

September 12, 2019: National Webinar – Intersection of Faith and Domestic Violence

Oliver Williams, professor and leading expert in domestic violence in the African American community, explains the historical challenges of domestic violence in faith communities and highlights tangible action steps to more holistically address domestic violence in contexts of faith. Williams co-presents with Dr. Andy Johnson from Bethel University in St. Paul Minnesota, co-author of *Religion and Men's Violence Against Women*; Mrs. Elizabeth Petersen, MSW Executive Director of SAFFI (South African Faith and Family Institute-Cape Town South Africa); and Minister LaDonna Combs, Director of Prevention Sisters in Detroit, Michigan. This panel of faith leaders dives into how to debunk gender roles and address domestic violence within communities of faith.

The objectives of this webinar are to:

1. Educate service providers on the intersections of faith and domestic violence
2. Expand on how faith communities can be proponents of the intervention and prevention of domestic violence
3. Explain how to interpret religious texts that center around gender and equality

About the Presenters

Doctor Oliver J. Williams is the Professor of School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul. He was the Executive Director of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community from June 1994 to September 2016 and he served as the Director of the Safe Return Initiative that addressed prisoner reentry and domestic violence from 2003-2016. Dr. Williams Directed the African American Domestic Peace Project (AADPP) that works with community leaders in 12 cities across the United States from 2010 to present. He has worked in the field of domestic violence for more than thirty-five years. Dr. Williams is a clinical practitioner; working in mental health, family therapy, substance abuse, child welfare, delinquency, domestic violence and sexual assault programs. He has worked in battered women's shelters, developed curricula for batterers' intervention programs and facilitated counseling groups. He has provided training across the United States and abroad on research and service-delivery surrounding partner abuse.

Elizabeth Petersen is a PhD candidate at the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape and she holds a Master's Degree in Social Work. Her journey within the VAW sector dates back to 1993 as a social worker at St. Anne's Homes in Cape Town, a century old Anglican shelter caring for abused and homeless women and children, and then she became their Director in 1997 until 2008. She is passionate about women's issues and the plight of the marginalized and has addressed various local and international audiences to help bring about gender & racial sensitivity and equality. She established the South African Faith and Family Institute in 2008 with the intention of creating a coordinated restorative justice response to domestic violence with particular focus on strengthening the capacity in the faith sector.

Doctor Andy J. Johnson teaches at Bethel University in the undergraduate program in psychology. His research interests are in the intersections of gender-based violence

with religion, culture, race, national origin, immigration status, sexual orientation, and gender identity. He earned an MA and Ph.D. in counseling psychology from the University of Notre Dame. Andy is on the Board for the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence, where he currently serves as Co-Chair Elect of the Education and Mentoring Action Team. Recently, Andy served as a member of the Olmstead Specialty Committee for the State of Minnesota which addressed interpersonal violence against persons with disabilities.

La Donna Marie Combs is a highly trained international educator, counselor, and advocate for victims and survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Teen Dating Violence, Stalking, and Human Trafficking in Michigan. She is the President and CEO of the *Sisters Against Abuse Society*, a nonprofit organization bringing hope, help, and healing to victims of domestic & sexual violence in the black and African American Community. She is an Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Spring Arbor University in Spring Arbor, MI and a former curriculum writer for the *Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community* at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN. She is the recipient of the Phenomenal Woman's Award given by the AWARE Shelter in Jackson, MI, the Phoenix Award from HAVEN the mainstream domestic violence service provider of Oakland County, and the "Survivor Award" given by Sara's Place in Oak Park, MI. In May of 2019 she was voted the Women of Year by the Michigan Chronicle newspaper for her superlative and passionate work in the City of Detroit. La Donna has a Master's Degree in Organization Management. She has been a licensed minister of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) for more than 30 years.

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Intersection of Faith and Domestic Violence

Oliver Williams, Elizabeth Petersen,
Andy Johnson, and La Donna Marie Combs



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Your Host Today

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Thank you for making this presentation possible!

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Your Presenters Today



Oliver Williams



Elizabeth Petersen



Andy Johnson




La Donna Marie Combs


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Domestic Violence and Faith Communities: How to be a Resource


Presenters:

- Dr. Oliver Williams, University of Minnesota,
- Dr. Andy Johnson Bethel University,
- Minister, La Donna Combs, Ph.D. Candidate, Prevention Sisters,
- Mrs. Elizabeth Petersen, MSW, Ph.D, Theology Candidate Executive Director with the South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI)


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Presentation Agenda

- Why consider Faith in addressing Intimate Partner Violence/Gender Based Violence?
- What is the rationale of some Faith Leaders about including IPV/GBV among part of their ministries?
- What does the literature tell us about Faith and IPV/GBV
- Story about a women of Faith in shelter and IPV/GBV
- Working with multiple Faith Leaders about IPV/GBV


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Considerations of Faith as a part of a ministry

- **Observation of the churches that include DV among their church ministries:**
 - ❖ They have reviewed their Faith text and interpretations about partner relationships and abuse
 - ❖ They see the contradiction of Faith interpretations in Faith text
 - ❖ They preach about it during Faith sermon
 - ❖ They have been trained on how to understand and respond to domestic violence
 - ❖ They train lay leaders on how to hear, respond and to refer members to the proper supports for Intimate Partner Violence


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What is the rationale of some Faith Leaders about including domestic violence among part of their ministries?

- Some faith leaders interpret their faith text with more accuracy about what is stated and the direction it offers and they see violence and abuse as not the will of their faith tradition
- Some faith leaders hear the voice of those that suffer from Intimate Partner Violence
- Some grew-up in household where they witnessed it occurring and understand the consequences of abuse
- Some faith leaders are called to action on this issue among others


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What is the rationale of some Faith Leaders about including domestic violence among part of their ministries?

- Some faith leaders believe that if you have a social service component to your ministries and you ask the question "is there something that troubles you" you have to be willing to respond to the problem
- Some faith leaders are called to action on this issue in their ministries among others



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References

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- Islamic Response to Domestic Violence: Video and Report, 2014--willi2change.org
- Discussion of domestic violence with Islamic men and women 2014, in Harlem New York--video
- Christian and Islamic response and guidance to men who batter concerning domestic violence
- Williams, O. & Jenkins, E. (In press) A Survey of Black Churches Responses to Intimate Partner Violence, Journal of Christianity and Social Work.



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Dr. Andy Johnson

What does the literature tell us about Faith and IPV/GBV?



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Dr. Andy Johnson

What does the literature tell us about Faith and IPV/GBV?



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Examples of why it is important to consider religion and spirituality

- **Unanticipated Barriers:** Religious cultural beliefs surrounding burial is one of the primary reasons Hmong women tend to remain in abusive marriages. (Vang, 2015)
 - Why is it surprising to me? Role of context, personal experience.
- **Minimizing Abuse:** Just one example of abuse in Orthodox Jewish relationships often overlooked by therapists-- Forcing wife to violate tznius (modesty)
- **The System does not work well for everyone:** Churches fill the gap
 - African Americans: The legacy of lynching and the effects on IPV
 - Help seeking behavior within African congregations (Muhovich & Geddes, 2015)
 - IPV in Latino American churches (Ames & Ware, 2015): Often more willing to use informal networks and the church
- **Even Clergy Misunderstand Scriptures:** Misconceptions about Islam and IPV are common: Verse 4:34



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Higher Levels of Spirituality and Religious Involvement (DV Survivors)

- Fewer depressive symptoms (Watlington & Murphy, 2006; Gillum, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2006)
- Fewer PTSD symptoms (Watlington & Murphy, 2006)
- Greater levels of social support (Watlington & Murphy, 2006; Katerndahl, & Obregon, 2007).
- Increased psychological well being (Gillum, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2006)
- Spiritual well-being second only to hopefulness in terms of predicting suicide nonattemper status (Meadows, Kaslow, Thompson, & Jurkovic, 2005).



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Negative Effects of Spirituality and Religion

- Potter (2007) African American DV Survivors
- Contradictory effects
 - 1) abuse against women by their intimate partners is often excused if not condoned by clergy
 - 2) proof texting -- use of religious texts out of context to support one's position
 - 3) use of religion and spirituality for resilience



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Results (Potter, 2007)

- Vast majority of the women relied on spirituality to help them get through and get out of the abusive relationships
- Many spoke of how they sensed that the spirit or their God, was watching over them and that they continued to rely on their faith
- Unsupportive Christian cleric assistance – most did not seek out assistance from clergy and others in their religious communities but 20% did seek help
- Being told to remain in the relationship and work things out were common
- Women who sought help from their pastors became disheartened with their churches during their abusive relationships
- Many reported feeling derailed from their religious track during their abusive relationships—they always had faith but the practice of many waned



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Help Clergy to Take Steps

- Ludy Green (2015): follow her recommendations on developing a domestic violence policy for a religious congregation.
- Encourage systematic opportunities for ongoing education and training for staff on IPV.
- Remind clergy research has shown most Christian women want to receive help first and foremost from their pastor or their church community (Nason-Clark et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this same research has also shown the church usually is rated as the least helpful resource by abused women.
- Do not refer persons affected by domestic violence to marriage or family therapy. Clergy serious about saving marriages should take steps to make your congregation safe for abused women to report abuse so they will do so early in the cycle when the abusive behavior of the man is more amenable to treatment.



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Steps, Continued

- Reframe low rates of IPV reported in congregation: "Given that violence against women is so prevalent, if there are no reports of domestic violence in the church the question is why is this the case? Domestic violence is pervasive. If your church community is such a safe and supportive environment for abused women, then why isn't your church flooded with abused women and their children?"



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Creating a Policy (Green, 2015)

- Policy should serve as a guideline for behavior
- 1. Establish a committee of experts
 - Can include experts on IPV, on the religious cultural group, and on issues related to women, men, and children
- 2. Choose champion congregants
 - These adults will represent the religious institution's membership, be well known and respected in the church, and will have knowledge of other members
- 3. Prevent cover-up in the congregation
 - Can be accomplished by integrating the need for domestic violence prevention and intervention with the religious beliefs and values of the group
 - Observe symptoms, avoid the role of counselor, and do not judge



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Creating a Policy, Continued

- 4. Train champion congregants on action plan
 - Champions need to be trained on how to refer survivors to local community resources
 - Champions' tasks include: seeking expert assistance, holding the abuser accountable, and if reconciliation is to occur, considering it only after the above steps have taken place
- 5. Ensure the victim's safety
 - Champion or congregant member should not pressure victim to make decisions about returning home, etc.
 - Help to secure a place that is safe for the victim and the children
- 6. Assure confidentiality
 - "Only information necessary for the victim's safety and the safety of others will be shared on a need to know basis" (Liz Claiborne, Inc. 2003, p. 6)



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Minister La Donna Combs



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Culturally Specific Domestic Violence Services the



In The African American Church

The “Holy Hush”

No room for disclosure

Many religious women are victimized by their husbands who promised to love and cherish them for life (Nason-Clark, 2004).



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As a minister and evangelist, I began praying in secret with Christian women fleeing abuse in shelter while receiving services (Kelley, 2003).




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Patriarchal interpretation of scripture many times is informed by the internal biases around gender, male privilege and spiritual abuse by male clergy in church.




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Church is a very vital and intricate part of the victim's life and is still one of the first places victims chooses to turn for help in the black community.


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The church's ability to keep her safe, has to be one where clergy embraces the **full interpretation** of the Bible verses, which are also in **Ephesians** (but not limited to) and the Old Testament documentations of God using, empowering, and honoring women. And refers to the church in the female gender as His bride without spot, blemish or wrinkle.

Ephesians Ch. 5 vs. 25 thru vs. 33.
In which the Bible commands the husband (It does not give this command to the woman) three times to love his wife, as his own body.

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Understand that your ability to be an educated faith leader will either create a bridge for **safety** and **healing** or create a **barrier** that perpetuates victim blaming or attributing his abuse to her failure as a Christian. Creating a Crisis of Faith for the Victim.



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Funded by: United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women (2017-UW-AX-0014) and the Department of Health and Human Services (CSU19-82001)

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**Mrs. Elizabeth Petersen,
MSW, Ph.D Candidate**

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**Intersection of Faith and Domestic Violence
– A South African Approach**

The Family Justice Center Alliance Webinar, USA
20 August 2019

Presenter: Elizabeth Petersen (MSW)
Founder/ Executive Director
South African Faith and Family Institute

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Introduction and Context

- Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA) is flagged as the most prevalent form of violence against women irrespective of country, culture, religion, ethnicity and socio-economic status (Abrahams et al 2006; Chibber & Krishnan 2011; Slater 2013)
- South African women live in one of the most religious – yet most violent – societies in the world.
- Albeit reliable because of underreporting, it is estimated that one in four South African women finds herself in an abusive relationship (Jewkes & Abrahams 2002); and that a 2004 study found that a woman is killed by her intimate partner every six hours (Mathews et al 2004) and every 26 seconds a woman is being raped by a man in SA (Medical Research Council)
- It is estimated that 90% of the South African population subscribe to religious belief and practice (WIN/Gallup international 2015).



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Introduction and Context, Continued

- Given that in African societies, religion permeates every aspects of life (Mbiti 1999), it is imperative to explore the intersections between religion/ faith and IPA.
- Research indicates that many IPA victims/survivors use faith as a coping mechanism and they often approach their religious leaders and faith communities for help
- IPA perpetrators often use easily misinterpreted scriptures, religious teachings and cultural practices to justify their abusive behaviour.
- Research confirms that faith leaders are not adequately equipped by their theological training to address IPA
- While the 'rights' discourse is an essential democratic value, it is not in itself a plausible intervention strategy in contexts where religion (embedded in culture) is a social determinant of hierarchical gender power-relations (Pillay 2013; Petersen 2016).



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Hypothesis

If Religious Leaders are transformed in their thinking and/or knowledge about gender power relations, from hierarchical to relational, their teaching, preaching and pastoral care intervention will transform the way women and men relate to one another in intimate relationships, family life and broader society.

Ubuntu can serve as a catalyst for such transformation.



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WHY SAFFY?

- Mobilizes religious leaders and faith communities to
- Address faith dimensions and root causes of VAW
- Exist to help *Places of Worship become Sanctuaries of Hope and Healing* for individuals and families affected by domestic violence
- Resource to religious leaders and faith communities
- Offers training, professional / technical support, facilitate opportunity for reflection, engagement and dialogue
- Facilitates opportunity for networking and collaboration between faith communities and NGO's
- Advocates for legislative reform and culturally informed interventions



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Strategies



Domestic Violence Training and Capacity Strengthening Model for Religious Leaders and Faith Communities –

- * **Sensitizer Workshop**
- * **5 Day Training**
- * **10 Week Series**
- * **Theological Advisory Council on GBV**



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TACGBV Objectives

- Offer Theological Guidance and advice around easily misinterpreted Scriptures and Religious & Ancient Teachings
- Meets from time to time in sacred conversation and dialogue about pertinent themes that emerge during preaching and IPA pastoral care / support services
- Provide sound faith-based input to the development of resource material, denomination specific statements, policies and procedures in the quest to advance theologically sound prevention, intervention and aftercare programs
- Be available to SAFFI and GBV service providers when faith-based guidance is sought to better assist victims/survivors, perpetrators and their families
- Participate in various campaigns and advocacy initiatives



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Publications by the TACGBV



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Theological Advisory Council on GBV



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Muslim Judicial Council – 16 Days of Activism Campaign Initiative



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African Traditional Religion Conversation



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Jewish Community



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SA Religious Leaders TAKE A STAND Campaign

COLLECTIVE MESSAGE FROM ALL FAITH LEADERS
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYUJ69Mdc50>

SAFFI Exec Director: ELIZABETH PETERSEN
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXKkCF5aZuk>

Judaism: RABBI WARREN GOLDSTEIN https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omrZimm6_i8

CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP STEPHEN BRISLIN
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTFKWA3S6tI>

Islam: MOULANA ABDUL KHALIQ ALLIE <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nN4eA9k>

African Traditional Religions: INJOLI BONGILE MAWAWA
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-4J760BSI8>

Hindu: GURU KRISHNA <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prRhV-GKoaU>

Ba'ha'i: TAHIRIH MATTHEE https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_WrA5F5mkM

WC Religious Leaders Forum Chairperson: IMAM RASHIED OMAR
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVxIQSV0kGJ>

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Thank you 😊

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Intersection of Faith and Domestic Violence

Oliver Williams, Elizabeth Petersen, Andy Johnson, and LaDonna

Marie Combs

1.5 Hours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Casey Gwinn".

Casey Gwinn, J.D.
Co-Founder and President
Alliance for HOPE, International

**September 12,
2019**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gael Strack".

Gael Strack, J.D.
Co-Founder and CEO Alliance
for HOPE, International