

One pastor's response

By Kevin E. Frederick

On May 2, 2012, in the Phoenix suburb of Gilbert, five family members huddled together behind locked doors: Lisa Mederos, age 47, her daughters Amber, 23, and Brittany, 19, and Amber's 15-month-old daughter, Lily, and fiancé, Jimmy Hiot. They were hiding from Lisa's ex-boyfriend, Jason Todd "J. T." Ready, well known for his anti-immigrant tirades and links to neo-Nazi organizations, and with a history of abusing Lisa and threatening Jimmy. Suddenly, they heard a loud noise—Ready's truck crashing into the garage.

Within minutes, four of the five, as well as Ready, were dead. Brittany had managed to hide under a bed in the back room before the shooting started. Across the country, in western North Carolina, Lisa's parents received the phone call that every parent dreads. "Mr. Holmquist, I am sorry to tell you that Lisa, Amber, her fiancé, and Lily have all been killed by Lisa's former boyfriend in a domestic homicide. He then took his own life. Brittany is safe and unharmed but badly shaken."

For Rolf and Diane Holmquist, members of First Presbyterian Church of Burnsville, North Carolina, a huge part of life as they had known it ended. The coming days were filled with planning and memorial services in Arizona and North Carolina. At Burnsville First, members who had known and loved the Holmqists for years came together with other residents of the small mountain town to grieve with them.

Along with all other pastors of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, I was notified of the tragedy. As cochair of the Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network, I contacted the Holmqists to offer our assistance. Ten days later we met.

While Burnsville First's interim pastor, Bill Lindemann, was providing compassionate pastoral care to the Holmqists, Rolf was looking for something more. He wanted to redirect his life toward addressing domestic violence and was eager to talk. "Kevin," he said, "God is calling me to service as a result of this terrible tragedy."

As we continued to talk , it became clear that the Holmquists and their congregation would need additional help to absorb this horrific tragedy. We decided that I would give an evening presentation about domestic violence at Burnsville First, followed by a worship service in the sanctuary that would include the larger community.

A few hours before I was to speak, I met Rolf and Diane at the their home, along with Bill Lindemann and Joe Bennett, a Presbyterian hospice chaplain and family friend, to discuss plans for the evening. We listened as Rolf and Diane reflected on this tragedy that had devastated their lives.

After an hour and a half, we headed to the church. It was then that I noticed the natural beauty surrounding their home, nestled deep in the cove of a mountain, its profile forming a serene backdrop. Rolf said it had provided a healing peace to them.

As I followed their car, I noticed the powerful emblem on its back window—a large decal of a red, filigreed cross with the words “In Loving Memory” emblazoned across it. Underneath were the names of the four victims, each birth date listed separately, but with a shared date of death: May 2, 2012.

I have never cared much for this type of memorial. But in this case I was struck by seeing the same death date alongside all four names. The brave witness of this couple, breaking the silence against domestic violence whenever they drive, moved me, especially when I considered that the decal must serve also as a painful reminder.

And then I realized that this decal only made public the pain, hidden deep, that had seared their hearts and will be present with each breath until their dying day.

Editor’s note: As part of his ongoing efforts against domestic violence, Kevin E. Frederick has written *Men in the Mirror: Orienting Our Lives toward a Christ-Centered Masculinity*, a 13-session curriculum that uses the Gospels’ portrayals of Christ to correct prevailing understandings of masculinity.

[Bio:] Kevin E. Frederick is pastor of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese, North Carolina, and current moderator of the Presbyterians Against

Domestic Violence Network, a volunteer network the Presbyterian Health, Education, Welfare Association.

[Photo credit:] Rolf Holmquist

[Photo caption:] Rolf and Diane Holmquist lost their daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter to domestic violence in 2012.