

Eradicating Bullying and Violence *by Inez Torres Davis*

Every summer thank you letters come into the church-wide office for grants issued in the annual Women of the ELCA grants program. This year one letter caught my attention because it contained the phrase “grassroots initiative to eradicate peer-on-peer bullying and violence among school aged children.” While I remembered the grant application from the KoKo & Friends Foundation, I wanted to know more. I called Dr. Clara Denise West, the foundation’s founder, who authored the thank you.

Children are dying, Dr. West told me, not from gang violence or drive-by shootings but from the cruelty of bullying. KoKo & Friends Not on Our Watch Community Outreach Program (NOWCOP) entered Johnson High School in Huntsville, Ala., to teach children that picking on another person is not fun—it is a cruelty that can end a precious life.

Dr. West was adamant in pointing out that bullying is not the problem, it is a symptom. Some youth fight because they are hungry. Some children are not being adequately parented, and the educational system has not been serving them well in this regard. They deserve better, she says. We all do.

This grassroots initiative began in 2010 and uses a peer-to-peer approach. They have a replicable four-week program that begins its first session with a casket that drives home the point that children are dying. The first week’s session points out and teaches how the power of words can give life or take life away. The second week looks at cyber-bullying—perhaps the most virulent form of bullying because it is possible to do it anonymously and because so many of our youth use Internet-based social networks. Week three of the program looks at the legal issues of sexting. Week four covers the malicious and life-killing results of gossip. All of the bullying methods covered by this program propose to the youth that they can control their culture in their school. There are choices that they can make.

It is the older students that provide the leadership

in the sessions. Dr. West says she has seen the worst kids become the best when given access to computers and introduced to the world. A global perspective is what is needed, she says, even as she is frustrated by how the system is not preparing these children for future gainful employment.

It wasn’t only the students that needed the program’s help and support. Some teachers had a problem addressing bullying as well. Dr. West shared that there were even a few teachers who did not welcome the program because they did not want to be told how to act toward their students. In rare cases, teachers were observed provoking negative behavior.

The program is working with little financial support from the community. Dr. West and her handful of supporters bear most of the expense. Women of the ELCA awarded Dr. West’s program a \$3,000 grant. This grant was made possible by various endowments (interest only) and your offerings to the grants program. KoKo & Friends appreciates the support of Women of the ELCA.

Now Dr. West is taking the program to the Memphis, Tenn., area with hopes that the community there might be more supportive. She hopes to find more people and organizations willing to invest in the children.

Dr. West sent me some material, including magazines, a poster and a laminated page that had the smiling faces of 24 children and youth. The next time I spoke to Dr. West she told me that all of those children had committed suicide because of bullying. I pinned that photo montage on the wall outside my office. I see it every day. You and every woman that you know need to know that Women of the ELCA’s grants program is saving lives.

I’ve told you. Please, go tell someone else.

Risse Writes...I Am On The Bus

Risse Snelgrove, VSWO President

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and **He shall direct your paths.**” (Proverbs 3:5)

Many years ago I sold Mary Kay cosmetics. I am not sure why I made this decision because I had never sold a thing in my life. I knew nothing about selling or recruiting representatives, which is apparently required to succeed in the Mary Kay business. We were living in Houston at the time and Mary Kay was holding a seminar in Dallas on how to be a top recruiter. I convinced my husband that I needed to attend this seminar because I wanted one of those RED JACKETS. Keith purchased me a plane ticket and he also booked me a hotel room for three nights. Not really being a world traveler in my younger days, I forgot one simple, but very important thing, to arrange transportation from the airport to my hotel. I assumed that Mary Kay would provide my transportation, along with all the other future red jackets flying in for the seminar.

I arrived in Dallas and as soon as I got off of the plane I saw a man with a red jacket on. This was my clue that he must be my transportation. I approached him and asked politely, “Can you direct me to the bus that will take me to my hotel?” He replied, “Do you have your jacket and badge?” I told him that I was new so I didn’t have my jacket yet and that was the reason for my trip. He looked at me and motioned for me to follow him. Before I knew it I was climbing aboard a huge tour size bus. The bus was full of ladies in uniforms so I figured I must be on the right bus.

The bus made many stops at different hotels that night, but none of them were my hotel. After riding around Dallas for what seemed like hours, I looked around to find that I was the only person left on the bus. I started to panic. I could feel my

heart starting to race and I felt as if I had swallowed a ton of bricks. I finally got up enough nerve to walk up the aisle and said to the driver, “Miss, I’m with the Mary Kay Cosmetic Seminar and can you tell me when we might arrive at the Adolphus Hotel?” She turned around laughing and said, “Lady, this bus is the United Airline flight attendants bus and we aren’t going to the Adolphus tonight.”

The next thing I knew I was standing on a corner in the middle of Dallas, Texas and the bus was gone. I started to cry and had no idea what to do. I looked around and saw another hotel up the street, so I walked there dragging all of my luggage and asked the bell captain to help me get a cab.

I finally made it to my hotel that night, after about three extra hours of finding my way. All ended well as I found myself safe and secure in my room. The seminar was a total success. At the time it was not the least bit funny, but now I look back and laugh at myself (my husband and family do too). I have chalked this up to just another “Risse” moment.

I am telling you this story because I want you all to know that I AM ON THE BUS and I pray that you will join me. We are about to embark on a new journey together, as I become the new President of the VSWO. I have huge shoes to fill following the leadership of Jody Smiley. It will also take me a little while to know which way to go. We may not know right now where this journey will take us, but I do know one thing for sure. That is God will be our navigator. I fully trust that He will guide us and direct our paths, even if we experience a few detours along the way. I am so excited to begin this journey together and honored to be your next President. I ask that you continually check-in with our divine navigator, so He will know that we trust Him to let us know where our next stop is.

Your sister in Christ,
Risse

We Are an Offering: a stewardship devotion

Opening Hymn: Accept, O Lord, the Gifts We Bring *ELW* 691

Reading: Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Reflection

Stewardship is about actions. Our time, our service, our love and affection for others: those actions are our offering. Those stewardship actions show how we love and serve God, for that is our purpose as Christians. The Pharisees had forgotten their purpose. They were too concerned with how they looked, obsessed with how they were praised by others and unwilling to do equal service. Jesus reminds us that we are all equal as humble servants, stewarding God’s gifts and spending our lives striving to love God and others.

Closing hymn: We Are an Offering *ELW* 692

Offering focus: Your offerings support the coordinating work of the Women of ELCA grants program, which annually awards grants to domestic and international non-profit organizations that serve women and children. You can read more about our past grant recipients as well as find information concerning the upcoming 2012 application process at womenoftheelca.org/grants.

See the article, “Eradicating bullying and violence,” on page 1 of this issue to read about a 2011 grant recipient.

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Bold Women in the VSWO

With the wonderful hospitality of Tom & Carol Bailey, the new VSWO Board held an overnight retreat in September for team-building and long-range planning. Perhaps the biggest news to emerge from our 2-day retreat was a recommitment to the purpose of the Women of the ELCA and planning for how that will look in the VSWO. Risse Snelgrove, our new president, gave out board assignments (see page 7 for list.)

In addition, the board voted to renew and refresh out committee areas as follows: Mission Growth has been changed to *Mission: Spiritual Growth* and includes promoting Bible Study; promoting the Gather Magazine (formally Lutheran Women Today); promoting Café an online newsletter for Young Women; and, developing leadership by creating leadership training materials.

Mission Community has been changed to *Mission: Stewardship* and includes promoting and education on the many ways your offerings are put to use; encouraging offering increases; encouraging sharing your gifts and talents with others; building up healthy women and girls programs; and, promoting being good stewards of the earth.

Mission Action has been changed to *Mission: Justice and Action* and will include promoting and education on racial justice advocacy; promoting education on domestic violence; and, promoting and participating in service projects for Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Family Services such as Quilts, Layettes, School Kits, Prayer Shawls, Box tops and labels.

Plan now to celebrate Bold Women's Day

Our mission is mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. We know that each woman will act boldly in a way that's unique to her, so we talk about each of us "finding our bold." Some boldness is firm and quiet. Some is bright and loud. We want to help each other find that bold, live it out and celebrate it.

Bold Women's Day—observed annually on the fourth Sunday of February—celebrates all Lutheran women who have acted or are acting boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. Whether you live out your bold story of faith in your workplace, family or community, it's time now to start planning your Bold Women's Day celebration. We've got some great planning tools available to make that easy for you.

Go to womenoftheelca.org/bwd and you'll find ideas, litanies and certificates. Everything's available online and also in a downloadable PDF resource that you can share with other planners in your congregational unit.

Want to plan a retreat as part of your Bold Women's Day celebration? We have several resources you might consider for such a retreat. *I Am She* helps participants discover their "best bold" and put it into action. Two three-part Bible studies look at bold from the perspective of health and mission: *Act Boldly for Health* and *Act Boldly for Mission*.

Need an ice-breaker for a meeting (even your planning meeting?) Try *Finding Your Bold: An Ice-Breaker*. Use *A Bold Life of Faith: Katharina von Bora Luther* for an hour's program and learn about Katie while learning more about yourself.

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Growth of our Young Women

This year celebrates 25 years for VSWO. As we look forward to 25 more years, we want to make sure that we are always growing and learning about those who will make up our future.

Each year at Convention we have a special segment that is all about what is to come and what will shape our mission. Young women, which is anyone from 18-40, come to our convention to make new friends and to learn about VSWO and what it means to so many women of all ages who work together each year. I would like to invite every young woman even if you have not been to Convention to visit our Face book, Young Women of the VSWO. Your VSWO would like your input on what is on your mind as a young woman and how the VSWO can be part of your growth as a Christian woman who has a purpose in her church, community and world. The planning has already begun for the Young Women's Gathering for this our 25th anniversary for VSWO. We are planning a reunion, so if you have been to our Young Women's Gathering before, plan to be at Roanoke College again this summer. Please post your ideas and your wishes for our Anniversary and be one of the 25 women who will shape the future of VSWO.

Also check out Café which is your Young Women's on line newsletter that is provided by WELCA each month just for you.

Blessings to you,
Connie Saunders
Vice President VSWO

Getting ready to celebrate 25 years

The 25th anniversary of Women of the ELCA is in 2012 (the Constituting Convention was held June 1987). Observing our 25th anniversary will be a wonderful opportunity to lift up our mission and purpose as an organization. In doing so, we remind one another of our shared history and why we are still organized today as a community of faith-filled women. Our anniversary will both celebrate our past but also affirm our relevance for the future as a women's organization committed to acting boldly on our faith in Jesus Christ.

As part of our 25th celebration, we will have a special anniversary appeal, of which 50 percent of the offerings received will go directly to the ELCA Malaria Campaign toward three specific areas: medicine, clean water and advocacy. Our contribution as the women's organization of the church to the malaria campaign will be recognized and celebrated at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2013. The remaining 50 percent of offerings received in honor of our anniversary will support the ongoing work of Women of the ELCA.

Look for anniversary materials beginning in February 2012 that will include anniversary stories in *Gather* and *Interchange*, a special anniversary section on the Women of the ELCA website, a printed anniversary resource with ideas for celebrating our anniversary as well as more detailed information about the anniversary appeal and our commitment to the ELCA Malaria Campaign.

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Save the Date!

While some of our conferences have Fall Gatherings, many are refreshed with Spring Gatherings. For more information, contact your local conference coordinator or unit leader. Upcoming conference Gatherings include:

Conference	Date	Time	Church	Location	VSWO rep
Southern	October 2	1pm	Bedford Lutheran	Bedford	Judy
New River	October 9	3 p.m.	Zion	Floyd	Sherry C
Southern Valley	October 23	2:30 pm	Salem	Mt. Sidney	Judy
Tidewater & Peninsula	November 9	10 am	Our Savior	Virginia Beach	Ellen & Lisa
Richmond	November 19		First English	Richmond	Risse
Germanna	March 19	10 am	Hebron	Madison	Risse



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As a community of women
created in the image of God,
called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and
empowered by the Holy Spirit,
We commit ourselves to
grow in faith,
affirm our gifts,
support one another in our callings,
engage in ministry and action, and
promote healing and wholeness
in the church, the society, and the world.



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