

Spiritual Care for Spiritual Distress

BY CYNTHIA WACKER

A simple tool to aid in examining our personal beliefs about the experience of violence. In thinking through these questions, how can we prepare to be healing agents for those who need compassionate, faithful support?

This term *spiritual distress* is used professionally within medical circles and recognizes the complete disruption of life that pervades a whole person and the need to address this in the healing process. Spiritual distress leads to the loss of self-worth, sense of trust, personal relationships or our faith. There can be a sense of shame and an inability to see hope for the future.

Faith congregations are not immune to violence that befalls human beings and society. Indeed, communities of faith often are specific targets of those with agendas, and pastors or lay ministers often are called on to work specifically with victims of violence. The expectation is that healing and restoration can and will occur in a place of worship.

The role of pastoral care for the results of violence is an unfolding mystery as each day brings a new component. There is no way to be fully prepared for the excruciating effect that violent behavior has on the very souls of us as individuals or a community. However, we must continue to examine our beliefs and individual attitudes toward friends, family and community affected by this unrelenting wounding to our spirits.

Cynthia Wacker, MSN/Ed, RN, Faith Community Nurse, is the manager of a faith community nurse program at Penrose-St. Francis Health Services in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Her mission outreach work reaches to congregations as well community. She is a national speaker and passionate educator in the intersection of faith and health. She can be reached at cynthiawacker@centura.org.

7 Questions for Healing Violence to the Spirit

- 1. In my personal experience with violent behavior ...**
 - a. This is not part of my personal experience.
 - b. I have dealt with it sufficiently.
 - c. I have experienced some healing.
 - d. I would appreciate the chance to examine more deeply.
- 2. Regarding violent behaviors, in my pastoral or caregiver role ...**
 - a. I have been affected by violent behaviors of others toward me.
 - b. I have experienced this behavior but dealt with it.
 - c. I am not sure if what I have experienced fits this category.
 - d. I have not had this experience.
- 3. Which statement is *most* true for you in working with others affected by violence?**
 - a. I am confident in my abilities to work with them appropriately.
 - b. I am mostly realistic about my abilities or lack of them.
 - c. I seek help as needed.
 - d. More training would definitely be helpful.
- 4. In faith settings I have experienced a pastor, staff member or lay minister's violent behaviors toward me or others ...**
 - a. Often.
 - b. Sometimes.
 - c. I have seen it, but it was not personal.
 - d. I have not experienced this behavior.
- 5. My faith or spirituality ...**
 - a. Is part of my coping mechanism.
 - b. Helps me in crisis and I call on it.
 - c. Seems to help others and I wish I knew how to use it to cope better.
 - d. Is not part of my world of coping.
- 6. My faith or spirituality ...**
 - a. Provides the rules needed to determine how to and when to critique a situation.
 - b. Provides some understanding and is effective for coping and maybe helping others.
 - c. Provides understanding and the tools.
 - d. Facilitates acceptance and provides guidance and hope.
- 7. Reflecting on my connection with my faith community ...**
 - a. I do not feel my faith community is a safe or nonjudgmental place.
 - b. I am unsure of the opinion and support of the faith community when in crisis.
 - c. I have a friend or small group for support.
 - d. My faith community is a place of healing and acceptance regardless of the issue.

"7 Questions for Healing Violence to the Spirit" may be reproduced for personal or congregational use with credit to Penrose-St. Francis Health Services, Colorado Springs, Colorado and Church Health Reader. Go to chreader.org for more information.