

# *B*OOK REVIEW: **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: WHAT EVERY PASTOR NEEDS TO KNOW**

*Domestic Violence:  
 What Every Pastor Needs to Know*  
 by Reverend Al Miles.  
 208 pages, Fortress Press, 2000.  
 Regular Price \$17.00, **Special Offer \$13.00.**

The only thing wrong with *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* is the title. This book contains information essential to every *person*, not just pastors.

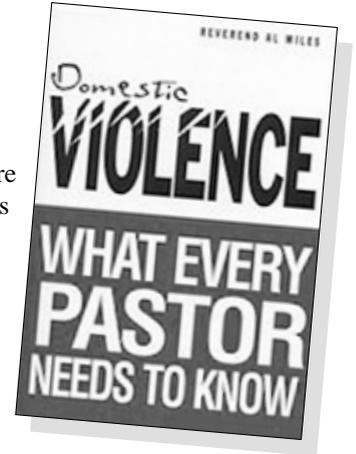
Motivated by what he terms “the magnitude of pastoral neglect” of domestic violence, Rev. Miles has written a compelling and practical book, based on years of experience in hospitals and interviews with 158 clergy members, 52 survivors, 46 professionals working in the domestic violence field and 21 former batterers.

Through the interviews with both male and female pastors, Miles found they overwhelmingly denied the idea that abused women and perpetrators are part of their congregations. Since statistics suggest that one quarter of American women will be abused by an intimate partner, Miles refutes this widespread misconception and others, such as:

- Christian survivors need faith, prayer, a positive attitude and God to be freed from domestic violence.
- Domestic violence occurs only in certain cultural, racial and socioeconomic groups, and only in urban areas.
- Victims can stop the battering by changing their behavior. This will save their marriages and families.

An emerging fact is that misinterpreting Scripture can fuel the problem. Traditional teachings on relationships often instruct men to rule and women to submit, a model that promotes unhealthy relationships and isn't biblical, according to Miles. In the words of Rev. John Tschudy, one who was interviewed, “Our theology is shaped as much by the passages of Scripture we choose to ignore, as those we choose to cite.”

Interlaced with the information are the true stories of the abused women. These sections are perhaps most powerful, as the women share their own accounts of abuse, giving shape to the statistics. Through these stories it becomes apparent that pastors, without necessarily meaning to, often do more to endanger the victims than help.



To combat this problem, Miles offers pastors sound advice when working with perpetrators and victims. With his combined expertise in the Bible and the field of domestic violence, he shows pastors how to minister to the victims in a compassionate and informed manner. He also suggests ways to raise awareness in the congregation and work with other professionals to protect a victim of abuse.

Miles is also not afraid to address thorny questions, such as whether an abuser can ever change, or how a survivor should approach forgiveness. With each of the topics he addresses, Miles is sensitive to the needs of those involved, committed to the Bible, and thoughtful in his presentation.

If you're not a pastor, don't be scared off by the title. The insights in this book are so valuable that it would be tragic if only pastors read it. I know I gained an extraordinary amount of education, as well as a new sensitivity to an often-ignored subject.

*Reviewed by Joanne Nystrom, CBE's book service coordinator.*