

# **East Coast Conference Women Ministries Welcomes New Advocate for Victims of Abuse Coordinator**

The East Coast Conference Women Ministries Board is thrilled to introduce the new conference AVA Coordinator, Colleen Cox, a member of Christ Church in Harleystown, Pennsylvania. Regional conference coordinators make up the AVA National Leadership Team, which helps provide direction, sets goals, and assists in implementing AVA's strategic plan. These coordinators are equipped to educate clergy and lay leaders at the local level as well as assist churches in the development of their own AVA ministry. Regional coordinators conduct educational workshops and seminars on adult and teen domestic violence and on adult survivors of sexual abuse for local churches, women ministries groups, and clergy. They also conduct AVA training for local church advocates.

The East Coast Conference has been without an AVA coordinator for some time. Conference Superintendent, Howard Burgoyne, in commenting on the appointment said: "AVA is a powerful and critical ministry that seeks to stand with victims of abuse as they journey towards becoming victors over their circumstances. I celebrate Colleen's appointment and look forward to supporting her ministry in the future." As the denominational website says, "The Evangelical Covenant Church is committed to this work because we knew that domestic violence and sexual abuse exist not only in our communities, but also in our congregations. AVA has been one of the highlights of our community of faith's commitment to stand up for the downtrodden and broken."

For more information about AVA see the denominational web site under Compassion, Mercy and Justice ministries. Advocates for Victims of Abuse (AVA), a denominational compassion, mercy and justice effort, began as a three year national Women Ministry special project in 2005. For more information about Colleen see the following interview. We trust you'll see why it's exciting to have her as a resource for our conference.

WM: Tell us about yourself.

CC: Well, I am an incredibly blessed woman. I was born and raised in Youngstown, Oh. I got to Pennsylvania on a long strange trip. I am divorced but remarried to my soul mate, the dream of my life, a true life partner, Jonathan. We will be together forever. My faith and my marriage are the two biggest things in my life.

I've always wanted to make a difference. Then I learned that I couldn't have children. But I wanted to leave a legacy and found I was drawn to social work as a career. I've been a social worker for 20 years. And that also, is a long, strange trip. I've worked with victims of violent crime, been certified in domestic violence; acquired a Master's degree and worked in homeless shelters and domestic abuse programs. I've been affected by people. Child abuse is so big. Now I serve as a supervisor with Child Welfare in Pennsylvania.

On the lighter side, I have two cats, Simon and Joshua, am a proud aunt, a youth leader in my church, and a Godmother.

WM: How did you learn of the Covenant's Advocates for Victims of Abuse (AVA) training?

CC: I was reading through the Triennial registration brochure and saw that a training event was going to be held before the conference. I was debating about whether to go or not, because I suspected there would be a lot of women's "rah rah stuff," which takes me out of my comfort zone. But I went to the website and checked out all that was going on. And I felt called. This could be an answer not only for my church, but also for other churches that don't have the expertise or experience to deal with the overwhelming issue of abuse. Immediately I knew it was not a question of "Will I go?", but "How quick can I get there?"

I am so excited to be part of such a wonderful effort. I always felt my work was special, but with AVA it feels like a calling. It takes social work one step further with a faith component.

WM: Tell us what the training was like. What did you expect?

CC: I come from a place of tons of training and half expected to be bored or on alert to be sure the information was correct. But I didn't have to do any of that. Yvonne DeV Vaughn is really, really very good. The training was comprehensive, encouraged partnership with existing efforts, and strongly recommended going through additional training and being certified. Then it added the faith piece. And the whole experience just made me very happy, even though I had to rush home for a medical emergency right after class.

WM: Tell us about your church family.

CC: I'm in my sixth year at Christ Church in Harleysville, Pa. I was raised Catholic and had issues with organized church for a long time. Then my best friend asked me to be Godmother for her baby. I figured it was time to be serious about spiritual things and finally found the incredible church family at Christ Covenant Church. I'm a youth leader there and work with junior and senior high young people. I hope I am making a difference for them in their faith walk.

WM: What do you hope to accomplish as an AVA Coordinator? What's your vision for AVA in the East Coast Conference?

CC: ( Laugh) Well, do you mean in a perfect world with no budget constraints...? We need to have a safe place for victims of abuse. I'd like to see at least a second coordinator and 2 advocates in every church, because the issues are so prevalent and there's so little training in the churches. Is there another social worker out there who's interested in being an AVA coordinator? The conference is so widespread there really should be two coordinators. And, unfortunately I know next to nothing about other churches in the conference. It would be wonderful if we could encourage advocates with special training in each church. I'd like to see an AVA awareness Sunday event around the conference in October, which is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. I need to let people know I'm here and I'm a resource. I'd like to do some kind of regular column on the website. And schedules permitting, I'm willing to speak at churches. I've already been invited to be a resource person at the Chesapeake District Women's retreat fall 2011. And I've created an e-mail site so people can communicate with me directly. It's [ColleenCoxava@yahoo.com](mailto:ColleenCoxava@yahoo.com). I see my role as catalyst. I was excited to attend the ECC Women Ministry Board planning meeting at the end of January when I got to meet the board and jointly plan. To think that God has given me the opportunity to interact with more than 70 churches! It's thrilling.