

# Break The Silence Sunday

April 25, 2021



A time for the church to learn together  
about the realities of rape and sexual violence;

about ways to create a community where survivors  
can share their stories and receive support, hope, and love;

and to prayerfully consider ways in which they can be advocates  
for change in their communities, and around the world.

## Resources for Worship

<http://www.breakthesilencesunday.org>

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## Acknowledgements

Break The Silence Sunday would not be possible without those who contributed their words, their music, and their prayers. So many people have been a part of the years leading up to this project, who have patiently waited through the frustration, fears, anger, and silence.

- The Rev Franz Rigert for holding opening a door that sometimes still feels closed;
- The friends who have held my hand, offered tea, coffee, wine, and snacks; who have listened to my anger and frustration, and just plain loved me, I owe you more than you know ~ Richard & Trish Bruxvoort Colligan, Bryan Sirchio, Christopher & Carla Grundy (and the Grundlings), Andra Moran, Lisa Hart, Conie Borchardt, Ben Welch, Amy Englesdorfer, Brent & Sara Smith, Jody Clegg, Darryl Commings, Maggie Schultz, Helen Rowinski & Lella Baker;
- Bryan Sirchio for his amazing musical skills in setting my story to song and for the courage that entire experience has given me for this part of the work;
- The folks who have contributed to the liturgy...
- The amazing survivors who have offered their reflections, shared their stories, and generally been amazing people who have triumphed over things they should never have had to endure;
- The churches, communities, and clergy who have been participating in BTSS through these early years, trailblazing with courage and hope and setting an example for what the church truly can be;
- The amazing folks of the Tri-Jo Parish United Church of Christ (Trinity UCC Shiocton, WI and St John's UCC Cecil, WI and St. John's UCC Black Creek, WI who trust me with the privilege of being their pastor, and who graciously give me time every year to write these materials;
- Severin Provance, for his logo design;
- My survivor siblings, particularly my support pit bull Lella Baker, who understand how hard this work is, and how incredibly important it is as well;
- My community of friends around the world who remind me that I'm not alone, and that somewhere there is always someone awake who will talk me through the struggle;
- For all the survivors who are stronger than they imagine because they get up and face each day, I hope we have done well by your stories;
- For all of you reading this who shall faithfully plan and lead worship to help us break the silence; my gratitude for your courage;
- And in 2021 particularly for my friend and survivor sister, Gwen M, who entrusted me with the work she couldn't continue ... rest in peace.

In faith and hope, *Rev Moira Finley*

## As We Begin

As you begin planning for Break The Silence Sunday you may feel many things, wondering if you can bring this word of hope to your congregation, and how they will respond when you do.

You could be wondering what kind of stories will be shared with you, and if you will be able to hear them with your whole heart. You might be afraid of not knowing answers that you think are needed by those who come to you with questions about this day, with stories of their own, with fears and insecurities.

You might be thinking “do we really need one more special day on the UCC calendar?”

You might be hearing the voice of that parishioner who asks, “Why do we have to do this again?” and you’re trying to find the words to tell them that the reality of rape and sexual violence need to be confronted over and over again until justice has come.

Or you might be thinking that yourself, that two years ago your congregation did something for BTSS so it’s time to move on.

Or you might be thinking, the world’s on fire and there are other things we have to be addressing.

Whatever you’re feeling, and thinking, please don’t panic. Your thoughts and feelings, and those of your parishioners, are understandable.

Yes, we’ve done this before, and we’ll do it again.

Yes, it needed a General Synod resolution and needs recognition on the UCC calendar because that’s the only way some will pay attention.

Yes, there are lots of things we can, and should be addressing and they’re all interconnected (the way we treat other people is mirrored in the way we treat creation).

This is a journey, and every step counts, no matter how tentative.

So sit in a comfortable place, take a few breaths, and then pray this prayer for yourself whether you are clergy or not because you (yes, you) are the one we need, in this moment, to raise their voice for survivors of sexual violence...

## **A Prayer For Hesitant Clergy**

by the Rev Don Niederfrank

Divine Companion, you have encouraged and comforted me  
at so many times,  
in so many places,  
with so many persons.

One more time, I ask, though afraid even in my asking,  
be with me.

Strengthen my trembling knees,  
that I may stand with those who have too often and too long stood alone.

Call to me in the tumult of my self-focused anxiety,  
that I may bring your Presence, your Peace, to those whose terror is real.

Deliver me from my silencing fears  
that I may speak your Word.

Holy Shepherd, I am yours. Send me to those you love.

## **Break The Silence Sunday 2021**

As we all know, 2020 didn't go the way any of us had hoped or planned. It was supposed to have been a triumphant year for Break The Silence Sunday. Following on the overwhelming success of our resolution at the UCC's General Synod in 2019 there was supposed to be abundant publicity about our work, opportunities for new communities and congregations to join in observing BTSS, and a growing group of survivors who heard the reassurance of the church's love and support for them. But then covid happened, the world shut-down in many ways, and much of life (including church life) moved online.

In March of 2020 I fielded a lot of calls and emails about what to do about BTSS. Some congregations had already begun their plans for an observance in April, and others were beginning the conversation, but with worship becoming virtual and online it just didn't seem like something that made sense. Break The Silence Sunday is a particularly intense and intimate time in worship. It wasn't something that I felt could be easily moved online, even for congregations that have had BTSS services for many years. So, like much of the world, BTSS took a pause, but that doesn't mean we were quiet for the last year.

An incredible amount of work reaching out to individual survivors, and to communities who are looking for ways to support survivors happened. As governments issued orders for people to stay at home as much as possible, many people started referring to them as "safe at home", but for far too many people that simply isn't true. Lockdown made many difficult and dangerous situations more complicated. Survivors were often trapped in their homes with their abusers, cut off from lines of communication and support, and stuck in the limbo of trying to leave while legal systems shut down. In addition, many survivors were now at home, without ways to connect to others for support and encouragement, dealing with difficult memories on their own. Already fragile mental health situations have been pushed to the limits, coping skills stretched to the breaking point, and many survivors (and others) are just overwhelmed by the combination of everything they have had to cope with in the past year.

And then, in the United States, we were also dealing with a bitterly contentious election season and a great social upheaval demanding we face the white supremacy and racism that this country was founded on.

As I write this in February 2021, Rep Alexandria Occasion-Cortez (D-NY) has come forward detailing her experience as a survivor of sexual violence and how that impacted her experience during the terrorist attacks on the US Capitol building on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Sadly there has been backlash against her, a backlash every survivor knows far too well, with victim blaming and shaming coming from many sides.

And in recent days, actress Evan Rachel Wood has spoken out about the violence and abuse her former partner, singer Marilyn Manson, inflicted on her. Interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly, the response to Mr Manson has been swift and decisive with his record label and other businesses quickly distancing themselves from him.

The wonderful #metoo movement started by Tarana Burke has added #acttoo to their mission, reminding us all that there is work to do not only to support survivors, but to undo the intertwined evils of patriarchy, white supremacy, racism, and violence. You can find more information about their important work at <http://www.metoomvmt.org>

There is also essential work being done by We As Ourselves to center conversations around black survivors. They invite all of us who aren't black to step back, and listen to the particular ways in which black survivors struggle with healing and justice. Their goals are:

- Fighting for Black survivors to safely share their stories and experiences;
- Unpending historical and cultural narratives that harm and silence Black survivors; and
- Working in solidarity with our community to create conditions where the stories of Black survivors can be heard, believed, and supported.

You can find their work online at <http://www.weasourselves.org>

So what do we do, as the world continues to deal with covid, as we aren't going to be back together in worship in the same way we had been for at least a while, where the reality of the struggles of survivors of sexual violence has often been silenced by other pressing needs and concerns, where as a colleague said to me recently "maybe you should just give it a rest for a while" since it makes people uncomfortable to talk about sexual violence?

Well, first of all, we don't give it a rest because the need is greater than ever, because survivors are desperately listening for what the church is (or probably isn't) saying about their lived experience, about how their story of survival fits into the story of the Gospel of Jesus, how we are (or aren't) welcomed into the community of faith, and if we are asked to silence ourselves, censor our stories, to make other people comfortable.

The need is far too great. For every case you hear about, every survivor who speaks up and shares their story, there are hundreds and thousands of survivors who struggle in silence because there aren't places where they can safely tell their stories without judgement and condemnation. For every survivor who finds help from the legal system, there are so many more who never report because of the belittling, doubt, judgement, blame, and harassment heaped on by the system that is supposed to help them.

Now, more than ever we need to hear the voice of the church, the people who claim to follow in Jesus' footsteps, declaring that they are here for support, encouragement, and love, embracing survivors as they are. It's past time for excuses on why we can't talk about this.

As a pastor, and survivor advocate, I keep track of the number of calls I get each year that are particularly about survivor issues and concerns. In the last year, as we have dealt with the pandemic, the number of calls has ***tripled***.

The isolation of staying home has caused mental health resources to be more difficult to acquire. The old wounds have been reopened, the fears reignited, and the memories and struggles that haunt all survivors have been pushed to the front by the stress the whole world has been under. Survivors are waiting, and listening to either what we say about their presence in our communities, or unfortunately more likely they are listening to our deafening silence.

It's time for us to say it without wavering or hesitation. **The Body of Christ has been raped and abused and the Body of Christ must stand up to witness with and support survivors, saying repeatedly and clearly that they are believed, loved, and valued as they are.** We must continue to do the work of education about consent, and healthy relationships, and all the hard work that needs to be done to prevent future rapes, but we must at the same time stand in solidarity with those of us for whom consent education and prevention didn't work, who bear the scars in our bodies and souls of other people's violence.

**CAUTION ... the next four paragraphs deals with an incident of suicide (no details).**

I am still, personally, dealing with the death of a dear friend, Gwen. She was the first survivor advocate I met after I was raped. We worked together to undo the damage done to our lives by other people's arrogance and violence for more than thirty years. We worked with survivors to help them as they reported and disclosed their experiences to their family and friends, their community, and law enforcement.

We were harassed and threatened by people who said that survivors always lie, called every name in the book, and kept going because we both knew what is at stake ~ survivors are literally dying from the silence and the judgement. Gwen was the bravest, strongest person I knew and yet, in her last note to her sister she said she couldn't do it any more.

Early in the hours on the Wednesday after the US Presidential election Gwen took her life saying, "the rest of the world is just looking the other way, saying it's ok that an admitted serial rapist is this close to being reelected." Sadly, Gwen was not the first to write those words in a suicide note. In just over four years, I know twenty survivors who couldn't deal with it anymore, with the climate of the world we are living in and its toxic hatred for survivors.



At the end of Gwen's note she left me her work, claiming I am stronger than she ever was and braver than she ever could be. I am honored to be entrusted with her legacy, and this work will continue always in her honor.

Because of covid, I'm not offering new complete liturgies. The ones that were written for 2020 are in the archive on our website. Partly that is because being a local church pastor to three congregations during the pandemic has been a lot of work, and partly it's because the liturgies for last year were good and didn't get used.

**There were also, in the 2020 materials, some incredible survivor reflections on their experience that you are invited to read, and use as best fit your worship context. Please remember, these are the courageous words of survivors speaking out to you, to the world, to the church throughout all time. Treat them gently, and with reverence.**

It's also, if you remember reading the introduction last year, because I decided that we should be on a three-year or so cycle like the revised common lectionary, allowing some of the prayers and pieces of liturgy to be repeated. We don't have to reinvent the wheel every year to do good, and important work. The same prayer, year after year, may provide the gentle nudge the Spirit needs to move individuals and communities to a place of real change.

Instead, this year I will be recording a few prayers and posting them to our website in the next couple of weeks, ideas for a few minutes you might include in your worship experience ~ either online, in print, or in person ~ to open up space to say that in these challenging days you are with survivors in their struggle.

I said last year that I wasn't sure if Break The Silence Sunday could be done in a virtual context with pastoral integrity, and with respect for survivors and their needs for community, safety, and support. I stand by that assessment, but in a year a lot has changed. There are communities and congregations out there doing incredible work at building relationships of support and strength online, places where survivors and others feel welcomed, included, and safe. They can, with enough planning and preparation, include a full BTSS liturgy in their worship life. There are other congregations, myself included, that are in the midst of a combination of all kinds of worship experiences ~ in print, in video, and in person ~ and what is possible for those communities will, by necessity, be different.

**The most important thing is that every community that engages with Break The Silence Sunday does so carefully, with the knowledge that it is a difficult, sensitive, and essential topic for the church and that there is a plan for follow-up and after-care for whatever they do.**

This is a time for solidarity, sitting together in the pain without trying to offer quick and easy answers, and reminding survivors every day that they are cherished children of God, just as they are, that they have a place in our communities, that they are a valued and essential part of the Body of Christ, that their story matters, and that we are willing to listen without judgement or condemnation.

## **An Important Note About David Haas & Celebrity Cases**

In previous years we have included work from the Catholic musician David Haas in our liturgies. News that Mr Haas was a serial abuser, often taking advantage of young women studying and working with him, has come to light. These allegations had been made in Roman Catholic circles before, but had not been widely known until now. Mr Haas' victims have asked that communities and congregations stop using his music, particularly until he issues a complete and honest apology for his actions. To date he has not done so.

Break The Silence Sunday stands completely and entirely with his victims and are grateful for their courage in speaking up, speaking out, and asking for what they need to continue their healing journey. One of Mr Haas' songs does remain in our historical documents, but going forward you will not see any of Mr Haas' music in our liturgies until such time as his victims let us know that they are comfortable with us doing so.

This will continue to be a challenging thing, not just about Mr Haas, but about many other well known and celebrity personalities who are revealed to be rapists, and abusers. The question of what do we do about their previous artwork, their previous contribution to their field, after we learn of their actions is a complicated one indeed.

If an actor, for example, is revealed to be a serial predator are we still "allowed" to watch their old movies, to take enjoyment in something they created before we knew of their behavior? If a writer is accused of sexual violence what do we do with their books? There isn't a clear answer, but it's a question we must continually ask ourselves ~ as individuals and communities. How do we stand in solidarity with survivors and what do we do about the work and contributions their abusers may have made?

With Mr Haas it is clear as his survivors have made a specific request that his music cease being used until some form of confession and contrition is achieved. With others, we must all investigate our hearts and minds and be in a continual state of discerning what the best approach is.

There is a lot more information about preparation for leading any form of BTSS observance, as well as all kinds of resources from previous years, and contact information on our website: <http://breakthesilencesunday.org> Please don't hesitate to reach out, let us know you're with us in the work, send cute pictures and memes (we all need a break from the intensity of this work sometimes), and know that you are not alone.

Through all of this, please try to keep in mind that Break The Silence Sunday is a movement and a work of hope. It is a movement, and it takes time. We believe that, as individuals, as congregations, and as the wider church we can do better in supporting survivors, creating space where they feel safe sharing their stories, and honoring their courage and resiliency. We can find new ways of thinking about, and talking about our faith that don't glorify suffering and don't perpetuate the abuse that so many have suffered. And we believe that we can work together to change the culture that allows sexual violence to happen, building a future where survivors can share their stories without shame, and where all can live free from sexual violence.

And if nothing else gives us reason to hope it's that you, yes you, are sitting here reading this material. Maybe your community has a supportive pastoral staff and all you need to participate fully. Maybe you're the pastor who is going to invite your congregation to observe BTSS for the first time and you're anxious, but also confident, that it's what your community needs right now.

Maybe you're reading this and thinking you'd like to suggest it to your pastor or worship committee or whoever in your context might be most supportive, and you're just not sure any of them will be. Maybe you're a survivor who thinks you're perhaps, possibly ready to share your story and hoping your faith community will receive it with grace and love.

**Whoever you are, whatever the situation you find yourself in, you are the reason Break The Silence Sunday will ultimately make healthy, sacred space for survivors in our faith communities.**

The suggested date for Break The Silence Sunday is the fourth Sunday of April. This keeps us within the national observance of Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), but it is just a suggested date. In 2021, that date is Sunday April 25<sup>th</sup>. This is, in the UCC's calendar also Pacific Islander Asian American (PAAM) Sunday, a vital part of the diversity of our life together. There are also churches that will observe Earth Day events at the weekend, particularly given the current state of climate crisis. Please feel free to pick a time that works best for your community.

Some have held observances in October during the observance of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, remembering that much rape and sexual violence occurs within domestic relationships. Other communities observe during the summer, and still others find Lent an appropriate time to take on the challenging work of learning about sexual violence and creating space for survivors. Whatever date you choose please feel free to adapt these materials, use them for inspiration, and craft whatever you need – worship, prayer, study – that best fits the needs of your community, particularly in these days of living with covid.

If you've been with us from the beginning, thank you. The archive of materials is available on our website and you are welcome to change and modify them so they work best for your community. All we ask is that you use proper attribution for those who have written these materials.

Please, whatever you do, we would appreciate feedback about what you liked, and didn't like, about these materials, what worked for you, what was a challenge, and what could be provided in coming years to help you better implement BTSS in your community. There's a feedback form at the end of these materials if you'd like to mail it in, or you're welcome to send questions and comments to our email at [breakthesilencesunday@gmail.com](mailto:breakthesilencesunday@gmail.com).

Again, please be in touch if there's anything here you need to talk through, if you have questions or concerns, if you need to share your story, or if you just need a cheerleader as you work towards bringing Break The Silence Sunday to your community.

Thank you for your openness to this work, welcome, and God's blessings.

Peace and grace, *Rev Moira Finley*

## **Strings Of Strength (SOS) ~ Comfort Items For Survivors**

Strings of Strength is a project to provide comfort items to survivors who share their stories with the Break The Silence Sunday team. More than 800 stories have been shared since BTSS began in 2015, and we wanted to find a way to tangibly honor those stories, to help survivors remember that they are believed, that they are strong, and that they are not alone. By creating shawls, scarves, and other items we hope to be able to provide those who share their story with something that will remind them of our common strength as survivors of sexual violence.

### **Here's how it works...**

- ♥ You (and maybe your group) create items of support (see suggested list of items below).
- ♥ You record the initials of the creator, and the fiber content on each item.
- ♥ You post them to BTSS (see below)
- ♥ We add a nifty little tag with your initials, fiber and care information, and a phrase of love and support (it reads "Your story is heard, believed, and held with love and grace.")
- ♥ We distribute them to survivors who share their stories at events like church conference meetings and the U.C.C.'s General Synod 2021 in Kansas City, MO.
- ♥ You enjoy the connection you've made to a survivor who now feels less alone in the world.
- ♥ You create more objects and we repeat this process until rape and sexual violence are no more.

### **Suggested items include...**

- ♥ shawls – something like 24" x 60", give or take
- ♥ scarves – well, you know, a scarf is sometimes skinny, sometimes not; sometimes long, sometimes not; variety is key here, but scarves are clearly skinnier than shawls in width
- ♥ wubbies – about 12" square (big washcloth?) and get carried around in backpacks and purses and such so when you need to know it's there, you just reach in and pet it;
- ♥ mini-wubbies – these would be coaster size, think about 3 or 4" square, just enough to tuck in your pocket
- ♥ bookmarks – something skinny, maybe 1" wide x 4 or 5" long
- ♥ something else you dream up that would be a way for survivors to know they are believed, loved, and not alone

### **How do we create them?**

Knit, crochet, weave, sew, needlepoint, cross-stitch, something that involves thread/string that we haven't thought of. However it is you create, create with intention, sewing or knitting or stitching in love and care for survivors.

### **Things to consider...**

- ♥ Soft – the items should be soft, a comfort, like a good and healthy hug, a sensory plus for a survivor
- ♥ Or perhaps not quite so soft – someone is making cross-stitch hearts that will go in small metal boxes (think Altoids size boxes) that could be easily carried around, they won't be soft and squishy, but rather strong and sturdy
- ♥ Colors – purple and teal are the colors for sexual assault awareness, but don't let that limit you because we know about the diversity of people in the world and how their tastes and preferences for color vary so send us your browns, yellows, greens, blues, reds, oranges, grey, and everything you've got as we're sure we will find a survivor who will fall in love with what you create; also think about pastels, and brights, and neons, and primaries, and the whole variety of colors and tones that exist in the world
- ♥ Diversity – survivors come in all kinds; men, women, and non-binary; first disclosing their experience after 70+ years and a young adult just beginning college and everything in between; of every ethnicity, and orientation, and physical abilities – our comfort items need to reflect that so go ahead and make that thing your brother loved, or the pic line cover your sister-in-law's grandfather had when he was receiving chemo, or the needle felted heart your daughter wore under her uniform while serving in the Army, or ... well, you get the idea because comfort comes in as many different ways as there are different survivors
- ♥ Care – if you're making a wearable type object please make sure to let us know about care/washing instructions so the survivor can look after your creation

### **But wait, I'm not very good at knitting, crochet, or any of that...**

Ah yes, we thought we'd get to that. You don't think you have any skills or talents to lend to this enterprise, BUT you're wrong. We don't need masterworks here. We aren't trying to win any competitions or blue ribbons. We're trying to support survivors. We've received two lovely wubbies in the mail and on the envelope it said "crocheted with love (not necessarily skillfully crocheted)", and they are absolutely beautiful and will make some survivor feel the love and solidarity of the universe. We need you and what you have to offer. So, no excuses. In knitting words ... drop those stitches, pick them up backwards, and craft on.

### **OK, but really, I can't craft...**

Alright, we won't push, but if you'd still like to help we would gladly accept donations for additional yarn, materials, packaging, storage, tags, and so on. We have PayPal and Venmo at [breakthesilencesunday@gmail.com](mailto:breakthesilencesunday@gmail.com)

## Mailing Instructions

- ♥ Attach information to each item with
  - the crafter's initials (or your group's name) AND
  - the fiber content (for example, 100% acrylic or 70% mohair/30% acrylic, and so on) AND
  - the care/washing instructions for wearable items
- ♥ Please include a contact name, return address and/or email so we can send you a thank you note for your contribution
- ♥ Mail items via whatever service you like to:
  - Break The Silence Sunday (BTSS)
  - c/o Moira Finley
  - 130 E Green Bay St
  - PO Box 691
  - Bonduel, WI 54107

### Questions that aren't answered here?

Email to [breakthesilencesunday@gmail.com](mailto:breakthesilencesunday@gmail.com) and we'll get back to you!

## Break The Silence Sunday In A Box

- ♥ Perhaps you want to have a display at your Association or Conference meeting?
- ♥ Maybe you want to give a workshop about Break The Silence Sunday?
- ♥ Or maybe you need something for your church, a space where you can put out information about Break The Silence Sunday along with your local area resources for survivors?

Then Break The Silence Sunday In A Box is for you!

You provide:

- ♥ Enthusiasm for the work of Break The Silence Sunday
- ♥ A display board (3-fold science fair type boards are most common)

We provide you with:

- ♥ Break The Silence Sunday (BTSS) brochure\*
- ♥ Strings of Strength (SOS) brochure\*
- ♥ Clergy commitment flyers\*
- ♥ Save the date cards\*
- ♥ Sample signs, wording, and pictures for your display\*
- ♥ Break The Silence Sunday business cards
- ♥ Break The Silence Sunday buttons
- ♥ Complete copies of the current year materials

Many of these items will be available electronically on our website so you can download and print them on your own, saving on shipping fees. Electronically available items are marked with an \* above.

If, however, you want us to mail you everything we can do that as well. You cover shipping costs, and consider adding a donation to help continue the work of Break The Silence Sunday. If you are interested in larger quantities of buttons, let's talk about the price and shipping directly from our supplier.

Visit the website for downloadable materials and to request anything to be mailed to you:

<https://breakthesilencesunday.org/btss-in-a-box/>

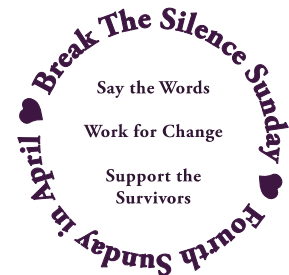


## Break The Silence Sunday Clergy Commitment

As a Christian pastor, as someone who tries to follow in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, and as a human being committed to working for the dignity and equality of all people, I declare to survivors of sexual violence that:

- ♥ I am a person to whom you can tell your story of sexual abuse, harassment, assault, violence, and more.
- ♥ I will listen without judgement, and without condemnation.
- ♥ I will hold all you tell me in sacred confidence, within the bounds of law.
- ♥ I will listen to whatever you need to say, and however you need to say it.
- ♥ I will honor your story, and remind you of the dignity and worth you have as a child of God, created in God's own image, and I will remind you that you are more than your story.
- ♥ I will walk beside you on your healing journey, accompanying you as best as I am able, and as you need to counseling appointments, court dates, or wherever else you need me to be with you.
- ♥ I am here for you, and with you.
- ♥ I stand with you.
- ♥ I believe you.

© *Break The Silence Sunday, the Rev Moira Finley, October 2017*



## Some Statistics ~ compiled by the Rev Moira Finley

- There are an average of 321,500 people (age 12 and older) raped or sexually assaulted in the United States each year. (Source – U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *National Crime Victimization Survey*. 2010-2014)
- There is an average of one sexual assault every 73 seconds in the United States. (Source - Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *National Crime Victimization Survey*, 2018 (2019)).
- Let's do some math with that statistic of every 73 seconds:
  - During an average song on the radio (3 minutes 30 seconds) there will be about 3 assaults;
  - During an average sitcom (30 minutes) there will be about 25 assaults;
  - During an average movie (1 hour 57 minutes) there will be about 96 assaults;
  - During a typical US football game (3 hours 12 minutes) there will be nearly 158 assaults;
  - During an office work day (8 hours) there will be 395 assaults;
  - During a single day there will be 1184 assaults
  - During a single year there will be 432,160 assaults
- All of those numbers are for people over the age of 12. In addition to those statistics, in a given year:
  - 80,600 inmates are raped to assaulted
  - 60,000 children are sexually abused
  - 18,900 members of the United States military are on the receiving end of unwanted sexual contact
- Approximately 55% of victims are assaulted in or near their own home, and an additional 12% are assaulted in or near a relative's home. (Source: Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010*. 2013)
- As of 1998, 17.7 million women in the United States (1 out of every 6) and 2.78 million men in the United States (1 out of every 33) have been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime (source – National Institute of Justice & Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey*. 1998)
- 15% of sexual assault and rape victims are under the age of 12 (source – U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sex Offenses and Offenders*. 1997)

- The year in a man's life when he is most likely to be the victim of a sexual assault is age 4. The year in a woman's life is age 14. (Source – U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *2000 Sexual Assault Of Young Children As Reported To Law Enforcement*. 2000)
- 93% of juvenile sexual assault victims know their attacker (Source – U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *2000 Sexual Assault Of Young Children As Reported To Law Enforcement*. 2000)

A note on the statistics from RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network): Sexual violence is notoriously difficult to measure, and there is no single source of data that provides a complete picture of the crime. On RAINN's website, we have tried to select the most reliable source of statistics for each topic. The primary data source we use is the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which is an annual study conducted by the Justice Department. To conduct NCVS, researchers interview tens of thousands of Americans each year to learn about crimes that they've experienced. Based on those interviews, the study provides estimates of the total number of crimes, including those that were not reported to police. While NCVS has a number of limitations (most importantly, children under age 12 are not included), overall, it is the most reliable source of crime statistics in the U.S. We have also relied on other Justice Department studies, as well as data from the Department of Health and Human Services and other government and academic sources. When assembling these statistics, we have generally retained the wording used by the authors. Statistics are presented for educational purposes only. Each statistic includes a footnote citation for the original source, where you can find information about the methodology and a definition of terms.

For additional information on how the statistics are compiled, and additional crime reporting statistics please visit: <https://www.rainn.org/about-rainns-statistics>

## Some Helpful Definitions ~ by the Rev Moira Finley

Should we use survivor or victim?

It's a complicated question. Some folks think that victim is more appropriate to describe who they are, their feelings and their experience. Other folks think that survivor is more appropriate. What matters is that you listen to the person who has the lived experience of sexual violence. If you use one word and they tell you they prefer another, please respect that. Do not insist on your word to describe their experience. Listen to and respect all who have lived through these things.

Acquaintance Rape/Assault – where the perpetrator(s) is previously known to the victim; occurs in approximately 4 out of every 5 rapes/assaults in the United States; acquaintance may refer to a date (hence “date rape”), domestic partner, former partner, family member, classmate, neighbor, boss, coworker, and more.

Attempted Rape/Assault – a threat or rape or sexual assault, including verbal threats, and those made in other ways such as electronic communication (email, text), and on social media (Facebook, Tumbler, Twitter)

Domestic Violence – violence, and threats of violence, between spouses, domestic partners, and those who are co-habiting.

Force – methods used to coerce a victim into a non-consensual sex; this may include the use of a weapon, or physical violence, but also includes emotional and psychological manipulation, threats to the victim's family, the withholding of finances, intimidation, threats regarding employment or child custody, and more.

Incest – sexual contact (which may or may not include penetration) between closely related persons such as parents, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins; in legal terms incest is often described as the crime of sexual contact between people who may not be legally married

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – a condition resulting from the experiencing (or witnessing) of a traumatic event that causes long-term difficulty with flashbacks, intrusive memories, and severe anxiety; not all rape survivors will develop PTSD

Rape – a form of sexual assault; the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics defines rape as forced sexual intercourse which is defined as “vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by the offender(s)”; this also includes incidents where the penetration is by an object such as a bottle; legal definitions vary by state, and some states do not use this term at all in their laws instead they have degrees/grades of sexual assault.

Rape Culture – the way in which society blames victims of rape and sexual assault, and normalizes this violence, particularly male against female violence; the assumption that rape and sexual assault are an inevitable part of life; this includes the use of the word rape in other contexts (for example, when a sports team is defeated and commentators say “they were raped”), as well as the objectification of women’s bodies including school dress codes and purity movements that seek to control and limit women’s behaviors

Sexual Assault – sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim; this includes, but is not limited to: penetration of the victim’s body (see rape), attempted rape, forcing a victim to perform sexual acts on the perpetrator, fondling, unwanted sexual touching.

Stranger Rape/Assault – where the perpetrator(s) is previously unknown to the victim; occurs in approximately 1 of every 5 rapes/assaults in the United States.

Survivor Guilt – though most often associated with being a survivor after a mass catastrophe (such as an airplane crash), this phrase has also come to mean the guilt imposed on survivors of rape and sexual assault because of some perceived action, or inaction on their part

Victim Blaming – words and actions that imply the victim of rape or sexual assault is to blame for the actions of the perpetrator(s); this can be through questions about what the victim was wearing, why they were out alone, why they didn’t fight back, if they had been drinking or had previous sexual relations with the perpetrator, and questions about the previous sexual activity of the victim

## Resources

### General Information About Rape & Sexual Assault

- Rape Abuse Incest National Network (RAINN) – includes links to their online and telephone counseling services, <http://www.rainn.org>
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center, <http://www.nsvrc.org>
- Joyful Heart Foundation, <http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org>
- No More (a national campaign to end sexual and domestic violence), <http://nomore.org>
- “What’s Their Problem? Sharing Our Pews With Sexual Abuse Victims and Survivors”, from *Christ And Pop Culture*, <http://christandpopculture.com/whats-problem-sharing-pews-sexual-abuse-victims-survivors/>

### Resources About Recent Cases In The Media

- Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her experience of being retraumatized by the terrorist attack on the US Capitol building: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/aoc-leads-lawmakers-recalling-their-harrowing-accounts-capitol-siege-n1256828>
- On the case of a UK woman convicted of lying about being raped on the island of Cyprus and what it tells us about rape culture: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-51050656>
- On the awarding of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize to Dr Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2018/press-release/>
- On the documentary “Surviving R Kelly” and its impact on boys: [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/bvgz78/sexual-assault-happens-to-boys-too?fbclid=IwAR3WGPoKS48MAhHxb8b1N6JaSF9aySp4lc\\_TmmkIVdixpxEmk8ERzSG5ew](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/bvgz78/sexual-assault-happens-to-boys-too?fbclid=IwAR3WGPoKS48MAhHxb8b1N6JaSF9aySp4lc_TmmkIVdixpxEmk8ERzSG5ew)

- An interview with Chanel Miller [https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-09-24/abcarian-chanel-miller-sexual-assault-brock-turner?fbclid=IwAR2ZegY\\_qmvvP3fRTFCszEyuEB6nfwlN52YJ2fwIvhRC79DHMVqCBsUsH7A](https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-09-24/abcarian-chanel-miller-sexual-assault-brock-turner?fbclid=IwAR2ZegY_qmvvP3fRTFCszEyuEB6nfwlN52YJ2fwIvhRC79DHMVqCBsUsH7A)
- A speech from Dr Christine Blasey Ford about being a survivor [https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2019/10/30/christine-blasey-ford-brett-kavanaugh-supreme-court-power-to-inspire/?fbclid=IwAR3roli9OitBA5zJVwT4ZGbDr0dtITcd3pwcgPcPm9qQ2Exs79lMKRC6\\_xk](https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2019/10/30/christine-blasey-ford-brett-kavanaugh-supreme-court-power-to-inspire/?fbclid=IwAR3roli9OitBA5zJVwT4ZGbDr0dtITcd3pwcgPcPm9qQ2Exs79lMKRC6_xk)
- Very practical ideas about how to support survivors in your midst: <https://www.bustle.com/p/14-ways-to-support-sexual-assault-survivors-right-now-7739137?fbclid=IwAR28CT1TCjWj28KosMybubll8nT2LVRnFxOD4BppC6bqQ1zGrRqkOfVIP50>

## Resources on PTSD

- From the Department of Veteran's Affairs: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>
- From RAINN (specific to rape survivors) <https://www.rainn.org/articles/post-traumatic-stress-disorder>

## Resource Ideas For Family, Friends & Allies Of Survivors

- <https://www.rainn.org/articles/help-someone-you-care-about>
- Particularly for parents [https://puckermob.com/moblog/10-things-every-parent-of-a-sexually-abused-child-needs-to-know/?fbclid=IwAR3DpnmSTDFV0US9DfL-pvCk5fu1mzfxdPUUFQ3L96-ySCxY8fhvUD\\_o4Oc](https://puckermob.com/moblog/10-things-every-parent-of-a-sexually-abused-child-needs-to-know/?fbclid=IwAR3DpnmSTDFV0US9DfL-pvCk5fu1mzfxdPUUFQ3L96-ySCxY8fhvUD_o4Oc)
- Particularly to support male survivors [https://cutacut.com/2019/10/24/how-to-help-male-survivors-of-sexual-violence/?fbclid=IwAR1xteiIiYYv56GKZ4GVT\\_8es6yztJ9Z9ON-GCuxntiejRxFY01iaSY-7t0](https://cutacut.com/2019/10/24/how-to-help-male-survivors-of-sexual-violence/?fbclid=IwAR1xteiIiYYv56GKZ4GVT_8es6yztJ9Z9ON-GCuxntiejRxFY01iaSY-7t0)

## State of Wisconsin Resources

- Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Telephone: 608-257-1516; <http://www.wcasa.org>  
Offers information and referral on any issue related to sexual violence; does not offer direct services to victims/survivors, but will connect them to local agencies
- County by County resources – please visit our website  
<http://www.breakthesilencesunday.org> and the Resources tab to find a chart which will identify sexual assault resource organizations in each Wisconsin county