

THE BEFRIENDER

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THE SAINT PAUL SEMINARY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST.
THOMAS

Interdependence Helps Heal

St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Hopkins, Minn., Garners Community Resources to Address Family Violence

Audrey Borash, pastoral minister and BeFriender staff at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Hopkins, Minn. knows how to help the community work together to serve God's people well.

Audrey needed an internship project to complete her Masters degree in pastoral ministry. She said, "As I listened to people going through the annulment process as well as other experiences in my life, the pain of family violence was in my heart. I had received a mailing on the subject, and it caught my interest. Then the pastor passed the article on to me. That second nudge got me going. I participated in the local hospital training on family violence as well as another geared specifically to churches and their needs. I learned that training was also available through a battered women's shelter in our local community."

The parish deacon was interested in the issue, too, and took the church-based training, which included how to minister to the abuser. Audrey said, "I knew if I wanted to provide the support needed, I couldn't and shouldn't try to handle it alone. BeFrienders have a solid base in listening skills. Knowing I had the financial support of St. Joseph's Women's Club, I invited any interested BeFrienders to participate in additional training. Two men and two women came forward. Without our deacon and those BeFrienders, I'd still be trying to handle this alone." The church also provided continuing education on the topic for all BeFrienders and interested parish members, enabling them to recognize warning signs and to make appropriate referrals. In addition, a group of 20 people serve as prayer partners for families suffering from violence and those who care for them.

"Our circle of strength is expanding beyond our parish too," Borash said. "When I saw Dick Wilson's play on family violence, *What's the Matter with the World Today*, which was offered as a BeFriender continuing education event at the University of St. Thomas, I wanted people in our parish to see it." She knew, however, that they couldn't afford to put it on alone. Their parish religious education coordinator contacted the churches with whom they were already co-sponsoring a support group for separated and divorced persons. It is often in those groups that church staff become aware of family violence issues. They also worked with the local school district, which had the facilities to host the play. "Reaching out to other churches ecumenically and to the community brought in people and money," Audrey said. Over 1,000 people saw the production with the second production made possible through a grant.

Audrey continued, "I like connecting with community resources." Parish newsletter articles, the pastor's Sunday homily and posters naming where people can get help raise people's consciousness about the problem. "People know we are aware

of the problem and want to support them. We've created a parish prayer card for people living in abusive situations and put the names and phone numbers of community resources on the back for people who still find it difficult to reach out to their church community.

“When I began this project I was nervous. I knew I wanted to respond to family violence, but I was a bit overwhelmed and afraid. The education I've received, as well as establishing good working relationships with parish and community resources, have given me much greater comfort in dealing with the issue. Ordinarily we are not dealing with serious crisis situations. The hospitals and police are usually the ones called there. Providing a circle of support to families can often prevent the situation from escalating to that point. We're doing what we can, a little at a time, but I know we are making a difference.”