

There but Not There - Synopsis

Despite many criminal justice initiatives, domestic violence continues to be a major social issue around the world. Lack of appropriate responses from faith communities to situations of family violence is also an ongoing challenge. However, since the inception of programs such as the 'RAVE Project' (www.theraveproject.org) clergy members now have additional resources available to them when they desire to help families within their faith community who are experiencing domestic violence.

Yet not every religious community feels the need to intervene, or the belief that it is appropriate to have church intervention in situations of family violence. Despite best efforts, instances remain where church administrators and members turn a blind eye to situations of abuse within their community or prescribe ill-advised methods of resolving these issues. In some cases there is victim-blaming, whether intentional or unintentional.

In 2010, there were approximately 99,000 cases of family violence reported to police by victim/survivors in Canada. This number is only indicative of those willing to report the incidences to proper authorities. Based on these numbers, denial is no longer a possibility in faith communities; it must be assumed that situations of domestic violence are present in faith communities. Family violence is an all too common problem that the church and their communities can no longer ignore or refuse to accept as social reality. Yet, the reality is that churches are not always the best channels of support for these families despite their active role as social institutions within the community. Within the past ten years many resources for faith-based communities have been developed and it is important that church leaders become efficient support systems for those within their communities who are in need.

This photo-essay depicts some of the challenges associated with the traditional beliefs and values faith groups when applied to situations of contemporary society. It is symbolic of how these groups can no longer choose to remain silent or absent in cases of family violence. In certain cases the debate between maintaining beliefs and supporting members of the church is blurred and traditions can be seen as interfering with appropriate care and support for community members in need. Families can no longer continue to be excluded and ignored by their faith communities as a result of their social and personal actions. This becomes a situation of insider--outsider status, where both victims and aggressors are acknowledged in some contexts but ignored in others. Reciprocity of support in these cases is also convoluted. It is conflicting for individuals who are refused help, or given inadequate resources and support, while maintaining ongoing expectations of activity, contribution, and devotion in the faith community.