



African American Network for Violence Free Relationships



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“CALLING ALL MEN OF FAITH” SEMINAR MARKS A FIRST IN THE NATION

LONG BEACH, Calif, October 19, 2009 – On October 17, the African American Network for Violence-Free Relationships (ANFVR) hosted “Calling All Men: A Day of Dialogue To End Violence Against Women, ” a milestone event that was characterized by special guest U.S. Congresswoman Laura Richardson, D-37th, as the first gathering of its kind in the nation to successfully convene a higher percentage of men than women. Of the more than 150 people who attended, nearly 75 percent were men who participated in a day of dialogue, education, and visioning aimed at creating a culture of peace.

The unprecedented daylong event, which was co-sponsored by Interval House Crisis Shelters, St. Mary’s Families In Good Health, and Jenese Center was led by internationally recognized keynote speaker and workshop leader, Ted Bunch, who is co-founder of New York-based A Call To Men: The National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence Against Women.

Bunch led a dynamic discussion of the complexities and troubles of socialization, which results in the creation of a “man box” that encourages sexism and violence against women. Bunch also touched upon issues of perpetrator accountability, intervention strategies, youth leadership development, and the role of parents.

“He did an excellent job of demonstrating that the culture of domestic violence is a learned behavior for children, and stressing to parents that they need to be aware that violent conduct in the home is perceived by children; it’s absorbed, passed along, and emulated,” says Interval House Board President Robert Armstrong, Esq., partner at Long Beach-based Demler, Armstrong & Rowland LLP.

“It was a tremendous event,” Armstrong adds. “It was great to see so many men, particularly young men, turning out on a Saturday morning for an event centered on domestic violence. I think it’s indicative of a change in our attitudes. Men are beginning to realize that it is a significant issue for them because men are generally the perpetrators of domestic violence.”

“Calling All Men of Faith” was held as a way to observe Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Because domestic violence is an incubator for many other forms of violence in our community, especially in the African American community, it becomes increasingly critical to provide a forum for men to engage in efforts to create a culture of peace in their homes and communities, says ANFVR co-founder Rev. Mary L. Walton.

“I am so glad that Ted Bunch came to Long Beach, and I think the seminar was really the beginning in California to really having men look at the problem of violence against women,” says family violence pioneer Ruth Slaughter, founder of the nation’s first domestic violence shelter in 1972. “Women have been primarily responsible for programs related to violence against women, but Ted Bunch is really having a call to men. The seminar was so appropriate. He did a great job of educating men, young men, and women in thinking outside the ‘man box.’”

Long Beach Vice Mayor Val Lerch, who shared his childhood experiences with domestic violence, attended the seminar, as did a diverse group of men and youth from several community organizations, including The Role of Men Academy, the EM3 youth group from St. Mary Medical Center’s Families in Good Health, faith communities, and domestic violence agencies.

Howard Perry of 100 Black Men of Long Beach served as Honorary Chairman for the event, and Rev. Luther B. Keith, pastor at Central Baptist Church received a special award honoring his extensive work in preventing violence against women. “He’s a man who has done for 20 years what we’re just beginning to do now,” Rev. Walton notes.

For the women in attendance, the afternoon session featured a viewing of *Sin by Silence*, a compelling film documenting the stories of women who have been imprisoned for murdering their batterers. The film resonated with the women in the room, which included survivors, advocates, and community activists.

“There were many survivors in the room who felt that it could have been them who were imprisoned,” says ANFVR co-founder Rev. Arnetha Inge. “But because they were able to find resources that were available to them, somehow, they were able to escape that fate.”

The day culminated with a powerful pledge by all the men in attendance to end violence against women.

ABOUT THE AFRICAN AMERICAN NETWORK FOR VIOLENCE-FREE RELATIONSHIPS

The African American Network for Violence-Free Relationships (ANFVR) is committed to promoting violence-free relationships within the African American community through education, advocacy and collaboration while encouraging leadership, moral and ethical accountability and culturally appropriate legislation, programs and services.

ANFVR consists of approximately 20 member organizations across the state representing a broad spectrum of the public and private sectors, including social service and nonprofit agencies, faith leaders, interested community members, academia, survivors of violence, and community advocates. The Network is a byproduct of Interval House's "Creating A Safe Environment," a model demonstration project in the faith community, and the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community's 2007 national conference in Long Beach, which encouraged participants to develop a "contract" with the greater community to end domestic violence.

From several months of discussion emerged an understanding that violence in the African American community are not random acts of violence; rather, they are often the result of a cycle of community and personal instability emerging from intimate partner, sexual and family violence, substance abuse, and cultural trauma Walton states. Thus, ANFVR sought to engage the broader community – including faith leaders, teachers, and community leaders – in a two-fold mission to: 1) spread the message, and 2) create a new generation of allies and leaders.

ABOUT INTERVAL HOUSE CRISIS SHELTERS

Interval House is a nationally recognized, award-winning nonprofit domestic violence program offering shelter and comprehensive supportive services to Los Angeles and Orange County communities since 1979. Interval House is unique in the nation for providing all services in over 60 different languages 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Comprehensive services include 24-hour crisis hotlines; emergency shelters and transitional housing; outreach centers; counseling; legal, health, children's and youth programs; economic self-sufficiency; leadership development, and community education. Over 99 percent of Interval House staff and advocates are multilingual, ethnically and culturally diverse, and have been personally affected by domestic violence. For more information, call (562) 594-9492.

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