

TELECONFERENCE SUMMARY

“Working with the Faith Community on Elder Abuse Prevention”

Mary Twomey, Moderator
San Francisco Consortium for Elder Abuse Prevention

Introduction

Clergy are often the first professional group people turn to when they have personal problems.¹ Studies show more people turn to the clergy than all other helping professions combined. As congregations grow older, clergy will be confronted more and more with issues of elder abuse, neglect, and self-neglect.² Reporting elder abuse is often both a legal and an ethical mandate for faith leaders.

In March and April of 2004, the National Center on Elder Abuse sponsored two nationwide telephone conferences on the topic of working with faith communities as elder abuse “sentinels” – key professionals, in frequent interaction with older persons who can be helpful in identifying abuse and connecting victims to services. Funding was provided through a grant from the U.S. Administration on Aging to focus on the development of partnerships that bring together groups and organizations that may not have otherwise worked together for the benefit of seniors.

The two teleconferences held on March 23 and April 1 included a total of seventy participants from across the United States and Canada. Special guest presenters included:

- Lisa Curtis, Director, Denver District Attorney’s Economic Crime Unit
- Elizabeth Podnieks, Ph.D., Chair, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, Ontario, Canada

¹ Clebsch, W. A., Jaeckle, C. R., *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, New York: Jason Aronson, 1983.

² Throughout this paper, the term “elder abuse” shall be construed to include abuse, neglect and self-neglect of both seniors and adults with disabilities. It shall include abuse that occurs in the community (e.g., in the elder’s home) or in long-term care institutions (e.g., nursing homes or board and care homes).

Both teleconferences began with reports on the Denver and Ontario projects. These presentations were followed by a question/answer and comment period open to all participants. The teleconferences were moderated by Mary Twomey, Director of the San Francisco Consortium for Elder Abuse Prevention, a program of the Institute on Aging.

Model Programs for Interfaith Outreach

ONTARIO NETWORK FOR THE PREVENTION OF ELDER ABUSE

Enhancing the Faith Community's Capacity to Address Elder Abuse

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The Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (ONPEA) project, led by Dr. Elizabeth Podnieks, is funded by the Canadian government's National Crime Prevention Center. In her extensive work on the subject of elder abuse, Dr. Podnieks found that people did turn to clergy when they were being abused or knew someone who was being abused. Yet, these same people reported that they had not received the help they expected or anticipated. In response, Dr. Podnieks initiated an exploratory research study in 2000 with the University of Toronto to find out the perceptions of elder abuse among the clergy. The study was developed to provide a baseline for outreach planning. The project surveyed 49 faith leaders through focus groups, interviews and written questionnaires. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they were aware that elder abuse was taking place within their congregations. The questions they asked covered the following areas:

- Were the faith leaders aware of elder abuse as an issue?
- What were they doing about it?
- What did they need to address the problem?

Dr. Podnieks reported that they found members of the clergy were generally familiar with the concept of elder abuse, but a number of factors inhibited their willingness to intervene. For example:

- Many of the clergy said that training on issues of aging, generally, or issues relating to abuse, specifically, had not been provided by the theological seminary or in their religious training.
- Many said that they did not have extra time to deal with the issue.
- The clergy felt conflicted when the abuser was a member of their congregation.
- They had special concerns around confidentiality issues and expressed a need for special materials to help them approach their congregations.
- The clergy wanted to know the risk factors, to know how to identify abuse, and clear and concise directions on what to do.

Additionally, and adding to the Canadian clergy's reluctance to report, is the fact that only four Canadian provinces have any mandated reporting laws for elder abuse.

Dr. Podnieks also described the work that the Ontario project is doing with older congregation members themselves. As an example, she noted that the project team educates congregation members about what they can expect when they go to their faith leader. They explain what kinds of help the faith leader can give them, and the kinds of support that other agencies that are involved with elder abuse, such as Adult Protective Services, provide.

As a result of the survey and research, ONPEA developed a comprehensive toolkit that includes pamphlets, workshop facilitator guidelines, and special videos for both faith leaders and congregations. ONPEA's "Elder Abuse Awareness in Faith Communities: Findings from a Canadian Pilot Study" was highlighted in a recent edition of the *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 15, Issue 3/4, pending publication www.haworthpress.com/store/TOC.asp?sku=J084.

A summary report of the ONPEA faith-based initiative can be found online at www.onpea.org/Strategy/Communication/conference02/podnieksstrakamackendrickwong.pdf. For more information, contact Dr. Podnieks at onpea.info@utoronto.ca.

DENVER, COLORADO DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S ECONOMIC CRIME UNIT
Clergy Against Senior Exploitation (CASE) Partnership

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The CASE (Clergy Against Senior Exploitation) Partnership is an older adult financial crime prevention and intervention program of the Denver District Attorney and Denver's faith community, supported with a grant from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), Office of Justice Programs, U. S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

The project has three components:

- Partnership with Faith Communities;
- Fraud Alert Program;
- Fraud Prevention Program

The purpose of the partnership is to provide a community-based system for elder financial exploitation prevention, crime detection and reporting, and victim support. As an integral part of the initiative, the DA's Office sponsors Clergy Training Seminars for clergy and lay leaders, as well as Fraud Prevention Seminars for older adults and congregations, and the Fraud Alert Program provides monthly alerts for church bulletins.

The program also employs a Faith Community Advocate who helps elders implement fraud prevention steps, promotes detection and reporting of elder financial crimes to

the DA's Economic Crime Unit and offers support to victims, helping them report crimes and utilize victim services.

In the first two years of the program CASE partnered with 225 churches, synagogues, and other entities. In 2003 alone, CASE presented 120 fraud-prevention workshops. Monthly Fraud Alerts are e-mailed to all of the partnering congregations that then insert them in their bulletins. Lisa Curtis, who directs the CASE program, estimates approximately 80,000 people per month are reached through these Fraud Alerts.

With the assistance of a continuation grant from the Department of Justice, the area agency on aging and local foundation funding, the program has been able to expand. The DA's Office now has community liaisons that are helping the program reach out to the African-American, Latino, Korean and Russian communities.³

Ms. Curtis shared with teleconference participants some of the CASE Partnership's strategies and ideas.

What Works

- Having some *measurable goals* and sticking to them.
- Having a policy of *flexibility* – working with partners and congregations to create a program of greatest mutual benefit and ease of use for them. (From the beginning they had a “no rule” policy – whatever worked for a particular group was what they would try to do.)
- *Staffing the program with a former minister*. This person understood the target population, was able to speak to them in terms they understood, and, therefore, brought the program immediate credibility. This was a critical ingredient for the success of the program.
- In addition, when reaching out to minority communities, it helped to build bridges by having an *introduction by someone from that community*. Finding

³ CASE update as of June, 2005: OVC funding has enabled the project to expand to three additional DA offices in the Denver area. Partnerships with over 600 faith communities will be in place by the end of 2005. The Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice has provided funding to support the development of a replication tool kit, web-based training and national replication assistance to be available after September 2005.

contacts in faith communities who could help alleviate distrust of government entities was necessary.

- Having a *marketing background* or finding people who have marketing experience to help you.
- Building a *positive relationship with the clergy administrative staff* is important to success. Administrative staffs are the key people you need to get on board before you can move forward.
- Structuring the program so that it *does not create more work* for the congregation personnel. They are willing to be the conduit for the message, but they cannot create the message.
- Delivering presentations that are *no longer than 2 hours*.
- Using a *brief letter of agreement* between the program and the congregation spelling out the responsibilities of each partner and the scope of the activity.
- Finding, if possible, a real victim of abuse to tell his or her *personal story* during the trainings.
- *Meeting first with denominational leaders* at various regional headquarters to request their endorsement and assistance.
- *Sharing best practices* was a good way of encouraging new faith partners to do something they wanted them to do. For example, if they really wanted a new partner to put the fraud alerts in the church bulletins, they would use the name of a sister church and say, "St. Mary's Catholic Church is putting the alerts in their bulletins to the entire congregation so they can see the information." They found that the new partners were more willing to join in if one of their sister churches was doing the same thing.
- Reaching seniors worked best when they *piggybacked on to a regularly scheduled event* at the congregation (for example, senior luncheon).

What Doesn't

- "*Blind mailings.*" Says Curtis, "Blind mailings are rarely effective. If you are trying to reach clergy, I recommend that you don't even bother doing mail."
- *Frequent changes in personnel* at the congregation level made continuity difficult.

A formal evaluation of the CASE Partnership was conducted in 2003 by Colorado State University and is available online at www.ext.colostate.edu/staffres/case.pdf
For more information, contact Lisa Curtis at llc@denverda.org

Summary and Recommendations

Clergy need *basic* information on elder abuse. Faith leaders have not been prepared to deal with elder abuse issues during their theological studies. Congregation members are coming to their faith leaders with reports of abuse and often the response is inadequate.

The following recommendations were distilled from presentations by two pilot projects in Ontario, Canada and Denver, Colorado and from comments by participants in two teleconferences, sponsored by the National Center on Elder Abuse in the spring of 2004.

1. Getting Started: Outreach to the Faith Community

- **Form an Advisory Committee** during the early stages of the program. A lot can be done with a group of dedicated faith leaders. Clergy have severe time constraints. A flexible program that can **piggyback on an existing schedule of meetings and activities** will increase participation. Creating and using a **brief letter of agreement** between the program and the congregation spelling out the responsibilities of each partner and the scope of the activity is helpful.
- Have some **measurable goals** and stick to them. For example, measurable goals might of the following type: a) call five places of worship each day; b) place an elder abuse prevention message in 1,000 church bulletins by (date);
- The more **flexible** the program, the better. Have a policy of flexibility which allows the partners and their denominations **to participate in creating a program** that has the greatest mutual benefit and ease of use for that group.
- Make the first contact through a **known faith connection (cold mailings are not the place to start)**. Contact **denominational leaders** in the community and enlist their help in outreach efforts. Next, enlist the support and

cooperation of **congregation administrative staff members** who can facilitate access to clergy leaders. **In multicultural communities,** introductions from local community leaders will open doors.

- Having a **marketing background** or finding people who have marketing experience to help create the target message is immeasurably helpful (an example of a targeted message is: *Honor Thy Father and Mother: Faith Leaders Respond to Elder Abuse*).
- **Connections need to be made between clergy, community services, and police.** In San Diego, for example, the Elder Abuse Prosecution Team in the District Attorney's Office routinely invites a victim's faith leader to attend the elder abuser's sentencing. In addition, now that ministers are mandated reporters of abuse in California, the DA's office has produced a 10- minute training video specifically to help them understand how they can protect seniors in their congregations. In the video, clergy and lay volunteers are encouraged to visit elderly members of the congregation who suddenly begin missing church. One of the key indicators of abuse is enforced isolation by the perpetrator.

2. Education of Clergy

- **Faith leaders need education and training⁴** to spot the warning signs of elder abuse, but **they also need to understand that they can trust the experts to take care of the investigation.** They need concise information on what to do and where to go for help. They need to understand the roles of Adult Protective Services⁵, the Long Term Care Ombudsman program, police, the District Attorney's office, Office of Victim Services, etc.
- **Clergy need to learn from clergy.** Having a faith leader on staff was a crucial asset to the Denver fraud prevention outreach. Faith leaders participated in surveys and focus groups in the Ontario project to help design a toolkit to guide outreach efforts. One needs to understand the target

⁴ The National Center on Elder Abuse is developing a model outreach brochure and a PowerPoint presentation for educating the clergy about elder abuse. These tools will be soon available on the NCEA Web site www.elderabusecenter.org.

⁵ Adult Protective Services (APS) may be referred to by other names. In this report, APS refers to the governmental entity charged with receiving and investigating reports of elder/adult abuse.

population. Sharing best practices from one congregation to another was also a good way of encouraging new faith partners to do something. New partners are more willing to join in if one of their sister congregation is doing the same thing.

- **Serve food** at trainings or meetings – with their busy schedules, faith leaders will appreciate the opportunity to “multi-task” by eating and meeting. Presentations should be no longer than **two hours**.
- **Stay away from “Us Educating You”** messages. It is far better, rather, to focus on partnerships.
- **Invite a recognized community leader** (e.g., District Attorney, Police Chief, respected faith leader) to join the elder abuse training for clergy. Even if they can only come for 10 minutes, the clergy will appreciate the effort.
- **Educational ministries** may present opportunities to broach the subject of elder abuse. In Connecticut, for example, outreach workers sit down with faith leaders to start a dialogue about their “family curriculum.” They inquire about how they approach family values, and then ask them what scriptural readings about marriage or family values they use. This helps make the interaction comfortable since one is coming to them in a position of wanting education and collaboration. This can then become an opportunity to find out their comfort level with including the issues of domestic violence and elder abuse. Educational ministry representatives are often very willing to collaborate.

3. Special Considerations

- **Elders need specialized assistance in order to use community services and referrals.** As an example, Denver’s CASE Partnership provides individual help navigating automated phone information and reading credit reports and other documents. Ontario’s ONPEA project discovered that older immigrant adults were vastly more vulnerable to fraud, indicating that culturally sensitive, multilingual materials will be necessary to work with diverse communities.
- **Opinions may vary on the value of mandated reporting for clergy.** Some teleconference participants said they felt that mandatory laws are needed “to set the stage for what you need to do” and to “help with liability and confidentiality issues,” adding that “it takes faith leaders off the hook in a

very important way (if they are mandated to report).” On the other hand, others noted that the Catholic Church seems to be opposed to priests violating the secrecy of the confessional. It was noted that indicators of abuse could come from other sources other than confessions. In California, for example, the mandated reporting law exempts Catholic priests who learn of abuse during the course of a confession (they may report but are excluded from the requirement to report).

- **Giving information to faith leaders about programs to help perpetrators** will help clergy overcome an important barrier to confronting members of their congregation who are abusers.

4. Additional Program Examples

- Information on additional faith based programs is available on the NCEA Web site, www.elderabusecenter.org. Select the Promising Practices navigation button and the search category “Faith Based Programs.”
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**NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE
TELECONFERENCE SERIES**

“Working with Faith Communities on Elder Abuse Prevention”

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Note: Due to technical difficulties with the registration, the names of some Participants may have been omitted from this list and some did not provide complete contact information.

The National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) serves as a national resource for elder rights advocates, law enforcement and legal professionals, health care professionals, public policy leaders, researchers, educators, and concerned citizens. It is the mission of NCEA to promote understanding, knowledge sharing, and action on elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

The NCEA is administered under the auspices of the National Association of State Units on Aging.

NCEA Partners

- National Association of State Units on Aging (NASUA), Lead Partner
- American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Law and Aging
- Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly (CANE) at the University of Delaware
- National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA)
- National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA)

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