



“Out of Desolation. . . The Daughters of Tamar”
Practical Recommendations for the Church’s Response to Sexual Assault

Help the survivor -

Immediately after the assault:

1. Make sure she is in a safe place. Tell her to try to get to a safe place.
2. Call 911.
3. Encourage her to go to the hospital.
4. Tell her that it is critical that she not shower, douche, change clothes, eat, drink, or smoke until she can get to the hospital.

When you meet with her/him:

1. Ensure sufficient time and a safe and private place for the survivor to talk with you.
2. Do not press for details about the assault. Allow the survivor to offer any information about the assault. Do not react to her story with shock.
3. Assure her that she is not to blame for the assault.
4. Help her to reflect theologically about what has happened to her.
 - Allow her to talk about how she feels about God as a result of the attack.
 - Allow her to be angry at God and/or feel betrayed by God.
 - Help her to understand a truer image of God - i.e., God did not cause the assault, God was not punishing you, God is with you, God has given you strength to survive the attack and recover from the assault.
5. Reassure her that it is possible to regain control over her life. Encourage her to make decisions for herself.
6. Provide necessary referrals to a rape crisis center, counseling, etc.
7. Continue to support her throughout her recovery, and, if it occurs, throughout the prosecution of her case.

Help the assailant -

1. If you know the person and feel safe doing so, confront him and tell him that you know what he has done. If you do not know the person, do not confront him on your own, to ensure your own personal safety.
2. Name the sin - tell him that his act of violence is a sin.
3. Report him to the police.
4. Encourage criminal prosecution of the case.
5. Support and pray for him during the trial and, if it occurs, during his incarceration.
6. Offer him hope of repentance and transformation through incarceration, treatment and confession.

7. Seek repentance from him. This requires the assailant to take responsibility for his violence, confess it, actively seek to change, and refrain from committing any other acts of violence. Help the rapist to understand that his sin is the consequence of his own brokenness (i.e. his need for power and violence) and is not in any way caused by the survivor.
8. Continue to keep him accountable.
9. Support reform in criminal laws that support the rights of survivors and ensure just prosecution of sexual assault cases.

Help the congregation -

1. Understand that the congregation will be affected by the assault and will need to have a way to express their grief/rage and to support the survivor.
2. Acknowledge the assault. Schedule a special congregational meeting to provide facts about the incident, education about the issue, and an opportunity to respond to the assault.
3. Hold a healing service to allow the congregation to pray with the survivor and lift up their own grief, while experiencing God's healing grace. However, make sure that the survivor is comfortable participating in such a service. If she is not, allow a special prayer time for members of the congregation to worship and experience healing.
4. Address the needs of the families of both the victim and the assailant.
5. Hold a bible study or other gathering during which you can teach the congregation how they can care for the survivor and hold the assailant accountable. Take the time to address particular myths, i.e., if they are blaming the victim, help them to place the blame on the assailant. Encourage discussion about ways in which they can prevent further violence. They will need to feel empowered to stop such violence.

Help the community -

1. Let survivors know that your church is a safe place for them.
2. Let the community know that your church is willing to address the reality of violence in the community. Invite them to attend any studies or discussions on the subject.
3. Seek to collaborate with the local rape crisis center, battered women's shelter, or other victim-service agencies in your area. Many of these agencies will not refer survivors to churches because of the inadequate responses to these issues from the church in the past. Meet with them and find out how the church can better respond to violence and help survivors. Consult with them on cases. This allows survivors to have both their practical and spiritual needs met.

Help the minister -

1. Advocate for seminary classes that address sexual violence. Many ministers are ill-equipped to deal with sexual violence issues.
2. Help ministers to understand the practical implications for the survivor's safety, the dynamics of assault/abuse, and, because of the high recidivism rate (67% for convicted rapists), the need to report the assailant to the police.

3. Encourage them to seek support for themselves while working to address an assault.

For more information, please contact your local rape crisis center, or:

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