

# CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  November / December 2001

## A Closer Look at "Evil"

While we have seen more frequent references to the term "evil" over the past several years, the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. have pushed it to the forefront of our minds. The incomprehensible nature of the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> - terrorists flying airliners full of innocent people into massive buildings filled with other innocent people - certainly justifies the use of the term "evil."

Most commonly, "evil" is used to describe "extremely bad" people or "horrifically destructive" acts. While a focus on highly visible "evil acts" and the "evil-doers" that perpetrate them is normal at times such as these, over the long term, it is not especially helpful. Such a labeling process can exacerbate tensions between peoples rather than reduce them, and can delude us into believing that evil can actually be eliminated from the world by eliminating specific "evil people."

It is more helpful to think of evil as a process that builds momentum over time. At this process level, evil most often works in subtle and insidious ways across all dimensions of life and within all people. It does not restrict itself to particular national boundaries, religious traditions, or racial and ethnic groups. Most basically, evil attacks and desecrates those dimensions of life that bind the human community together. Evil exploits the naturally occurring divisions within and among persons, and leads to increased fragmentation, alienation, and polarization. Figuratively speaking, this process can be as violent as hammering a wedge into a crack in a log to split it in two, or as subtle as the persistent freezing and thawing of water as it silently cracks our cement driveways.

If our goal is to reduce the power of evil in the world, we must recognize its roots. Two of the most prevalent roots of evil are the abuse and neglect perpetrated on millions of people minute after minute, day after day, and year after year - within our own borders and across the planet. Often times, these victims are emotionally, physically, sexually,

psychologically, and spiritually ravaged by those they trust and depend upon for life itself. This list of abusers includes not only individuals, but institutions and governments as well. At other times, the hurts and fears of persons are ignored, misunderstood, or minimized. As a result of neglect, persons are not provided the interpersonal and material resources needed for healthy psychological/emotional development.

Those that actively "abuse" others are clearly "terrorists" in their own right. They manipulate powerful emotions to get their own needs met; they demean, destroy, or remove sources of emotional comfort and soothing; they turn people against themselves by creating self-doubt and self-hate; they shatter the very selves and souls of their innocent victims; and they seek justification and sanctification from higher powers for what they do. Their attacks come in the day and in the night. They do not respect closed doors, personal boundaries, or the dignity of persons. Whether openly and unabashedly cruel, or disguised behind self-defensive personas or bureaucratic structures and policies, they weaken, cripple, rigidify, and fragment the psychic structures of persons, especially children. In so doing, they create a never-ending nurturing ground for generations of increasingly desperate people.

Unlike attacks by "foreign" terrorists, abuse and neglect are not viewed as threats to national security. They are as deadly as any virulent strain of bacteria, however, because they destroy the basic building blocks of human existence. They weaken the fabric of human community by creating a breeding ground that spawns life-denying forces that tear civilizations asunder one person at a time. These forces include: interpersonal violence, drug addiction, prejudice, racism, hate mongering, child pornography, slave trades, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.

It is time for us to realize that the damage done to the human psyche and soul by abuse and neglect is often

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perpetrated with as much consciously (and unconsciously) motivated persistence, meticulous planning, and empathetically attuned pinpoint accuracy as the most blatant terrorist act or retaliatory strike. Because they claim their victims one at a time, we fail to recognize the utter devastation wrought by these attacks and our own lack of response to them. As a result, the world community annually spends billions in health care, criminal justice, and national defense dollars to repair the damage they cause.

The President has defined the current state of affairs in terms of a “war between good and evil.” This is understandable. When survival is at stake, we instinctively revert to mental processes that collapse complex situations into clear and simple categories of “us/them,” “right/wrong,” and “good/evil.” We instantly switch off our cognitive circuits of reflective and critical questioning. This instinctual process allows us to act quickly and decisively, and to direct our vengeful rage at some easily recognizable target that is some inhuman-appearing “other.”

While this innate process of splitting is helpful in the short-term, it can be explosively dangerous in the long-term. It is undoubtedly important to contain those elements within the world community that threaten the welfare of others. At the same time, we dare not dissociate ourselves from them too much. If we believe that the roots of murderous rage within persons and groups gain their nourishment from the types of abuses noted above, as well as from the soil of poverty, hunger, despair, humiliation, and shame, then our “enemies” have important things to teach us. When we “other” those who hate us, we begin slipping into the perilous and escalating cycle of violent action and more violent reaction. At that point, we become co-opted participants in the very evil we claim to be fighting.

For now, the need continues for immediate attention to victims, their loved ones, and all those vicariously traumatized by the horror that has awakened us. The institution of more effective security and safety measures and the identification and dismantling of terrorist networks, wherever they occur, is also necessary. As important and difficult as that work will be, it pales in comparison to the more demanding work of appreciating the multidimensional nature of the many forces leading up to these events, and mobilizing the resources to mend the brokenness that lies beneath them. This work will require as much hard diplomacy with ourselves as we will be

doing with others. In the mean time, let us begin by being more gently attuned and appreciative of one another and the hurts we all carry within us.

*J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D.*

*Director of Clinical Services and Professional Education*

#### Suggested readings on evil:

Juergensmeyer, Mark. Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.

Means, J. Jeffrey with contributions by Mary Ann Nelson. Trauma & Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.

Staub, Erwin. The Roots of Evil: Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

## Mark Your Calendar: Fourth Annual Women Helping Women Luncheon!

**Date:** Wednesday, March 6, 2002

**Topic:** Women and Creativity

**Guest of Honor:** Sarah Grant Hutchison, Sticks, Inc.

**Speaker:** Rebecca Kemble, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Registered Art Therapist

**Location:** Younkers Tea Room, Downtown Des Moines

## C.O.O.L. Corner

Responding to tragedies within our world and helping our kids cope with such horror can be a difficult task. Keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Turn off the television.
- Share your feelings but don't flood children with the adult emotions.
- Share your coping strategies.
- Reassure them you will do everything you can to keep them and the family safe.
- Tell them that many adults are working hard to protect all children; it is their job.
- Talk about and implement ways that you can help as a family.
- Keep routines in place.
- Play.

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## MANifest Workshop: Our Fathers

**Date:** December 8, 2001

**Time:** 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**Location:** To Be Announced

Men who participate in this workshop will explore their relationship with their fathers (even physically or emotionally absent fathers) and gain an understanding of how this primary relationship may continue to influence them in their current roles and relationships. For more information on MANifest or to request a brochure, call Lowell Houts or Mike Sears at (515) 274-4006.

## Mental Health Counselor Joins Center Staff

Deborah Reed, Ed.D., L.M.H.C., recently joined the Center staff as a licensed mental health counselor. She comes to the Center as a part-time staff member, having completed our two-year psychotherapy residency program. Debbie earned her doctoral degree in counselor education from Drake University. Prior to the residency program, Debbie worked as a mental health counselor at Wellspring Counseling Center, providing individual and small group counseling.

Debbie will provide individual, marital, and small group counseling at the Center. Her special interests include counseling individuals struggling with cancer diagnosis and treatment and women healing from childhood/adolescent emotional and sexual abuse.

## 2002 Clergy Day Redeeming Memories: Witnessing to Trauma

**Presenter:** The Rev. Flora A. Keshgegian, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, Texas

**Date:** February 8, 2002

This presentation will explore the relationship between trauma theory and theology. The process of working through traumatic memories will be developed as a multiple practice of remembering suffering, claiming resistance and resilience, and connecting with a fuller life narrative. More information about Clergy Day will be provided in the January/February issue of *Connecting* or call (515) 274-4006.

## Holistic Nurse / Healing Touch Practitioner Joins Center Staff



*Kathy Reardon*

*Kathy Reardon, R.N., M.S., C.H.T.P.*, joined the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center staff this month. She is a holistic nurse, spiritual director, and Certified Healing Touch Practitioner. Kathy combines Healing Touch with other holistic approaches to assist her clients in growing in self-responsibility, empowered well-being, and wholeness.

She has a special interest in working with those in trauma, life threatening illness, grief and loss, and critical life transitions.

Kathy is a member of the American Holistic Nurses Association, Healing Touch International, and Nurse Healers-Professional Associates. She speaks widely in the Des Moines area on Healing Touch, holistic health, and spirituality. She has been through the spiritual director formation program, the Institute in Spiritual Guidance, offered through St. Joseph Educational Center in Des Moines. Kathy comes to the Center after seven years in private practice in Des Moines.

## What is Healing Touch?

Healing Touch is one of a long line of healing traditions based on the belief in a universal healing energy. Energetic approaches have been a part of the health and healing practices of this world for thousands of years. They are credited with relieving physical pain and distress, reducing anxiety and restoring emotional balance, and promoting a sense of wholeness and well-being. Healing Touch utilizes a number of gentle techniques of touch intended to help restore the balance of vital energies within an individual.

Healing Touch is known for its ability to induce a deep relaxation within the individual. The insights, images, or knowledge that arise from this deeply relaxed state are often very helpful in gaining new perspectives on the mind-body connection and unity of body, mind, and spirit; self-care needs; dreams and life aspirations; and changes necessary to improve health and quality of life.

### Did you know?

You may make a gift to the **Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation** through your estate plan. For more information, please call Stephanie Kuhn at (515) 274-4006.

# Group Counseling for Sexual Abuse Survivors

Debbie Reed and Susan Kearney of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center will co-lead a group counseling experience for women who are survivors of childhood/adolescent sexual abuse. The primary purpose of the group is to provide a safe and therapeutic environment in which women are helped to move past the role of “victim” toward a sense of personal empowerment. Other goals of the group are to increase ability to trust oneself and others and to provide an opportunity to begin working through and resolving feelings associated with the trauma and make changes.

The group will meet weekly for 90 minutes on Saturdays from 10:00-11:30 a.m. over a 16-week period. Meetings will begin in February and will be held in West Des Moines. The cost per session is \$20 (\$320 total). Each prospective group member will be screened prior to acceptance into the group. Women enrolling in the group must be currently involved in on-going individual counseling and obtain the permission of their therapist. For enrollment and/or further information, please call (515) 274-4006.



Debbie Reed



Sue Kearney

### Facilitators:

*Debbie Reed, Ed.D., L.M.H.C.*

Debbie earned her doctoral degree in counseling from Drake University. She is a licensed mental health counselor and has experience in individual, marital, and small group counseling. Her past group experience includes work with cancer survivors and survivors of incest/sexual abuse.

*Susan Kearney, L.M.S.W.*

Susan earned her master’s degree in social work from the University of Iowa. She is a licensed master social worker and has experience in individual, marital, and small group counseling (with families of clients with addictions).

## CONNECTING

is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For nearly 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to individuals, couples, and families for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, and Ankeny.

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Des Moines Pastoral

**Counseling  
Center**

550 39th Street, Suite 100  
Des Moines, Iowa 50312

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