

PARTNERS IN CRISIS

Guidelines and Resources
for
Spouses of Clergy



The Holston Conference
of
The United Methodist Church

PARTNERS IN CRISIS

A Volunteer Support Network

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for
Spouses of Clergy**

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ABOUT THE LOGO

“Inspired by God,” artist Kerry Fatherree Tripp says of the logo she created in 1998 for *Partners in Crisis*. She describes the significance of space, color and symbol:

The *cross and flame* comprise the official symbol of the United Methodist Church.

The *left hand* represents the stress and tension associated with a crisis. The base of this hand is closed, signifying closure to a painful experience to which he or she will not return. This outstretched hand reaches upward seeking comfort and help, peace and trust, and unconditional love.

The *right hand* represents all those who reach out to those in crisis. The base of this hand is open, signifying the presence of God through the Holy Spirit, through whom hope flows, even when all hope appears to be lost. This hand is white, representing new beginnings, new life.

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## THE WEBSITE CONNECTION

Printed *Guidelines and Resources* are available through each district office, including names, addresses and phone numbers for volunteers who serve as legal, financial and personal counsel, and those who provide temporary housing (safe houses) in an emergency. High regard for confidentiality limits inclusion of some information.

**Website: [www.Holston.org/pic](http://www.Holston.org/pic)**

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Acknowledgement of Generous Support

Scores of persons who volunteered to serve as needed.
Spouses and widows of clergy persons.
All who have affirmed the vision through prayerful support.

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## In an Emergency

**For immediate attention, turn to page 14.  
Call any one of the persons or offices listed.  
They will welcome your call and assist you  
with compassion and confidentiality.**

## CONTENTS

|                                                     |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Preface .....                                       | 5  |
| Report/Resolutions/Results .....                    | 7  |
| Some Spouses' Stories: <i>I've Been There</i> ..... | 9  |
| Purpose .....                                       | 11 |
| Structure .....                                     | 12 |
| Preparation and Distribution of Guidelines .....    | 13 |
| Holston Conference Pastoral Counseling Center ..... | 14 |
| In an Emergency .....                               | 15 |
| Guidelines for Financial Assistance .....           | 16 |

**Lovingly Dedicated**

**to**

*Betty Hurlock*

**Visionary founder of  
Partners in Crisis,  
in appreciation for her selfless compassion, her  
persistence and dedication to the well-being of the  
Spouses of Holston Conference Clergy**

## **PREFACE**

Partners in Crisis affirms the values stated in Social Principles of The United Methodist Church that “*assert the sanctity of the marriage covenant which is best expressed by love and mutual support ...*”

Partners in Crisis also asserts that the church is responsible for providing resources, such as marriage enrichment seminars and quality counseling to strengthen marriages among laity and clergy.

While PIC affirms that the marital contract is intended to remain unbroken, and that each partner commits to both personal growth and the development of the unique gifts of the other person, the divorce rate among clergy mirrors that of the general population.

Stress impacts all marriages through illness, death, care of children/aging parents, schedules, finances, personal growth, and so on. However, the spouse of a clergy person often is uniquely vulnerable. When a separation, divorce or other complex crises occur within this marriage, the female spouse traditionally loses the most, including her best friend, her church (that she did not choose in the first place), her pastor, spiritual leader and trusted counselor, her home and furnishings and oftentimes her career/job, financial/social status.

Furthermore, the female spouse of clergy is likely to conceal the violence of physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse, neglect, incest, gender bias and substance/alcohol abuse by the partner. This tendency toward secrecy and protection of the clergy partner can isolate the spouse in a prison of denial and powerlessness.

The family of a clergy person easily experiences a unique stress point that may be referred to as the “your-story-is-better-than-mine” syndrome. The cogent, demanding “stories” of parishioners sometimes cause the spouse and/or children to feel invalidated and neglected by “their” pastor who is available to everyone except them.

During marital crises, spouses often lack information about counseling services, the pension program, availability of emergency funds, temporary housing, legal and financial counsel.

As a result, Mrs. Charles (Betty) Hurlock, with the support of Mrs. Clay (Dot) Lee and a growing core of other spouses of clergy in the Holston Conference, formed Partners in Crisis in 1995. In an interview for *The Call*, Hurlock states, “My concern goes back years and years. We would hear of some minister’s wife who [unexpectedly] ... had no home, no church, no minister, and it seemed [like] utter abandonment ...”

This response grew out of concern for the crisis generated for the spouse in such circumstances, and a growing awareness of increasing numbers of separations and divorces among the clergy, equal in number to those in the general population.

Since its inception, Partners in Crisis has provided support in many ways to both male and female spouses of clergy persons.



## RESOLUTIONS/REPORTS/RESULTS

Following a review of PIC, Dennie Humphreys, then chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry, recommended/reported to the 1999 Annual Conference that Partners in Crisis should continue its work, that the Steward of Clergy Concerns should help to facilitate responses to such crises/needs, and that the Board would attempt to find funding for PIC.

That same year, a resolution was submitted by PIC through the Board of Ordained Ministry that read as follows:

Whereas, a call to ministry as clergy is one that affects the entire family and creates situations wherein the clergy family is often separated from family and friends; and

Whereas, clergy families may experience severe tensions that sometimes lead to marital separation and divorce; and

Whereas, clergy spouses are often vulnerable in such situations, being unaware of protection and assistance within the structure of the Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church; and

Whereas, Partners in Crisis, a volunteer group in the Holston Conference, offers support;

Therefore, be it resolved, that Partners in Crisis be recognized as an official organization in the Holston Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, and,

Be it further resolved, that this group be staffed by volunteers who work in cooperation with the Steward of Clergy Concerns and the Board of Ordained Ministry.

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Another resolution was submitted by PIC and the Board of Ordained Ministry to the General Conference 2000 to recommend that “each Annual Conference study and make available to families of clergy an explanation of the requirements for clergy and the rights of spouses during a marital separation or divorce, in accordance with the Book of Discipline and the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.”

Although the work of Partners in Crisis is sanctioned by the Board of Ordained Ministry, the district superintendents and the Steward of Clergy Concerns, in the interest of spouses in crisis who may feel disenfranchised by the emphasis on *clergy*, the Pastoral Counseling Center is likewise vitally connected and committed to both spouses and children of clergy in crisis.

Betty Hurlock represents PIC to the Holston Conference Foundation, hopefully leading to additional exposure and potential funding.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

To support this vital ministry financially, contact Beth Green at (865) 983-5640, Thelma Hamilton at (423) 746-0367, the Steward of Clergy Concerns, Rev. Daniel Taylor, in Alcoa at (865) 690-4080, your district superintendent or the Executive Director of the Holston Conference Foundation at (865) 690-8124.

FROM A SPOUSES' PERSPECTIVE: *I've been there ...*

“When I heard of Partners in Crisis, I was in total support ... years earlier I had two friends who struggled on their own because there was no one ... they could turn to ... In my wildest imagination (or nightmare), I could not believe I'd ever need such a program.

In the blink of an eye, I ... hit rock bottom and the top was nowhere in sight. I was overwhelmed, frustrated and homeless and did not know what to do. In a situation that seemed hopeless for my children and me, Partners in Crisis made it possible for us to keep our dignity and establish ourselves. I will forever be thankful and grateful.

I hope no one ever goes through the nightmare that my children and I have gone through, but I'm so glad that Partners in Crisis is there to help through crisis situations.”

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“None of us goes into a marriage thinking that one day you may divorce. I sure didn't. I knew that my husband may die someday, but then I'd have insurance to help me find a place to live ... As a minister's wife, divorce put me in a terrible position. God took care of me, but the Conference needs to have a fund or some other ways of helping us.

Thank God I have a career and was able to provide for myself with the help of family, but what if I had not worked outside the home ... and not had a family [to help]?

I was informed that the parsonage was the pastor's; I could either stay in a separate room for awhile or move out. I lived with friends for three weeks and carried my clothes and belongings in the car. I even stayed with someone I didn't know for a week. I felt like a bag lady.

When I moved to an apartment, I had no furniture, not even a bed, because we had always had parsonage furniture. All the expense of moving into an apartment was not easy, although the church gave me an offering. I hope we can do something to help other wives who go through the same kinds of hardship ...”

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One spouse didn't press charges of abuse by her pastor-husband, “because of the children.”

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“You can't tell your congregation or friends that your marriage is in trouble. Counseling didn't work because I couldn't identify or express my feelings about what was going on within me. Clergy families are often well-educated and brought up to focus on thinking, so are less in touch with feelings. [We] don't want to show feelings, because it's not professional. Pressured to be thinking people, we get cut off from our feelings. Those feelings build up and cause problems ... it's essential to be in touch with one's feelings...”

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“I feel that the church blurs the lines about sexual policies and creates confusion in situations of adultery, sexual abuse and sexual orientation ...”

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“Too often a spouse’s contribution to the ministry of his/her partner is forgotten when there is a divorce. It’s unfair to overlook that ...”

## **PURPOSE**

Partners in Crisis are a supportive community offering hope to spouses of clergy during marital separation, divorce and other crises. Its primary purpose is to provide friendship, love and emergency resources. These may include:

1. Connection with a person who can provide support, confidentiality and information to meet immediate and ongoing needs.
2. Names of persons willing to provide temporary housing for the spouse and his or her children.
3. Names of attorneys willing to give free emergency counsel on legal matters and laws of various states/counties within the Holston Conference.
4. Names of financial advisors willing to offer emergency counsel and guidance.
5. Limited, immediate, short-term financial assistance through Partners in Crisis, based on availability of funds.
6. Names and telephone numbers of current district superintendents and the director of the Holston Conference Pastoral Counseling Center who can support/advise the spouse during the crisis and subsequent healing process.

An integral part of the purpose of Partners in Crisis is confidentiality. Group discussions of a specific crisis are outside the parameters of regular meetings of the facilitators, thus assuring the spouse that her/his situation never becomes part of the business discussion.

Partners in Crisis are bound by faith in Jesus Christ and fellowship in the connectional church. It is committed to providing a safety net of prayerful, compassionate support, while avoiding blame and judgment.

## **STRUCTURE**

**Purpose:** To provide a safety net for the spouse in crisis in his or her marriage relationship to a clergy person.

**Structure:** To include facilitators who relate to the Pastoral Counseling Center, the Board of Ordained Ministry and the Steward of Clergy Concerns.

**Function:** To set policy based on needs and to implement its purpose, at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

**Membership:** To be comprised of concerned spouses of Holston Conference clergy.

**Meetings:** To meet twice a year in the spring and in the fall, or more often as determined by the officers of PIC. Notices shall be sent to recent attendees or by request.

**Officers:** Facilitators to elect co-chairpersons, a secretary and a treasurer at first meeting of the calendar year before Annual Conference.

**Terms:** The officers shall serve two years, and may succeed themselves when needed.

**Chair emeritus:** Betty Hurlock as founder shall continue to serve as circumstances allow.

**The Nominating Committee** shall be comprised of the officers, the spouse of the bishop if she/he desires to serve and one other facilitator who attends meetings regularly. The slate of officers shall be presented at the meeting prior to Annual Conference, and shall be open to other nominations. In the event an officer cannot complete a term, the nominating committee shall appoint a person to serve until the next meeting of the facilitators.

## **PREPARATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF GUIDELINES**

**Updating Information:** Volunteers for housing, legal and financial counsel need to be confirmed annually by the committee or other volunteers following Annual Conference.

**Distribution of Guidelines:** Cost of booklets to be funded by the Conference. Pages with changes shall be provided annually for the following, with full booklets printed only as needed. For the purposes of confidentiality, the volunteers who provide housing and other services shall be included in the printed booklets, but not on the website.

Spouses attending retreat or luncheon at Annual Conference, if internet not accessible  
Volunteers listed as providers of temporary housing, legal, financial and other counsel  
The officers of PIC  
Director, Pastoral Counseling Center  
Each district superintendent/office secretary  
Each member of the extended cabinet  
Spouse of each district superintendent  
Episcopal office/secretary to the bishop  
Spouse of the bishop  
Website, with the exceptions noted above

## **HOLSTON CONFERENCE PASTORAL COUNSELING CENTER**

Services of the Holston Conference Pastoral Counseling Center are an extended ministry of the Holston Conference. This service exists to support and encourage the emotional, spiritual and relational wellbeing of the clergy and clergy families of the Holston Annual Conference. Services include counseling, spiritual direction, individual, couple and family therapy about a variety of issues including grief and loss, divorce recovery, vocational discernment depression and anxiety, all of which could be important for the clergy spouse. Support for spouses of the clergy is a primary aim of the work

**CONFIDENTIALITY** – Information shared in a session or in consultation is held in confidence. It is only with the written signed request of one seeking services that the counselor involved would supply information about participation in counseling or anything shared in counseling with a third party or agency. There are limits to confidentiality set by state law. Exceptions relate to intended harm to self or others and also information about child or elder abuse or neglect.

**COST** – The Holston Conference provides funding for this office and services are provided free of charge. The spouse of a clergy person is eligible for counseling without charge for two years following a divorce as are children, as long as they are dependents.

**STAFF** – Rev. Laura Shearer is director of the Pastoral Counseling Center and provides counseling services. She is ordained clergy under appointment in the Holston Conference as well as a licensed professional counselor. Laura provides compassionate, skilled counseling services on a variety of issues. She has worked in counseling since 1995. The primary office for counseling is in Knoxville, but Laura also sees clients in Abingdon, Johnson City, and Chattanooga. Hours for appointments are Monday thru Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with extended hours available by special arrangement.

**EMERGENCY ROOM** – Partners in Crisis can be considered the “emergency room” for the spouse in marital crisis. Acting as partner, PIC will provide an immediate response to an individual’s need. The Pastoral Counseling Center offers professional help and support for the spouse and children during separation, divorce and recovery. Likewise, the Steward of Clergy Concerns can become pastor to the spouse whose marriage to a clergy person is in crisis.

**MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT** - While the purpose of Partners in Crisis does not include a wellness clinic for marriages, PIC recommends that each district provide regularly schedules marriage enrichment events for clergy and spouses. Information is available through your district superintendent.

**CONTACT** Laura A Shearer at 865-692-2390 in emergencies for an appointment.

## IN AN EMERGENCY

**Contact Persons** - A spouse should not hesitate to call his or her district superintendent, the Steward of Clergy Concerns, the director of the Holston Conference Pastoral Counseling Center or any listed below during an emergency. Contact Helpline in several areas can also offer assistance and will have the *Guidelines*. They have been contacted about Partners in Crisis.

These persons want to assist and to facilitate an immediate response to needs such as housing, protection, child care, financial assistance and counsel for the spouse of a clergy person in a marital crisis. Any spouse who needs help is urged to call one of the contact persons. He or she will respond appropriately with discretion and confidentiality.

**In an emergency**, or if counsel is needed, call one of the persons below. Available day or night, any of them will assist the spouse and/or refer the caller to someone who can.

|                                                               |                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Beth Green, co-chair</b>                                   | <b>(C) (423) 331-7451</b><br><b>(H) (865) 983-5640</b> |
| <b>Thelma Hamilton, co-chair</b>                              | <b>(H) (423) 746-0367</b>                              |
| <b>Laura Shearer, Director<br/>Pastoral Counseling Center</b> | <b>(O) (865) 692-2390</b>                              |
| <b>Rev. Daniel Taylor<br/>Steward of Clergy Concerns</b>      | <b>(O) 865-690-4080</b><br><b>(C) 865-679-7500</b>     |

## DISTRICT OFFICES

|                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Abingdon:      | (276) 628-4421      |
| Big Stone Gap: | (276) 523-3025      |
| Chattanooga:   | (423) 629-0333/0625 |
| Cleveland:     | (423) 476-8221      |
| Johnson City   | (423) 926-7533/4988 |
| Kingsport      | (423) 224-1533      |
| Knoxville      | (865) 470-7005      |
| Maryville      | (865) 982-1427      |
| Morristown     | (423) 586-2942      |
| Oak Ridge      | (865) 482-3209      |
| Tazewell:      | (276) 988-4891      |
| Wytheville:    | (276) 228-4922      |

## CONTACT HELPLINE

This inter-denominational listening/referral agency is available in many areas to receive calls in the event that the spouse is uncomfortable for any reason in contacting those listed above.

|                                 |                                     |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Care Helpline                   | (865) 584-4424 (several counties)   |
| Knoxville Family Justice Center | (865) 215-6810 (includes Oak Ridge) |
| Chattanooga Area:               | (423) 266-8228                      |
| Johnson City Area:              | (423) 926-0144                      |
| Kingsport Area:                 | (423) 246-2273                      |

## **GUIDELINES FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

### **IMMEDIATE AND SHORT-TERM NEEDS**

#### **Housing**

The district superintendent, the Episcopal office, the Holston Conference Pastoral Counseling Center and numerous others have the current list of those who offer temporary housing in their homes. They are listed in the booklet, but not on the internet. The spouse may call directly to the person of his/her choice. They offer pure hospitality—no strings attached. You have no obligation to explain your situation.

We offer temporary housing in a home for a few days or in a hotel for 2 or 3 days.

#### **Meals**

Money for meals for two days will be provided for the spouse and his/her children.

#### **Transportation**

Cash may be applied to expenses for gasoline, taxi, bus, etc

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

**Short-term needs** such as medicine, child-care, and so on, may be provided as needed through your district superintendent who will be reimbursed by PIC.

**Longer-Term Needs** A one-time sum will be made available for housing, utilities, telephone, deposits, and so on. Money will be paid directly to the provider of such services by the treasurer of Partners in Crisis.

Necessary funds for child-care in addition to this amount will be made available upon request.

Available financial assistance will be up to \$1650.00 at the discretion of the Executive Committee as the funds are available.

### **ACCESSING FUNDS**

A request for funds shall be made through the office of the district superintendent. If he or she cannot be contacted, any persons listed on the following page can be called in an emergency. The PIC treasurer will then reimburse the district office as funds are available. The whole dollar amount will be disbursed as needed through the district superintendent.

### **REIMBURSEMENT**

The recipient of financial help should not feel embarrassed or hesitant to request funds for the emergency. If and when the spouse is able to do so, the recipient is encouraged to reimburse the funds in the amount of 50 percent of money received. This returns to the treasury to assist other spouses. Financial assistance will be up to \$1650 at the discretion of the Executive Committee as funds are available.

