

Safe Places in the Upper Room – *Catherine Taylor*

Mike very specifically asked me to do something that was not about the Bible. That agreement made; this is not a Bible study. But, I do think it is a spiritual one. Spirituality is about relationships of various ilk. All healthy relationships are safe ones. Therefore, healthy spirituality includes safety. Simple logic.

I can't remember a time in my life, past the age of 33 months, when I wasn't thinking about safety, in some form. I knew viscerally that this house and my aunt and uncle on Draper Lane, from which I type, were safe. I knew my grandmother's house was safe. I knew two of my five teachers at the Bakersfield SDA Junior Academy were safe. I didn't know the components of that safety, yet. I knew that the possibility of safety in every other environment at that time was a crap shoot.

I began to think about the components of safety while working in East Los Angeles with Project Amigos – a volunteer tutoring and family support program out of UCLA. I found myself wanting to conceptualize the legal and sociological components that would have my documented and undocumented immigrant families be safer in their community.

Building programs for the Turners Falls Youth Center in rural Massachusetts continued the journey of safe community building in a very different context. Here I began to think about ways creating physical and psychological safety would help the kids from those streets develop skills to build their lives in a pattern different from those of their peers and progenitors. It took a variety of forms: trips to Fenway Park, camping in the White Mountains where they collaboratively made budget decisions that allowed us all to have a final dinner at a very nice local restaurant, and having them teach me to play pool.

Later, staffing a shelter for battered women included looking at the need to understand levels of physical and psychological safety as we built a transitional community process that helped families build new skills.

The thirteen years I worked for People's Bridge Action in Athol, Massachusetts expanded my focus. I developed a 10-year project for mothers

of children who had been sexually abused that included group conversations, developing collaborative training for our local police, protective services, and other therapeutic providers. We made a film and produced a newsletter. It was here that I began to present our work at trauma and family therapy conferences in the US and Europe and well as at training seminars for other clinicians and a local school of Social work. It was here that I began looking at the ways helping professionals such as prosecutors and therapy providers often unintentionally replicate the components of abuse and trauma inducing contexts. I presented those findings at trauma and systemic family therapy conferences.

At the same time, I was a Campmeeting presenter for three of the Unions that were close to where I lived. At one of those meetings, I began to learn the extent of sexual abuse that was taking place in Seventh-day Adventist communities. My local conference was very interested in developing ways to address the issue, provide services for those abused, train family members who were supporting those who had been abused, and develop systems to prevent further abuse. Because of that work I was asked to write a chapter about Seventh-day Adventists and Sexual abuse that was part of an academic book addressing the issue in other cultures. (Included with these materials). Here I also worked with conference church leaders to avoid unintentionally creating contexts that replicated abusive or traumatizing contexts.

In my community building, therapy, and work with Adventists I have addressed ways we can develop safe and nurturing structures that avoid replicating toxic systems and nourish their members. It is from all this previous learning that I have developed Nourishing Safe Communities: Healing Injured Ones. This presentation is part of that program.