

Winter 2009

AVA'S CALL

From a Pastor's Perspective

AVA'S CALL is a quarterly publication of the Department of Women Ministries' program Advocacy for Victims of Abuse.

AVA's Goals are to:

- Provide resources to bring healing to victims of abuse
- Equip the church to minister to victims of abuse
- Promote preventive measures to combat abuse

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AVA Website:

www.covchurch.org/cov/women/ava

National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-Safe (7233)

As followers of Christ, we need to not only strengthen our families with the life-changing love of Christ, but also offer hope and healing to those impacted by the deep hurt of domestic violence.

Recently *Pastor Scot Gillan*, from Grace Community Covenant Church in Tucson, Arizona launched an AVA Local Advocacy Ministry in his church. Speaking openly and candidly in his morning sermon, he called upon his congregants to begin to speak out about the issue of domestic violence and sexual assault. Below is an excerpt from his sermon. Please take time to listen to the entire sermon. It can be found at: <http://www.gracetucson.org/>. It is titled *Love's Dark Side*.

Our vision statement at Grace speaks of taking God's love to Tucson and the world – life-changing and transforming.

And of course the first place we learn of and experience LOVE is in our homes and families. We learn its warmth, security, acceptance and encouragement. We learn love's patience. We learn that forgiveness is part of love. We also in family learn love's challenges. In a majority of families, it works. Love reigns most of the time.

In other marriages and families, there is sometimes a dark side, a silent reality, secrets, an imbalance of power – and hurt, even violence.

For most of us, the challenge of family love is to let go of self-centeredness, and grow into the love God has extended us. We need reminders to be strengthening our families with the love of Christ. Most of us.

But today the AVA team and I want to make you aware that some families – more than likely some families even in this room – are hurting deeply, and people are even being hurt by what we call domestic violence. It may or may not even involve physical violence, but power, control and abuse come in all kinds of



forms: physical, verbal, psychological, financial – even spiritual. And the rest of us can't ignore it. We need to be offering hope and health in place of hurt.

As followers of Christ, we need to not only strengthen our families with the life-changing love of Christ, but also offer hope and healing to those impacted by the deep hurt of domestic violence.

We are the body of Christ. A place to be saved AND safe. If there are those in our midst who are being hurt, we need to be used by God to bring healing. What can we do?

• **Be aware: it is a current issue with a longtime impact.** It happens. Now. Or it did. Some of you are very familiar with domestic violence. Or know someone whose life has been impacted. We need to be aware that it is for real, not just because it is a social problem but because this is a biblical justice issue, as well: when someone is being oppressed, held back, overpowered by another person, that's what the Bible calls injustice. So we need to:

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CHLOE'S PLACE, A RESIDENTIAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM IN CENTRAL OHIO

Chloe's Place, a residential self-sufficiency program for young, single mothers and their children, is being established in Central Ohio. The development process includes working with leaders of Hope House of Colorado, a successful self-sufficiency home. AVA Regional Coordinator, Connie Nafziger (Chloe's Place) and Lisa Steven (Hope House of Colorado) share the following insights and information as they consider the consequence of abuse on young lives.

FACT: Abuse is all too often a reality in the lives of teen moms!

- Abused children are 25% more likely to experience teen pregnancy.¹
- The rate of child abuse is estimated to be 3 times greater than is reported.¹

Connie: "In your work with parenting teen moms does your experience reflect these startling statistics?"

Lisa: "I have worked with teenage mothers for 15 years, and in over 90% of the cases domestic violence is a factor. There is often physical abuse by a husband or boyfriend against the teen mom's own mother. Most prevalent, however, is physical or sexual abuse of the teen mother during her childhood. "

Connie: "What about the children of the teen moms?"

Lisa: "Exposure to abuse, and certainly experiencing abuse, leads to a higher risk that the teen mother will abuse her own child, or will choose to be in an abusive relationship."

Connie: "How does a self-sufficiency home help break the cycle of abuse?"

Lisa: "At Hope House we seek to break these cycles through a comprehensive self sufficiency program that includes professional counseling, one-on-one sessions with a parenting educator, and the opportunity to build healthy relationships with stable adult staff and mentors."

Like Hope House, Chloe's Place will address abuse

through curriculum, nurture and modeling. A Christ-centered environment and classes celebrate the value of each person, acknowledging that each is fearfully and wonderfully made; deserving respect in all relationships.

Megan, a resident of Hope House of Colorado shares this excerpt from an essay she wrote:

"At the age of 14 I was the victim of statutory rape by my mother's boyfriend, resulting in pregnancy. He was convicted of child abuse, rape, and a pattern of abuse. The situation was tragic. I was an "object" traded for drugs by my mother to the offender. I made a life changing decision to keep my baby, and change my future. I graduated high school with honors, despite the hard work of caring for my baby son. On a day to day basis I struggle mentally and emotionally with my past, yet I am striving for success. I live at a self sufficiency home, called Hope House of Colorado, and am receiving therapy and parenting classes, and also working toward a Graduate Gemologist Diploma. I have many goals for my future, and I will move past my trauma and create a stable home for my son."



¹Administration for Children & Families of the US Department of Health & Human Services "Child Maltreatment Report 2003"

You are invited to learn more about the life changing work that is on-going at Hope House of Colorado by inquiring at info@HopeHouseOfColorado.org or their website: www.hopehouseofcolorado.org . You can follow the progress in establishing Chloe's Place by reading a blog at chloe-news.blogspot.com or email chloesplace@chloeinc.org.

In the Trenches

More Questions Than Answers

I remember sinking deep into the worn couch, it's springs long since deteriorated. The carpet on the floor was faded, frayed at the edges where it met the wall's chipped paint. Scratched woodwork surrounded a dirty window where it looked out over the gravel parking lot of the business next door. It was in this drafty, barely furnished house that I began my first volunteer work as a "victim assistant" to those who had been sexually assaulted. A little girl and her mother sat at the other end of the couch and described the father's abuse of his daughter as I scrambled to remember all the proper responses my training had taught me.

When the session was over I breathed a sigh of relief as mom and daughter walked across the creaky floor to the door. Had I said the right things? Was I compassionate enough? Tough enough? I had more questions than answers, but I still truly felt that I was where I was meant to be. I was seventeen.

Throughout my young life I had searched for a purpose. In this run-down, old house I had found a place where I was needed. Few people wanted to donate money to a place like this. No one wanted to think about sexual abuse. I was doing a job that few others were willing to do, and it was here that I could truly be an instrument of God's will as I believed I should be. I thought I was on my way to making sense of the world and my place in it. To my thinking, it was just a matter of time until I had all the answers.

As the years went by and I grew in both skills and confidence, I made a surprising discovery. The more experience I gained, the more ill at ease I felt. There were so many things I didn't understand. Why did God allow the suffering I was seeing all around me? Why couldn't I undo the damage that had been done? When would I be good enough, strong enough, and have faith enough to know the answers? I finally received enlightenment through an older woman who had just turned down my request to drop off some supplies to our local women's shelter. "You can't help those women" she told me sarcastically. There's always going to be women like that. It's just the way the world is." She, and so many like her, didn't have any questions. The world was simply what it was, and she had no desire to figure out why, or how to change it. In fact, she didn't even want to think about it. Life was simple to her, not a struggle for understanding.

Now I'm thirty-nine. I've spent 7 years in universities studying and collecting answers. I've counseled countless people in various organizations and hospitals...but I still have many questions. In fact, it

seems that the more answers I've found, the more questions I've created—but oddly enough, the questions don't bother me anymore. I've come to understand that to be in a state of questioning is to be searching for, and working toward the answers. I'm at peace now knowing that as long as I am filled with questions, I am following God's plan in my life, whatever that may be.

People often seem to feel that they're doing something wrong if they don't have all the answers...but I've come to disagree. It's knowing all the questions that matters. We question because we care and are struggling for understanding. If I ever come to feel that I have all the answers, that the world is just what it is and there's nothing for me to do to make a difference, then I'll worry. It seems to me that comfort, and God's will, is found in the questions.

— Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer

From the Book Shelf



The Mistake Has a Name

(Inspired by a True Story) by Anne Weihsmann

Julie Sandford wants a life-sized doll ... an Easy-Bake Oven ... a grandmother to play paper dolls with her ... a best friend to guard her secret dreams ... a yellow seersucker dress ... a full box of new crayons.

What Julie gets is a self-absorbed mother. An alcoholic father. A confused grandmother. Harsh teachers. The loneliness of countless geographical moves. The betrayal of trusted men.

Through the love of Mama T, Grandma Emma and Gloria Gustafson, Julie finds women who cushion her emotional falls. As they reflect the goodness of God, Julie is drawn into a search for a heavenly Father—and along the way encounters shocking revelation about her earthly dad.

Anne Weihsmann lives in the Midwest as a pastor's wife and mother of four children. She is passionate about her family, her writing, and her faith in a "second-chance God." Anne has had articles published in *The Covenant Companion* and *InSpirit* magazines. For ordering you can contact her at: STEPHEN ANNE WEIHSMANN steve_and_anne@q.com

AVA Regional Coordinators

It was very exciting to see God answer our prayers for more Regional Coordinators this past year. In November 2008, an AVA training and commissioning ceremony for new Regional Coordinators (RC) was held at Mercer Island Covenant Church. The new RC Coordinators are shown at the right. Please feel free to contact them for AVA information and training in your area. Their email addresses are located on the AVA website: covchurch.org/women/ava.



From left to right, Debbie Marr, NPC; Yvonne DeVaughn, AVA Director; Ruth Hill, Executive Minister Women Ministries; Lori Englund, NPC; Sarah Thontwa, NPC; Melanie Smith, ECCAK and Krisann Jarvis Foss, Director of Conference Ministries, NPC.

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- **Be willing to break the silence (which allows it to continue)** It's real and we are not going to pretend it isn't around here. We will help those trapped in silence and shame find a voice in a safe and helpful way. We will speak of DV more from up here in the pulpit and in our gatherings. And we will be willing to hold abusers accountable. We will:

- **Offer comfort, support and resources.** We have some trained advocates – not counselors, but advocates who can stand with those who've been hurt. We have resources in Tucson made available. We can educate ourselves (see: covchurch.org/women/ava).

And we must always, as an authentic Christian community be...

Modeling and living Christ's way by:

- building strong marriages where covenants aren't betrayed
- encouraging healthy families where each one is respected
- offering healing prayer, healing relationships and, acceptance to those who have been hurt.
- And even to the abusers in our midst there is hope for repentance, forgiveness, transformation, restoration – that's what Christ does.

STANDING WITH AVA

AVA continues to focus the light of Christ on the dark tragedy of abuse and assault. AVA is a call to the whole church to advocate for victims of abuse so that we create healthier communities and safe sanctuaries. Through our partnership together, AVA will, by God's grace, equip the Evangelical Covenant Church to bring the healing touch of Jesus into this needy area.

It is my desire and prayer to get at least 150 churches/individuals committed to giving a one-time amount of \$100 (amounts to the cost of approximately 4-5 cups of Starbucks each month) to help ensure that this ministry is sustained. If you say yes, and you will stand in support of AVA to minister to victims of abuse, send your donations to: **Women Ministries and earmark them for AVA.** Mail them to Women Ministries, Evangelical Covenant Church, 5101 N. Francisco Avenue, Chicago, IL 60625-3611.

May God Bless You,

Yvonne DeVaughn
AVA Director

