

SOCIETY OF HELPERS

# VOICES of Hope



Finding Hope in The  
Midst of Violence

BRINGING HOPE TO THE HUMAN JOURNEY

Vol IX Issue II

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## Letter from the Editorial Team



Two thousand seventeen has been an arduous year, one filled with violence at every side; violence that spares no borders, no individuals. Mother Earth has cried out to us, her voice heard in hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and fires. Some have queried, “Is this Armageddon?” On an international level, wars continue to rage and a nuclear threat hovers over us. Millions of people are dying of starvation and of thirst. Refugees and immigrants wander through deserts and cross oceans hoping to find refuge in a better place, only to confront death along the journey or be denied access at the point of arrival. Nationally and locally, people gathered in church or in a mosque, in a school or at a music festival have been the victims of terrorism, rage, and assault rifles.

It can be overwhelming, the violence in our world, in our government, our families, and neighborhoods. We can feel powerless, and that is the trap—the temptation of our day—the belief that we cannot change things. In the midst of this maelstrom there are “Voices of Hope,” voices of those who have lived the pain of violence in its various forms, be it street gangs in our neighborhoods or violence in our homes; the genocide in Rwanda, the civil war in Colombia, or the Persian Gulf War. They share with us their passage from a sense of powerlessness to a newness of life that generates creativity that brings about change. Large organizations such as Catholic Charities of Chicago with its “field hospitals” that chip away at violence, one person, one family at a time, or a small organization like Books to Prisoners, whose members reach out to touch the loneliness and isolation of the incarcerated by providing them with good reading materials, believe that we *can* do something.

As we begin a new year, may the reading of this issue of *Voices of Hope* rekindle the flame of hope in our hearts, strengthen our faith in the power of good over evil, and renew our creativity to bring about change.

*A Happy and Blessed New Year from the editorial team!*

Sr. Laetitia Bordes, SH

## Bringing Help and Hope to Troubled Communities

By Monsignor Michael M. Bolger



For the past 20 years, I have had the great privilege to be the president of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Celebrating

its centennial anniversary this year, Catholic Charities is the largest provider of social services in the Chicago metropolitan area, annually assisting nearly one million people of all religious, racial, and ethnic backgrounds through a variety of programs designed to help people escape poverty and restore their dignity.

Lately, when people hear “Chicago,” they think “violence.” Due in part to a great deal of media attention, we have earned a reputation for being a violent city. Sadly, much of the headline-grabbing violence occurs in troubled pockets of poverty where the culture of gangs and drugs have taken root. While violence is certainly not limited to communities and persons living in poverty, there is a very clear and unfortunate correlation between the instability and despair of poverty, and the desperation of violence. Violence breeds in neighborhoods where there is a lack of basic resources and

no hope for the future.

Pope Francis has reminded us that it is in these very neighborhoods that we must be present. I love his image of the Church as “field hospitals.” During war, field hospitals are situated right on battlegrounds—close to the wounded who need help. Similarly, the Church must be situated on the battlegrounds of life—in local neighborhoods where people need help. He tells us that the first job of the Church is to show mercy to God’s people, to heal wounds that life has wrought. Whether these wounds are spiritual, mental, or physical in nature, “... the Church must be merciful, taking responsibility for the people and accompanying them like the Good Samaritan who washes, cleans, and raises up his neighbor.”





It can be overwhelming to think about fighting violence on a city-wide level. The reasons for gang involvement and community violence are varied and complex. But what I like most about Pope Francis' image of field hospitals is that it is a great reminder of what we can do, and must do, to help people on an individual level. Pope Francis urges us that the first step is just to be there; to get out in the margins of society and show God's mercy and compassion to the people and places that need it most.

As part of the Church in the Archdiocese of Chicago, Catholic Charities strives to make our 154 locations very much like field hospitals, helping the suffering in neighborhoods that have become real battlegrounds. We bring the resources—and the hope—that can help people change their lives. I like to think of our staff and volunteers as ministers of mercy, providing help through a hot meal, a bag of food, a safe place to live, an empathetic ear to listen, or a friend to provide guidance and accountability.

People seeking help from Catholic Charities are coming to us in their greatest time of need. Often their struggles go hand-in-hand with violence experienced in their homes, their communities, or both.

No matter what type of service is being offered, each person who walks through our doors is treated with the utmost respect and dignity, given relief for immediate needs, and helped to develop a wholistic plan for the future that capitalizes on their inner strengths and abilities.

Catholic Charities' "field hospitals" take many forms depending upon community needs. We have several emergency assistance locations that provide food, clothing, and help with housing. We offer counseling and treatment programs for substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health issues, crisis-intervention, grief therapy, and trauma-informed therapy. We have a number of programs for at-risk youth including drop-in centers, employment programs, mentoring, help with schoolwork, and GED preparation.

We have early childhood education programs that prepare children for success in school. We have several affordable apartment buildings for low-income seniors that are intentionally located in the poorest communities so that seniors have a safe place to call home, and the communities have beautiful new buildings to call their own. We have programs that offer specialized help to immigrants, refugees, seniors, veterans, teen parents, and anyone who longs for someone to accompany them on their journey for a better life.

Although most of Catholic Charities' facilities are located in the neighborhoods with the greatest crime, greatest poverty, highest levels of gang involvement, and highest drop-out rates, it is in these communities that we find the greatest success stories: the high school drop-out who just received his GED; the teen mother who stayed in school and is now working her way through college; the young boy who can finally sleep through the night after witnessing a shooting; the formerly homeless veteran who has learned to cope with his exposure to human atrocities; the domestic violence survivor who is now living safely apart from her abuser; the child whose mentor showed him a world of new possibilities.

It is amazing to watch people's strength and resilience bloom when they are exposed to new opportuni-

ties. I am blessed to witness the tremendous success stories each day. And I am doubly blessed to witness the tireless service of our wonderful staff, dedicated volunteers, trusted board members, generous donors, and faithful parishioners throughout the Archdiocese who daily work with Catholic Charities to fulfill the Church's mission of charity. These ministers of mercy are truly working miracles in our neighborhoods.

To the casual observer it might be shocking that there is hope in seemingly hopeless communities. Yet, those of us with a strong faith tradition know that God has the power to shine His brightest light in the darkest places. Pope Francis reminds us of our essential role as Good Samaritans, shining God's mercy and love on our brothers and sisters in need. For Catholic Charities in Chicago, we are honored to create "field hospitals" on the battlegrounds of life, offering help and hope to our wounded neighbors, stabilizing communities, and chipping away at violence and poverty one person, one family at a time.

*Monsignor Boland is President, Administrator, and CEO of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago; Director of Human Services for the Archdiocese of Chicago; Spiritual Advisor for the Society of St. Vincent DePaul Chicago; and Co-Chair of Cardinal Blase Cupic Anti-Violence Task Force.*





## Working In a Peace-Challenged Neighborhood | By Angie & Bruce

Angie and Bruce have lived and worked in the Back of the Yards, a “peace-challenged” neighborhood on Chicago’s south side for a collective 55 years. Angie’s work has been dedicated to structuring a broad-based set of out-of-school offerings to children and youth of the community, based on best practices in youth work, which has included the mentoring of teens and young adults who grow and continue to take more responsibility for the younger members of the community. Bruce has been dedicated to coalition-building in the community, drawing together partners with interest in serving and mentoring the community youth and families. Along with their systematic work, each has teamed with others to accompany various youth groups throughout the years, which has given them a special perspective on the “story” of growing up in the community. While some call their work “wonderful” they know, through lived experience, that there is still a long road ahead before the community lives in justice and peace.

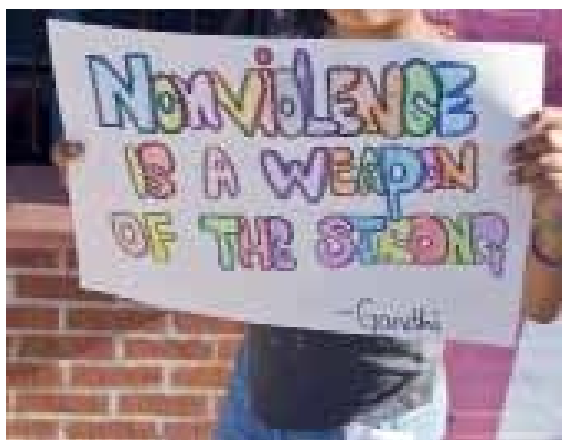
Angie and Bruce replied to a few questions addressed to them by the editorial team of “Voices.”

### What has been your experience of living in a violent world?

**Bruce:** The trauma of violence includes an inability to grasp the how and why of a moment when life is taken away. It is an experience that is not easily addressed. There was one instance in particular that will always remain with me.

It was Father’s Day and family and friends had gathered to celebrate, sitting in “the yard” – a garden oasis, really, in a densely populated neighborhood of immigrants, young families. DJ music played, and we sat with an off duty

police officer, enjoying the conversation, relaxing and sharing a drink. We heard what sounded like fireworks, many – but one of us knew it wasn’t fireworks. It was the sound of gun fire at 1:45 in the afternoon. Not wanting to believe it was gun fire, some responded more slowly, including the police officer. We walked one



block over and witnessed one of the most traumatic scenes imaginable. A young man lay in front of the Church massacred by an AK-47, and it happened during mass.

**Angie:** As a child, I thought of violence as something I saw on the news, most often taking place in the streets. In the 60’s, there were the Vietnam War and urban riots, for instance. But as I grew older, I became aware that there are varying expressions of violence such as domestic and dating violence, or even institutional violence. These forms of violence can be much more subtle, but just as damaging to the human person. Being pretty much everywhere, these challenge our well-being, sense of safety, and trust in the world.



### Where have you found the strength to respond to the violence?

**Angie:** Believing that God created our world to be good, my very being has to stand up in the face of whatever form of violence. Every sign of goodness reminds me that the resistance is worth it. My heart is drawn especially to the actions of hope in the children and youth around me.

**Bruce:** I find strength in the sharing of feelings about violence. In the sharing of the experience with others, the heartfelt disappointment or anger or sadness, there is a release that at least connects human hearts together. It consoles and brings understanding. It is how one moves towards the light and understanding.

### In what ways have you responded?

**Bruce:** We bring young people together to reflect. We bring psychologists and counselors into contact with young people to provide coping skills.

**Angie:** Being the Director of a large out-of-school youth program in a challenged neighborhood of Chicago, the Back of the Yards, I have taken serious every best practices training to learn to create program activities that are perceived as safe and supportive by the participants. This includes teaching

of life skills and social skills which help our youth learn to value their personhood and develop empathy for others, to resolve conflict peacefully, and to learn to lead their peers and near-peers in respectful dialogue.

**How have you been able to move from darkness into the light (over and over again)?**

**Angie:** Every time I hear bullets fired, every time I hear the despair of parents in facing the immigration system, every time I hear from a teen that he/she was 'kicked out of the house' I have to take a deep breath, work to ensure the physical and emotional safety of those involved, and focus on the resilient hope that drives the people of this neighborhood.

**Bruce:** There is a memorial of candles and a cross at the site of the massacre of the young man on that Father's Day. It is more than a testimony – it is a memorial. When I pass there I pause for a moment. I look at the bullet marks on the cement and on the walls of the church. This was a child of a mother, a friend of another boy who ran away at the time and survived, a brother; this was a human being who laid here and died. As I remember, I think of the young people who are alive. I move to hope for them, over and over again.



## Finding Hope in The Midst of Violence | By Sr. Antoinette Casibirege, SH

*“Still, one must have learned the meaning of falling  
as a rock falls into the darkness of waters;  
the meaning of cracking as a tree cracks and splinters  
when struck by the axe’s lightning bolts.*

*How can those whose nights were never those of agony and torment  
know the mercifulness of morning?”*

(Paul Baudiquey, “Rembrandt- The Return of the Prodig



### Introduction

My name is Antoinette Gasibirege from Kigali, Rwanda. I have been a member of the Society of Helpers for over thirty years. A nurse by profession, I have devoted myself to teaching CAPACITAR<sup>1</sup> since 2006.

“Capacitar” is a Spanish word which means to render capable by recognizing one’s *interior strengths*, and *innate energies* which lead to *empowerment*. These are key words to hold on to in the midst of violence because neither hate, the feeling of hopelessness, nor guns can succeed in crushing us when we remain connected to our innate strengths.

I received my training in CAPACITAR in 2004-2005 from its founder Dr. Patricia Cane. She later came to Rwanda to help me introduce CAPACITAR so that I could begin training various groups in its methods, something I have done until the present day. In June, 2016, we celebrated the tenth anniversary of CAPACITAR in Rwanda.

Today, I work with a variety of people: survivors of the genocide; women raped during the genocide; those who live with HIV Aids; single mothers marginalized by society. Besides working with these various groups, I offer training sessions to pastoral agents, local authorities, and those interested in learning how to manage trauma and stress in daily life.

<sup>1</sup> Since its founding in 1988, Capacitar’s mission has been to teach grassroots people what they can do for themselves to live in wellness in the midst of the challenges of life. Using popular education rather than a therapeutic approach, Capacitar gives people simple tools to heal and transform their lives, their families and communities. Capacitar’s methods are based on Eastern and indigenous models of healing that recognize health and wellbeing as the harmonious and dynamic balance and flow of the energy system of the person and environment. In contrast to fixing problems or curing illness, Capacitar endeavors to awaken people to their own wisdom, power and capacity in body, mind and spirit.





### **My Experience:**

My experience of violence goes back to April, 1994, at the time of the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsis in Rwanda. Almost my entire family was decimated. I experienced anguish, confusion, flight, but most of all, a feeling of powerlessness in confronting the machinery of evil and death. This took hold of me one night in a Red Cross Center.

Because I am a trained nurse, I had been asked to help with the wounded. In the middle of the night, I heard a small voice calling me. "Aunt Antoinette"... it was my thirteen year old niece who had survived an attempt to have her neck cut off by a person wielding a machete. She was the one who told me that our family had been massacred. Thus began my road to Calvary even as I began nursing the wounded without making any ethnic distinction. The Center welcomed soldiers and militia, those who had just committed horrible crimes.

What gave me strength during and after the genocide was the distance I took from an unbearable situation. I am fortunate to belong to an international congregation. I was welcomed by the Helpers in Quebec during the genocide and by the

Helpers in Chicago afterwards. To find myself welcomed in a country where there is no war, surrounded by loving faces, hearing words of peace, and using the CAPACITAR practices on a daily basis have been part of my healing, my transformation and rehabilitation. I responded to violence by making the choice to return to Rwanda. I wanted to work with those who wish to transform their lives by trying to live in harmony with themselves, whether or not they are survivors of the genocide or are the vulnerable in our society. I wanted to help them manage their strong feelings of resentment, anger, sorrow, and loss of self-respect that make them victims of all types of evil. I wanted to accompany them in discovering the wisdom that can be found in a world that is sometimes violent, and join with others to overcome hatred and injustice.

I think my life has been transformed by the approach of CAPACITAR which has put me in contact with so many faces of men and women who seek a reason to live in harmony with themselves. I feel connected to my inner life and the life that surrounds me...nature, people. My encounter with other cultures both in Quebec and in Chicago gave me the opportunity to live with persons who fight against injustice, who know how to respect life and human dignity. I now



find myself in this vast network of those who seek to establish a better world.

Sadly, traumatic events are part of human experience. Each day, in the media, we are exposed to the violence and catastrophes throughout the world. We are affected by them and we can no longer live isolated from the suffering of others. We need to learn both on a personal and collective level, how to live in the midst of struggle with wisdom, equilibrium, and compassion. We need to make of our wounds and struggles catalysts of our healing, transformation as well as the healing and transformation of the world.





## The Resurgence of Hope in the Midst of Violence

By Sr. Amparo Novoa Palacios, SH



### Introduction

Colombia is a country that has lived for decades immersed in violence. Since the middle of the twentieth century, violence has taken different forms at different periods. During the period of the free Republic from 1930 to 1946, Colombia saw a series of reforms that led to political and social upheavals. Land reform, freedom of religion, and the legalization of unions were among them. This situation generated concern among farmers, workers, and the church, but especially land owners who saw their private interests threatened. The assassination of the political leader Jorge Eliacer Gaitan on April 9, 1946, brought the recurrence of violence. The 1950s were marked by the confrontation between two political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives. During the 1960s we witnessed the violence of guerrilla groups who advocated communist ideologies. In the 1980s, it was narco-trafficking, and by the 90s violence was manifesting itself in guerrilla warfare, narco-trafficking and paramilitaries. All these forms of violence bring about permanent changes in a society because they emanate out of different contexts and particular interests. It is almost impos-

sible to offer any kind of reflection that would include every form of violence, so in this article, I simply offer my humble opinion.

I was born in that violent context, as were my parents, who had to flee the war in 1948. They fled their town, Ubate, Cundinamarca, near the capital of Bogota, a town rich in natural and human diversity. The violent situation was characterized as a confrontation between political parties. Since that time until the present, mass media has transmitted the atrocities inflicted as a result of armed fighting between sectors.

It is also in this context that many generations grew up, wanting and seeking ways to protect life under more peaceful conditions. They have wanted to rebuild the social fabric and begin the process of building peace by recognizing the values of solidarity, attentive listening, and putting oneself at the service of justice and truth. It has not



been an easy road because any attempt at peace is continually rejected by those who resist it. However, those of us involved in the process remain convinced that the way of violence is not an alternative for the transformation of society. That is why at present we are planning a variety of strategies to promote the consciousness that another country is possible; a country where every woman and man is willing to change their mentality and their way of acting so that we can work toward the ideal of peace. Accepting peace as the goal converts us into moral agents who foster and promote moral actions that include three basic aspects: choice, freedom, and responsibility.

With this in mind, the Helpers in Colombia join with others who are involved in networks that allow us, both as individuals and collectively, to take an option for peace with justice, equality, and truth as the only ways to rebuild the human social fabric and render viable what our brother Pope Francis told us when he visited Colombia: "We must dream big dreams" and know that the "historical architect of peace is the social architect;" not the people who are famous nor the political parties in power, but an entire society that gets involved. In order for that to be possible, it is necessary



to carry out the process with great freedom because a peace that is imposed does not invite nor include participation. The essence of peace is social and collective. Besides the aspects of freedom and choice, responsibility is fundamental. A society must live in the midst of its conflicts in an attitude of peace in order to have a responsible dialogue. By this we mean a dialogue that is transparent, sincere, and without deceit; one that wants to impose personal benefits over the common good.

We are now inaugurating new paths that hopefully will bury every act of violence, hatred, and corruption. We are aware that whatever actions we take towards others will have consequences. In the midst of this situation and, as a citizen, I work with others in the field of education. We have discovered that the best way to overcome the different forms of violence is to offer pedagogies that touch the soul, whether that be in school rooms or on the street, to see the latter as spaces for a re-

encounter. Education will need to lead the way; thus the importance to continue to work with "soulful" pedagogies in education that foster respect for life and human dignity. We are confident that, in time, future generations will be able to enjoy a society that is not polarized, but rather one in which forgiveness and reconciliation become a daily practice as we witness so many people directly affected by the war. To quote Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful arm that can be used to change the world... it is the engine of personal development."

*Amparo is a member of the Society of Helpers and has a Doctorate in Theology. She is Director of the Master's Program in Religious Education and Coordinator of the Research Project on Culture, Faith and Formation of Values in the doctoral program in Education and Society at de La Salle University in Bogota. Her research is characterized by an interdisciplinary approach that promotes dialogue between education, culture and faith from an anthropological stance. She has published widely.*



My role at Catholic Charities of Chicago is director of House of Good Shepherd domestic violence shelter. This

*Voices of Hope* issue on violence would not be complete without a discussion of domestic violence, for we know all too well that so much violence begins in the home. In the United States, one in four women and one in seven men will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes. It is a problem that touches every income and education level, every racial and ethnic group, every age, and every religion.

Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain control over another intimate partner. This can include physical abuse such as hitting, biting, kicking, or use of weapons; emotional abuse that is designed to belittle the victim and attack self-esteem; psychological abuse which may include threats, isolation, and intimidation; financial abuse to limit the victim's access to money and independence; sexual abuse including rape or coercion to perform undesired sexual acts; and stalking and cyberstalking which instill fear and emotional distress in the victim.

Abusive relationships often start a seemingly pleasant way. Abusers are charming and attentive in the beginning. By making the victim loved and appreciated, it is often difficult for her\*\* to notice that she is being controlled until it is too late. Soon, the abuser moves to isolate the victim by flattering her with compliments that he wants her all to himself, he knows what's best for her, and/or making her feel guilty for relationships with family and friends. As the victim loses close connection to outside supports, it becomes easier for the abuser to exert greater and greater control over her life. The abuser may sabotage her career or maintain a tight hold on family finances so that she has no money of her own. He may set her up for "failures" that he can justify his violent behavior. Violent episodes are almost always followed by a honeymoon phase where the abuser returns to the sweet, caring person the victim fell in love with and the victim hopes that things will really change this time. As tension builds again, the cycle of violence repeats itself. It may take multiple cycles, if ever, for the victim to make the choice to leave.

People often wonder why victims stay in abusive relationships, not realizing how much strength and courage is needed to leave the



situation. First and foremost, the victim knows that her physical safety and that of the children are at the greatest point of danger when she decides to leave. Batterers escalate their assaultive and coercive behaviors when they sense the victim is trying to separate. Statistics show that the majority of homicides occur when the victim has left the abuser or is attempting to leave. Once the decision to leave is made, it is critical that victims have an escape plan in place that includes protecting her and the children's physical safety. The other primary reason victims stay in the relationship is financial—nearly all victims say they do not have the resources to leave the situation and adequately support themselves and their children. A sense of familial or religious duty, and years of emotional abuse that shatter a victim's self-esteem also contribute to staying in an abusive relationship.

The trauma of domestic violence is linked to a person's health across an entire lifespan, and effects the health and success of the next generation. Exposure to violence as a stressor can lead to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a variety of health issues including heart

disease, cancer, asthma, and stroke. Studies have shown that children growing up in violent homes are more likely to show a range of behavioral, social, and academic problems; less likely to feel empathy for others; more likely to feel socially isolated; more likely to demonstrate aggressive behavior such as bullying and fighting; and are at greater risk for substance abuse, juvenile pregnancy, and criminal activity. Violence is a learned behavior. Therefore, it is critically important for the health of our communities that we break the cycle of violence in families.

In my work with the House of Good Shepherd, it has been gratifying to watch women transform their

own lives, their children's lives, and hopefully that of following generations. We have found that the most effective way to break the cycle of violence is not only to provide safe and stable housing, but also to provide "wrap-around" services that address multiple needs. Our violence recovery and healing program includes counseling, parenting skills training, legal assistance, immigration services, education and job training, opportunities to enhance self-esteem, and access to health care. Since financial abuse occurs in 98% of all domestic violence cases, we have a strong focus on financial independence, financial literacy and money management. Our children's services program is designed to help our youth reclaim a part of their sto-

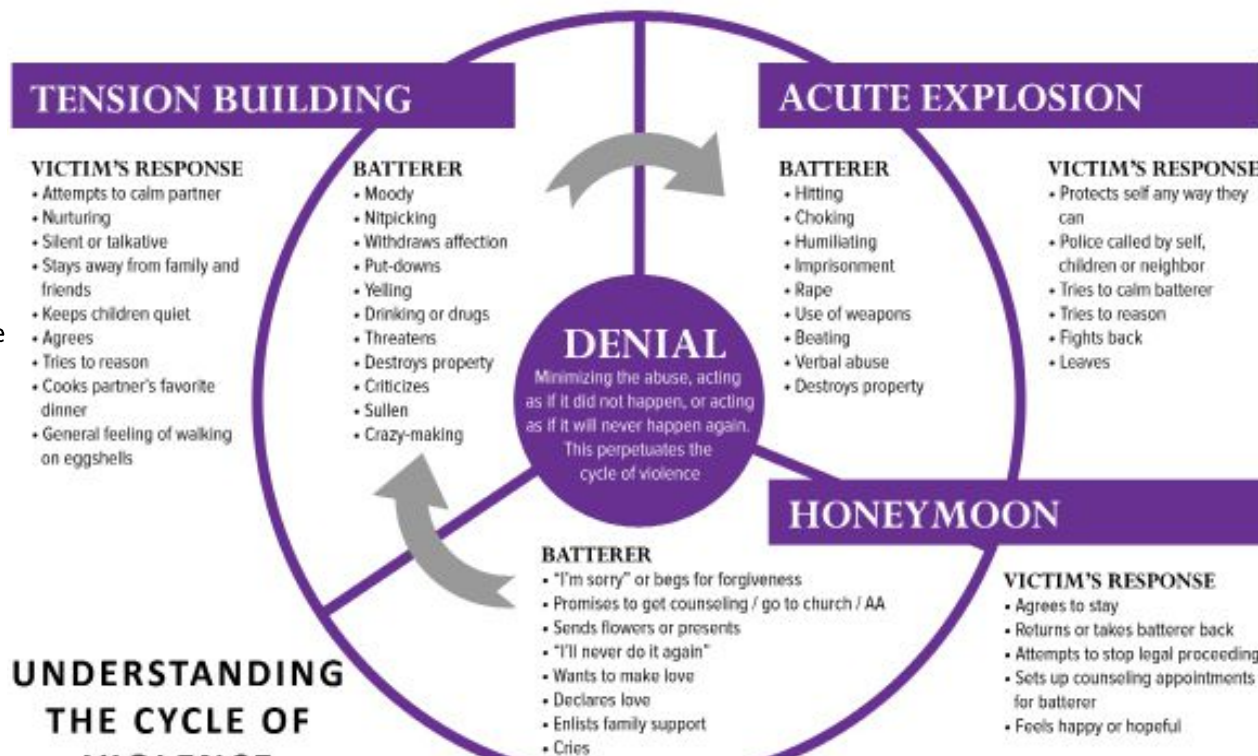
len childhoods. Through counseling, tutoring, enrichment classes, and plenty of opportunities for the children to have fun with their mothers, they can experience the joy and life of a safe and stable environment.

We are fortunate in the U.S. to have laws and resources for women suffering from domestic violence. In many parts of the world there are laws protecting women from abuse. In some cultures violence against women and subservience to men is not only tolerated, but accepted by society and by the women themselves. When women from these diverse backgrounds seek help at the House of Good Shepherd, it is our challenge to show respect for cultural differences, while at the

same time helping them envision a life free from physical and emotional abuse.

The following article is written by a domestic violence survivor and illustrates just how difficult it is for women to leave abusive situations. Let us pray for the strength, safety, and recovery of all those enduring and recovering from domestic abuse.

*\*\*Please note that gendered language was used in this article because abuse is most often perpetrated by men toward their female partners. However, men are also victims of domestic violence and face unique challenges in recovery.*





## Healing From Domestic Violence

The writer and her four children reside in a Domestic Violence shelter.

I am a Mexican-American mother of four beautiful children. My journey to hell and back began almost twelve years ago. It took me over thirty false starts to develop the courage to leave a very dangerous physically abusive marriage. When my abuser's violence got to the point that it became the norm for my children to see my face with bruises and scratches, that is when I changed. The look in my little girls' eyes as they cried with me changed my way of thinking. I was determined to change their tears of fear to tears of joy and happiness.

I drove to the shelter almost eight months ago and took part in the Healing and Recovery program. My children and I are so grateful for life without the fear of what my abuser would do to me next. The counselors, mentors and case managers, teachers and shelter director have been part of our success here.

I am now working as a medical assistant; my dependence on my abuser has diminished. I have learned to live again and enjoy family time with my children. I have learned so many different ways of coping through the educational classes I have received here. The learning center for my children has been an amazing healing experience. They have adapted very well with the change in our own lives.

When I was married, my abuser liked to control everything; he thought it was what husbands were allowed to do. I felt I was a prisoner in my own home. I felt like a dog on a chain and I couldn't get it off. But now, I am slowly accepting and forgiving all the hurt and pain. Not for him, but for me.



## Books to Prisoners | By Delaney Sterling

Books to Prisoners is an organization dedicated to, in the simplest terms, giving hope to those individuals who are now living life in one of the most dangerous and torturous ways imaginable—inside of a penitentiary. I say dangerous because physically the environment that these men and women, even juveniles, find themselves in leaves them open to being targeted or attacked for various reasons, ranging from the color of their skin, to gang affiliations, crimes they have committed, religions they follow, etc. The environment is tortuous since these men and women are mentally walled in much like their physical bodies. In many prisons there is little to no opportunity for advancement of knowledge or healthy creative outlets to let the mind ease itself from the constant stress and trauma of life behind bars. There are some, such as high school GED programs or automotive work opportunities, but this is unfortunately not the norm.

Therefore, I believe Books to Prisoners is such a beacon of hope to these inmates. Books to Prisoners provides inmates with an opportunity to reach out themselves in the form of a letter and request almost any book that they might like (as long as shipping requirement dimensions are met). They are given an outlet, treated as a human being with their own individual interests and goals, and are encouraged to read and let their minds grow, expand and relax. I remember one inmate who

at first started off requesting the Goosebumps series of books, which is a juvenile level of reading mystery and thriller. After a year, this inmate had grown and was now requesting books on cognitive psychology and organic chemistry, which are easily subjects that I, as a college student at the time, was struggling to comprehend. This man, who was imprisoned at that time for about years already, had sped from what might have been a 5-6th grade reading level to university level reading material. Later I learned that this man was working towards a goal of getting a bachelor's in chemistry when he was released from prison. The goal that was fostered from the time he spent in prison reading books that were sent to him from this organization. There is freedom and hope within the bounds of a book. There is opportunity and adventure that the mind can experience even if the body cannot.

*Delaney Sterling was a student volunteer for Books to Prisoners at the University of Illinois in the summer of 2012, and is currently studying music theory and volunteering with elementary schools around Chicago as a choir instructor. She uses her experience with Books to Prisoners to teach her students who are the residents of penitentiaries taught to her: no matter what circumstance you may find yourself in, keep pushing to improve yourself and never forget that one can find hope even in the darkest situations.*

## The Storm From Which Hope Springs | By William Delaney

*"Cela est bien, repondit Candide, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin."  
(Voltaire, 1759).*



I served during the Persian Gulf conflict from 1994-1998 as a non-commissioned officer in a small, relatively unknown group of Marines who had a very important job and a very high operational tempo. To Marines, violence is our world, so we actually thrive in it. In hindsight, I experienced a fair share of what one might consider traumatic events. However, at the time, it was just business as usual and no big deal. Our credo: "Always Faithful" carries us through the darkest times - as long as we stick together.

My problems arose at the end of my contract when I chose to pursue my college education. I had experienced warrior culture and was part of a tribe. When I accepted my Honorable Discharge, things fell apart.

I kept it together in school. But when I didn't have the structure anymore, my drinking progressed to where the stupid things that I used to get away with in the Marines started getting me into trouble. I'd often wake up from a binge with bruised knuckles, stitches, black eyes, and no idea what had happened the night before.

I always had a solid moral compass. But before long, it was as though I had a reverse Midas touch. I eventually buried myself so deep into a bottle that the next thing I knew I had lost everything, and I nearly drank myself to death on more than one occasion. I swallowed my pride and showed up at a veterans' shelter in Boston. They helped me get my life back together. Within a couple of months, I moved out and had a successful job. Life was good, but I still drank myself sick almost every single night.

One night in February of 2013, I woke up in the emergency room after three days of being in a medically induced coma with severe head trauma and a traumatic brain injury. I had no idea how it happened. I found out later from the police that while I was drunk, someone struck me in the head with a blunt object then repeatedly kicked my skull with a steel-toed boot while I was down. An off-duty police officer happened to be driving by and apprehended the suspect and called 911. I was unresponsive when paramedics arrived, so they intubated me on the spot. The officer stated that the suspect was surprised I survived,

and that was the only thing upon which he and the suspect were in agreement.

I was never the same after that; my brain chemistry changed. Then, just when I thought things couldn't possibly be worse, two months later - April, 2013 - I was on Commonwealth Avenue when something unspeakable happened that the city of Boston will never forget. Terrorists attacked in the midst of the Boston Marathon.

I needed a change of scenery. I couldn't live in the city anymore without surveilling every face, every avenue of approach, and every threat while planning ingress and egress routes, plotting pre-planned fire missions, and nine-line briefings. I felt as though I had a "Terminator" heads up display that constantly provided threat analysis.

I moved out of state and started individual therapy at the VA. I was willing to accept that I needed help, but wasn't ready to stop drinking. That winter, I drove drunk and was arrested by State Police and my case was transferred to the Veterans Treatment Court.

I have not had a drop since that night. I walked into the Veterans Treatment Court expecting obstacles. Instead, when I looked into the Judge's eyes, I saw something that I

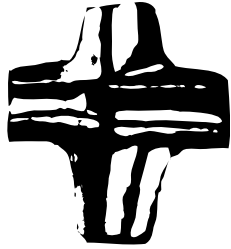
hadn't seen in a LONG time: Hope wasn't just another pebble on the scale. I hadn't burnt every bridge. I had an epiphany.

I decided to spend the rest of my life showing the world how much a difference it can make to believe in someone. I have not touched a drink (or a cigarette) since that night. I decided instead to help those who may need help finding their way home.

I am now in my second year in a clinical Masters in Social Work (MSW) program and work part-time as a social worker at a local nursing home.

Can good come out of violence? Absolutely, and I'm living proof. If I were the person who split my head open, I would thank you for giving me the opportunity to find the light. Life is a wonderful thing when we can see it. My name is Will, and I'm an alcoholic. As of this morning, I have been sober for 3 years, 9 months, and 6 days (but who's counting). Semper Fidelis.

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