective. The current wave is mandatory, with spotty effectiveness due to a variety of reasons, and is based on a one-size-fits-all approach. The third wave will be more tailor-made to the individual, with more sophisticated tools to measure and assess offender behaviors in the process, separating low-level offenders from high-level ones, with cultural competency and programming offered in many languages.

In Arizona, much of what happens seems to be based on money. There is no money available to help indigent offenders to receive treatment, no money to train interventionists, no money to do research, no money to develop resources, and agencies seem to try to undercut the costs of others in order to collect more referrals. Your state may have very different issues facing it.

Domestic violence intervention with offenders is a political football and also a whipping post for the men who offend, punishment in the eyes of many rather than treatment. DV coalitions, DV advocates, DV interventionists, police, judges, public defenders, prosecutors, the fathers' rights groups, a wide diversity of religious groups ranging from stay away from the sacred family... to... lets stop the violence and hold offenders accountable are all in the public arena offering up their opinions in the hope of achieving some perceived benefit for one constituency or another.

The PCUSA has been at the forefront of religious organizations addressing intimate partner violence. Our society needs for more of us to become informed so we can hold offenders accountable and learn how to better diagnose and treat them. I value your work in the field and pray for your continued support.

Gloucester Men Against Domestic Abuse

Rev. Bonnie M. Orth, Amsterdam, NY

Co-Moderator of Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence (PADVN)

As you enter and leave Gloucester, Massachusetts, you may notice the street signs identifying Gloucester as a domestic violence free zone. You will also find these signs located at the police station, the high school, at city hall and at all major intersections in town. In Gloucester, as in many communities across the country, there is a coalition working together to address domestic violence and one of the members of the coalition in Gloucester is Men Against Domestic Abuse (GMADA). This organization started with men in the community realizing that in order to end domestic violence, they must take a stand, publicly state their belief that “Strong Men Don’t Bully” and take a pro-active approach.

GMADA began with a campaign intentionally contacting men in the community working in all different occupations asking them if they would sign their name to a document stating their opposition to domestic abuse. In 2002, GMADA sponsored a billboard installed across from a popular bar stating “Strong Men Don’t Bully” with the background of the names of over 500 Gloucester men supporting GMADA.

The model for their program is based on 14 underlying principles.

1. **The silence has to end.** They believe that if the male culture silently tolerates abuse it will never end.
2. **Location, location, location.** If men speak out locally it will be more effective than working on a regional or national level.
3. **What is in a name?** Giving the organization a local name allows the group to have an ongoing presence in the community.
4. **The men are there.** Their experience has shown that many men are just waiting for a vehicle to express themselves about domestic abuse.
5. **No names without contact information.** As they gathered names of men around the community, they found that obtaining addresses, phone numbers and/or emails allowed them future contact.
6. **Speaking out as “We.”** GMADA states that speaking out as “We” will be more effective than speaking in an accusatory tone to abusers because it honors the fact that we all have work to do.
7. **Domestic Abuse-not just Domestic Violence.** When they include name-calling, insults, mockery, manipulative silence, etc., men are able to see that they are often part of the problem.
8. **Each community in its own way.** GMADA has participated in parades, community festivals, signature ads in the newspaper, posters, rallies, bumper stickers and billboard

messages in Gloucester. They realize that each community may have its own unique vehicle for responding and they offer their story as a model.

9. **No One Time Messages.** Action addressing domestic abuse must be sustained to be effective. They are continually exploring new ideas.
10. **Diversity.** GMADA believes that speaking out in a community must reflect its particular ethnic, racial and economic diversity.
11. **Conversation.** Experience has shown GMADA that conversation with men is more effective than mailings.
12. **Many men prefer action to discussion.** Men are more apt to talk during an activity rather than attending meetings to talk about issues of masculinity and domestic violence.
13. **Keep it simple!** GMADA states what is needed most from men is not complicated and can be simple, “Can you join with the rest of us in saying, ‘Men cannot be strong by abusing women and children?’”
14. **Celebration.** The work is serious but GMADA says that they can convey a strong, clear message against abuse and at the same time celebrate coming together to express their capacity to be caring and loving.

To find out more about Gloucester Men Against Domestic Abuse, visit their website, www.strongmendontbully.com detailing their work and offering suggestions for other communities wanting to use their model or contact GMADA Coordinator, Willy Greenbaum, at dontbully@strongmendontbully.com

“Flowers Only Once” A Training Event for Men in Guatemala

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Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (PADVN) Leadership Team

There is a saying in Guatemala, “A married woman will be hit 150 times in her lifetime but will receive flowers only once . . . at her funeral.” Members of the Presbytery of Western NC and two gentlemen from Guatemala were coordinating details of our workshop presentations when Pastor Humberto Baten from the Presbytery of Sur Occidente shared this comment with us. Our timing in providing Domestic Violence workshops to Guatemalan ministers was critical in light of the 2005 report of Amnesty International that the nation of Guatemala had one of the worst women’s rights violation records in the world.

From June 8 through June 16, Presbyterian Elder Chris Just and I traveled through the nation of Guatemala addressing the issue of Domestic Violence, an issue that has reached epidemic proportions in a nation with five hundred abuse related deaths of women in the first five months of 2006. (Guatemala has a population of 12.7 million people.) The Presbytery of Western North Carolina, of which I am a member, has had a covenant partnership with two presbyteries in Guatemala for the past 12 years. In addition, the denominationally based organization, Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network, has been growing in partnership with the CEDEPCA organization based in Guatemala City. CEDEPCA is an ecumenical Protestant institute providing biblical, theological, pastoral and practical training for Protestant churches throughout Central America. For several years now CEDEPCA has presented educational programs on themes related to the self-development of women.

Over six days we provided two seven-hour workshops and two more four-hour workshops, each on the theme, “Domestic Violence and the Response of the Guatemalan Protestant Churches.” We addressed a total of 93 people, mostly men and mostly pastors, but in our sister Presbyteries of Suchitepequez and Sur Occidente there was also a strong representation of women elders and deacons along with the pastors. The vast majority of these 93 folks were Presbyterian but in two workshops in Guatemala City there were also some Pentecostals, a few neo-Pentecostals, and one Episcopalian priest present. Everywhere we went, those in attendance acknowledged that Domestic Violence as a serious social malady deeply affects their women, their families and their nation. All who attended the workshops were open and hungry for the Bible studies and the practical suggestions and resources for congregational intervention.

In order to get from Guatemala City to our sister presbyteries in southwest Guatemala, we took a half-day bus ride into the country (the *campesina*). Throughout our week’s stay, we realized that sentiments against the United States Government have grown considerably throughout Central America since our first visit in 2003. On this trip, virtually everywhere we went, we heard comments from pastors and townspeople who were very critical of our nation’s foreign policies. One man, early in our third workshop, asked if I had come to export the US policies on human rights when we as a nation don’t follow them ourselves. He was skeptical as to our motives, and was unable to perceive me as a fellow Presbyterian. I thought for a moment and responded to his statement. *I am not here in any official capacity to serve as an advocate for US policy. I am not here to address this issue at all. My only authority is that of a Presbyterian minister. I, like you,*

look to be guided by the Word of God in understanding God's will for our most intimate of human relationships, those we live every day in our families. That is the only issue and the only authority I claim to represent. I saw heads nodding in affirmation all around the group of forty-four people. At that point the audience of Presbyterians was truly able to see us as brothers in Christ.

Throughout our presentations, both Chris and I recognized that pastors and lay leaders were fully embracing and understanding the depth of our message. Early on in our last workshop, one of the pastors pointed out a subtle but most powerful distinction in one Spanish version of a biblical translation of the first creation story in Genesis. In Genesis 1:26 the New Revised Standard Version says, "God created human beings in God's own image. In the image of God, he created them, male and female God created them." The pastor present pointed out that one Spanish translation of this text reads, instead of male and female, which would be translated, "*hombre y mujere*," it reads "*macho y hembra*." The term *macho* communicates the dominance and authority of males and the term *hembra* is translated as the female gender of animals and plants.

This translation discounts the equality of men and women who are both created in the image of God. The pastor recognized that the translation used by some fundamentalist churches in his country distorted the biblical truth in an effort to prop up the system of machismo that permeates the culture. The prevailing mindset of male dominance presents a serious challenge to the biblical witness of Presbyterians in Guatemala. Because of that popular translation and the common and unchallenged perception of male superiority, many Guatemalans cannot see God's will for mutual relationships between men and women.

When I led the last workshop in our sister church in San Antonio, Suchitepequez, based on a study of Ephesians 5:21-33, I heard an illustration shared by an older woman who had very little formal education but expressed the deep wisdom of scripture in sharing it. We were discussing the problem of taking part of this message out of the larger context and the distortion it creates, which then impacts human relationships. Verse 22 says, "Wives submit to your husbands for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church." Taken by itself this passage has been freely used to distort the relationship Paul lifts up as God's will for husbands and wives. This woman shared with us a story that dramatically illustrates the full impact of a distorted interpretation of this text.

She told us that her neighbor, a young woman pregnant with her first child, was admitted to the hospital with a problem delivery. Several hours into the labor, the attending doctor informed the woman that she would be unable to deliver without surgery, but she refused to sign the permission form without her husband's approval. (He was away working in another town and could not be reached.) Sometime later it became clear to the doctor that the baby's life was at great risk and he communicated the degree of threat to both the baby and the mother, but she refused to give her consent to surgery. The doctor not wanting a lawsuit from an angry husband, required her to sign a form indicating that he had explained the degree of risk involved and that she still refused surgery. She signed the form. Hours later the baby died and the woman's reproductive organs were so damaged in the birthing process that she will never be able to conceive another child. After hearing this story I asked all present, "Is this the will of God for human life?" Each person responded in a unified and unequivocal, "NO!"

Time and again the comments of the women present in our sister presbyteries communicated God's wisdom from the depths of their hearts and the knowledge of their experience. They spoke with wisdom borne out of the struggle of their lives in a very violent society. I believe it will be

the rural women, the beautifully strong *compesinas*, who will work hardest to spread this message of God's will for human relationships throughout the nation by going from door to door, and victim to victim, comforting and speaking words of hope and truth. And now these women have strong allies in the pastors and male elders of the churches who themselves understand the theology of the truth of God's will for human relationships. Both the pastors and the lay leaders are very aware that an accurate understanding of the biblical witness for marriage is very counter-cultural in Guatemala and they understand that they have an uphill battle in educating the nation and its people. The Presbyterian Church of Guatemala is looking to the PCUSA and to PADVN to provide training and culturally appropriate Spanish resources that will help them in being faithful to this calling of Christ. Let us also keep our Presbyterian brothers and sisters in Guatemala in our prayers.