FAITH INVOLVEMENT in WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

2016
WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

More than any other demographic group, the elderly are actively involved in or contacted regularly by religious congregations. Clergy and others from one's faith community are among the few, and in many cases, the only people who visit an elderly person's home or care facility. As a member of a faith community, be you lay or clergy, you may be in a unique position to observe signs of abuse and neglect by family, paid caregivers, or facility staff. Protecting the elderly from further loss or pain is a mitzvah, a good deed, a spiritual duty. In addition, reporting elder abuse is an ethical, and in many states, a legal responsibility.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) is a great opportunity to raise awareness about elder abuse and engage your community in action to protect elders.

WHY DOES WEAAD MATTER?

Did you know that every day 10,000 people turn 65 in the US alone? And that trend is going to continue for nearly the next 20 years. Our demographics are shifting, and we will soon have more elder people in the US than ever before. At the same time that the population is growing, we know that a startling number of elders face abusive conditions. Every year an estimated 5 million, or 1 in 10, older Americans are victims of elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation. And that's only part of the picture: Experts believe that for every case of elder abuse or neglect reported, as many as 23.5 cases go unreported.

WHAT IS WEAAD?

WEAAD serves as a call-to-action for individuals, organizations, and communities to raise awareness about abuse, neglect, and exploitation of elders. The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the World Health Organization at the United Nations (UN) launched the first World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) on June 15, 2006 in an effort to unite communities around the world in raising awareness about elder abuse. WEAAD is in support of the UN's International Plan of Action acknowledging the significance of elder abuse as a public health and human rights issue.

For a comprehensive WEAAD Toolkit including a guide to hosting awareness events, visit www.acl.gov/weaad.

WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

- According to the National Center on Elder Abuse, elder abuse refers to intentional or negligent acts by a caregiver or "trusted" individual that causes (or potentially causes) harm to a vulnerable elder. Most common categories of abuse are:
  - Neglect
  - Physical abuse
  - Sexual abuse
  - Financial abuse and exploitation
  - Emotional or psychological abuse and neglect (including verbal abuse and threats)
  - Abandonment
  - Self-neglect
- Each state defines elder abuse differently. (You may wish to look up how your state defines abuse in your state's statutes. For assistance, contact the NCEA.)
- According to available data, neglect is the most common type of elder abuse.
- There is some debate over whether mistreatment by strangers, rather than by a person in a trust relationship to the victim such as spouse, child, or friend, also constitutes elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND EXPLOITATION?

- Elder abuse can happen to anyone – a loved one, a neighbor, and when we are old enough, it can even happen to us.
- Elder abuse affects seniors across all socio-economic groups, cultures, and races.
- Elder abuse can occur anywhere:
  - In the community – for instance, in a person's home, or in public
  - In nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and other institutional settings
  - In hospitals
- Based on available information, women and "older" elders (80 years old and older) are more likely to be victimized, and mistreatment is most often perpetrated by the victim's own family members.
- Some common risk factors:
  - The victim has dementia
  - The perpetrator and/or the victim has mental health or substance abuse issues
  - Social isolation
- Poor physical health, which increases vulnerability and thereby may increase risk.

BUT WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

What can one person do to stop injustice, to end harm against the millions of elders being abused every year in the United States? What can one person do to end elder abuse across the world? One person can take one action. Live the love of God. Put faith in action. Use your voice to raise awareness about elder abuse.

EASY WAYS TO ENGAGE:

1. Turn your Facebook photo purple on June 15th. This is a great way to inspire dialogue within your social network.
2. Engage social media. Join our fun Facebook challenge and extend it to your faith community, or post information about elder abuse to your website, blog, or social networking site. See our sample posts for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Customize and share them with your network. www.acl.gov/weaad
3. Wear a purple awareness ribbon as a conversation starter.

4. Print our WEAAD Posters and share them in common areas at your place of worship. You can download them here www.acl.gov/weaad.

5. Does your faith community publish newsletters, blogs, or print other outreach materials? If so, consider including our sample blurb about WEAAD to outreach to your congregation. (See below)

6. Use this day as an opportunity to talk to the kids in your life about the challenges that many elders face. Spend some time with the kids in your family or help shape a Sunday School lesson for the children at your place of worship. Help kids to understand that belonging to a community means that we all watch out for and care for each other. If someone is hurting an older person, it is important to tell another adult that they trust, the same way that they would tell if they saw someone hurt another child. This is not being a tattle-tale. This is being a good citizen in our community. We must protect those that may not be able to protect themselves.

7. One of the leading red-flags of elder abuse and neglect, is social isolation. Consider visiting the members of your community who are isolated, living alone, or who have been moved to a care facility. Take a casserole, or make a date for tea or coffee. Just spending time with older or disabled community members can make a real difference. You may be the only person to have laid eyes on them or offered kindness and community to them for a very long time. What do they need? Is anyone hurting them? Are their bills being paid? Are their utilities on? Is there food in their refrigerator? Are their medications filled? If there are problems, you do not have to solve them on your own. You can call Adult Protective Services so that a social worker can offer services and solutions.

8. Service starts at home! Think about ways that you can honor your parents, grandparents, or older or disabled family members. Don't know what to do? Ask! Sometimes just having a person ask if there is anything that they need can make all the difference.

SAMPLE BLURB FOR YOUR FAITH BULLETIN, OR OTHER PUBLICATION

Join us Sunday June 15th 2014 in commemorating World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD). This international holiday provides an opportunity for our community to live the principles of our faith. Reach out to the older adults in your life and check on their wellbeing. Participate in our event [list any WEAAD activities your faith community is hosting]. Learn more about elder abuse and WEAAD here: www.acl.gov/weaad.

SERMON STARTER

There is an epidemic that no one is talking about. Every year 5 million elders, or 1 in 10, are being abused, neglected, and exploited right here in the United States. How can this be? How can such a great nation turn a blind eye to such wide scale suffering? Because we have forgotten our role within our community. It is easy to wear one's faith as window dressing, a way to be identified as part of a group, or respected amongst our peers. A strong community is one that puts faith into action. Honoring, respecting, loving, and caring for the older members of our community are all ways to put your faith into action. We know that the writings of many faith traditions frequently mention honoring our parents, but what does it mean to honor your father and mother? Honoring our parents is not just an instruction for children. It is a life-long way of relating to our elders.

As children, we honor our parents by listening, observing, and learning from them. We trust their wisdom and experience.

As we mature, we honor our parents by respecting their private history and perspective. We honor our parents by becoming mature, responsible, compassionate individuals who try to live the word of God.

When our parents are older, we honor them by providing for their care and protecting them. In every stage honor is an act of love and respect.

TOOLS FOR THE FAITH COMMUNITY

THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS 2:7

"Nowadays filial piety means being able to feed your parents. But everyone does this for even horses and dogs. Without respect, what's the difference?"

EPHESIANS 6:1-3

1 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." 2 "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— 3 "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

EXODUS 20:12

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."
Exodus 20:11-13 (in Context) Exodus 20 (Whole Chapter)

THE GREAT LEARNING

"When the ruler treats the elders with respect, then the people will be aroused toward filial piety. When the ruler treats the aged with respect, then the people will be aroused toward brotherly respect."

LEVITICUS 19:3

"'Each of you must respect your mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God."
Leviticus 19:2-4 (in Context) Leviticus 19 (Whole Chapter) Other Translations

LEVITICUS 19:32

"'Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord."
Leviticus 19:31-33

PROVERBS 23: 22

"Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old."

QUR'AN 17:23-24

"Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If one or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect, or scold them, but say a generous word to them. And act humbly to them in mercy, and say, 'My Lord, have mercy on them, since they cared for me when I was small."

OTHER ELDER ABUSE RESOURCES AND INITIATIVES FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES

NCEA PUBLICATIONS

- What Every Faith Congregation Needs to Know About Elder Abuse (2005)
- Teleconference Summary: "Working with the Faith Community on Elder Abuse Prevention" (May 2005)

MORE ABOUT FAITH COMMUNITIES RESPONDING TO ELDER ABUSE

- Partnering with Faith Communities to Provide Elder Fraud Prevention, Intervention, and Victim Services, U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime Bulletin, April 2006
- Where Faith and Safety Meet: Faith Communities Respond to Elder Abuse. An innovative collaboration between Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) examines the juncture of elder abuse and faith on a national level, and seeks to strengthen collaborations among faith community leaders and domestic violence, elder abuse, and sexual assault service providers.
- Raising Awareness of Abuse of Older Persons – An Issue for Faith Communities? Elizabeth Podnieks, C.M., Ph.D., Ryerson University, School of Nursing, Toronto, Ontario McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry (no date). This paper discusses a study undertaken in Ontario, Canada to determine the awareness level that faith leaders possess about elder abuse. An initial literature review reveals unsettling gaps in knowledge and information about this complex problem.