

Tuesday, July 1, 2008

[Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Violence](#)

The first week of my field education with the Department of Chaplaincy Services at the Division of Prisons I attended the [North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) Biennial Conference with Chaplain Betty Brown. I was privileged to listen in on conversations between workers from the Department of Social Services, Child Protective Services, the Division of Mental Health, and various domestic violence programs and shelters. The most interesting workshop that I attended was entitled "Domestic Violence and Children: Survival and Transcendence" led by Kit Gruelle and Lisa Floyd. Kit is a domestic violence survivor and an advocate for battered women and children. As the conference manual states, Lisa's "voice and experience of calling 911 as a 6 year old girl, one night many years ago (the Lisa tape), has been used since then to educate thousands of people about domestic violence and the impact on children." Listening to Lisa call 911 on this particularly horrible night was a heart-wrenching experience. While listening to her stepfather beat her mother, she continually used the word "please" when asking the dispatcher to send the police or hold on a minute and repeatedly voiced her concern for her "very delicate" baby brother and her little sister.

Several years ago, Kit was working with the police department and asked someone, "I wonder what this little girl is doing now. I wonder if we could find her and see how she's doing." The police were able to locate Lisa, and Kit's knock on Lisa's door was the beginning of a very meaningful friendship. Kit discovered that Lisa was in an abusive relationship of her own, but since they have met, Kit has helped Lisa walk through the process of ending that relationship. Lisa says that when she got pregnant with her second child something in her just snapped, and she knew she had to get out because she did not want to end up like her mother.

Lisa had no idea that her tape was being used to educate people about the effects of domestic violence on children. She only vaguely remembers signing away her rights to this tape, and no one ever told her why exactly they wanted it. Now as a twenty four year old woman, she still cannot listen to the tape because of all the pain she fears would surface. She wonders why they picked this particular tape since she called the police hundreds of times. Through her tears, she shared with us that her mother had not changed, that her older brother was in jail, that her sister was getting into trouble, and that she feared for the future of her little brother. She pleaded with the Child Protective Service (CPS) workers in the room to always be mindful of the child victims of domestic violence. The reality of her life and the lives of her siblings is a great testimony to the effects of domestic violence on children. Lisa told us that there were twenty-three documented cases of CPS coming to her house and that she nor her siblings were ever taken away from her mom. She said that she wishes she had been. Although she admitted that she would not have wanted to leave her mom initially, she said that in the end it would have been a better situation. She challenged us to always remember the children when dealing with domestic violence because they have no control or power to change their situation.

Someone asked Lisa if the church ever played a role in helping her family with domestic violence issues. She said that she did not believe in God, but she knew of many people who did have faith and that their faith helped them "get through it." I have to wonder if they meant they "got through it" by themselves with a silent response from the church. What have we done as Christians to help victims of domestic violence and even their abusers? Have we contributed to the problem with unfaithful readings of scripture? Have we ignored the signs and pretended as if nothing was wrong? How do we learn to speak honestly about the presence of domestic violence in the families who sit in our pews? And what can we do to minister to the abusers? I heard many of the groups at the conference speak very strongly about locking abusers up. But even if they are imprisoned, they will eventually get out. And, as Christians, locking people up cannot be the solution for us. How will we help to bring about change in the lives of all who are caught up in the cycle of domestic violence? How will share God's love with them all, even the abusers?