

Standing with Sisters Against Domestic Violence



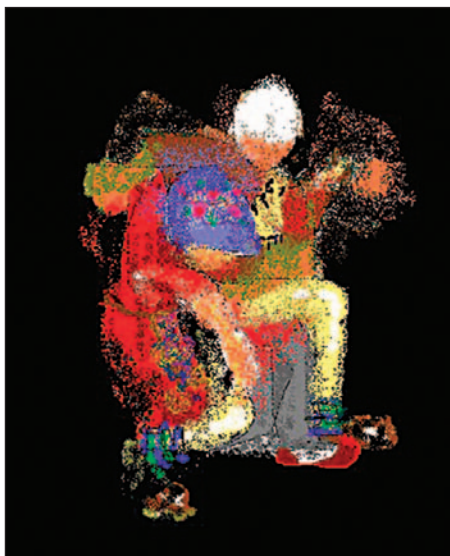
BY LINDA BRYANT VALENTINE

Whenever I stand in solidarity with my sisters in Christ, I cannot help but think of my own sister, Lois. She is a gifted artist, treasured confidante and tireless advocate for beauty and harmony in the world. Through her amazing textile artistry—and in her interpersonal relationships—Lois makes deep and meaningful connections with people, plumbing life's mysteries and healing the world.

Earlier this year, my heart broke for Lois, who contacted me with the shocking news that her friend and neighbor Anna had been killed by an abusive boyfriend. Anna, a talented and kind 17-year-old, was struck in the head with a hammer and died. If there are teachable moments in this episode of unspeakable violence—and even, ultimately, rays of hope—I find them in the reality that the church is an active participant in the national dialogue about ending domestic violence.

A Congregational Response

Many of our denomination's churches are finding ways to promote nonviolence in all relationships, and reaching out with Christ's healing love to the frightened and the abused. My own home church, Fourth Presbyterian in Chicago—known as "A Light in the City"—is boldly shining the light of Christ to raise awareness about domestic violence, as well as



Domestic Violence, Linda Buçinca

offering education, support and prayer.

Terrill L. Stumpf, director of Fourth Church's Center for Whole Health, provides support for the Domestic Violence Team, a part of Women@Fourth Connect. He works with Women@Fourth Connect members Helena Flickinger, Gayle Kryzak, Jane Purdy and Gail Riggs to nurture Fourth Church's partnership with Between Friends, a domestic violence agency.

Women and men from Fourth Church volunteer to help present Light up the Lakefront, an event held every October 1. For this event, luminarias are set up along the lakefront at Oak Street Beach, and a remembrance gathering is held in the early evening for those who have suffered domestic violence. Between Friends

places purple bows on the trees in front of the church on Michigan Avenue to draw awareness to the issue of domestic violence during the month of October.

Cherishing and Respecting All People

Also in October, the church features displays from the Silent Witness Project and the Clothesline Project, both national initiatives to address domestic violence and provide information, resources and advocacy for victims. Finally, this October, the sixth annual Domestic Violence Vespers Service for Remembrance, Healing and Hope will be held at Fourth Church.

In addition to raising awareness, Fourth Church is attempting to end the cycle of violence before it begins. Between Friends leads discussions with the church's confirmation class and its seventh- and eighth- graders on healthy dating relationships.

Even as I join my sister in mourning Anna's loss, I know that Anna's giving spirit lives on in the many lives she has touched. Standing together with Presbyterian Women and the General Assembly Council, I vow to do my own part in advocating for the prevention of domestic violence, as the Spirit gives me the courage to work for justice, freedom and peace for all of God's precious children.

Linda Bryant Valentine is executive director of the General Assembly Council.