

When crime hits too close to home

MORAL PERSPECTIVES



REV. KATE THORESEN

Crime hit too close to home recently. Our daughter in college came home for her week-long semester break. When she returned to the home which she shared with other college students, she found the place ransacked.

Thieves had broken through the cellar windows and took all kinds of things, including a watch her fiancée had given to her and her mountain bike which she had scimped and saved for. She was furious. Yet there was nothing she could do except call the police.

Ten days later she and a neighbor were driving in another part of town to pick up some tomato plants for a planned garden. Suddenly she saw her bike. A 20-year-old or so guy was riding it. She recognized the special feature she had gotten for the bike, plus the dent she had put in it.

She followed the guy as he peddled down the street. As soon as she could, she found a safe place to park her car. She asked her friend to call 911 as she jumped out of her car and took off after the guy on her bike. She grabbed hold and would not let go.

The startled man started to hit her. She looked him in the eyes with a determination that told him that he was out of luck. She started to yell at the top of her lungs for help. A crowd gathered at the busy intersection. And people started to urge the panicking young man to kill her. She still held her ground and would not let go.

Three policemen arrived. She was safe. And she recovered her bike after proving it was hers. She

is pressing charges for possession of stolen property and for assault. She refused to be a passive victim and I'm proud of her for standing up for her rights. Enough is enough. People must stop crime. But as a protective parent, I shudder to think what would have happened if the man had grabbed a gun. I experienced a deeper solidarity with the parents whose kids have been shot in Detroit.

A news article said recently that Detroit police records show that 98 youth ages 16 and younger have been shot this year — 11 fatally. And one child was struck by gunshot while he was riding in a school bus.

I wonder what fueled the crowd to egg him on in hitting her. Why weren't there just as many people to say to her and to stop him? When will people stand up and confront destructive behavior that threatens the lives of our children? When will plain everyday, ordinary folk just say, "Stop it. This isn't right. You cannot just steal stuff and get away with it! You cannot hit or hurt another person. Period."

When will this mass apathy be transformed into mass responsibility? It may be safer to think, "Well, it's THEIR problem." Or to say to ourselves, "I sure hope the city gets it act together for stricter law enforcement and to get guns and drugs off the streets." Or "Why don't THEY do something about it?"

Sorry, but I don't see it that way. Crime is OUR problem whether we fall victim to it or not. It affects each one of us. Together we can make a dramatic impact on crime prevention and law enforcement. We don't have to be apathetic or helpless or hopeless. We can help take responsibility especially in the areas of prevention.

How? We can volunteer just two-three hours a week and serve as friends and tutors for inner city kids through church and youth club programs. If each child had another adult who cared and contributed to his or her well being on a regular basis, then we would see more young people with hope in their own future.

We need to find ways to provide some of the opportunities for ALL children which our own children may take for granted. For example, for \$90 or so, we could provide a campership that sends a kid to camp for a week. For \$110, we can send 10 Boy Scouts for a camping adventure this summer they won't forget.

We can support the endeavors of young people who are working to build bridges and make a positive difference through our contributions to Motor City Mission Mania — a work camp experience in which 300 young people will come from all over the country to work at various sites in Detroit June 26-July 2. Let me know if you are interested. We'll find concrete ways for you to plug in to help improve conditions for safe streets.

We don't have to wring our hands in despair over the plight of crime. We can join our hands together and stop those forces which victimize people. Together as partners with many positive people and groups in the city, we can reach out from our familiar zones of comfort and confront some of the root causes of crime, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, child abuse and hopelessness.

We CAN make a difference and must make our communities safe havens for our sons and daughters — places where children of all races and walks of life can be safe and grow up to be healthy, productive community members.

Rev. Kate Thoresen is director of Partnership Ministries of the First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham. If you have a question or comment, call her at 963-2047, mailbox number 1882, on a touch tone phone.

OCC art exhibit kicks off

"The Committee: Our Visions," an art exhibit and sale presented by the Women in Art Project will open with a reception 7-9 p.m. today in the Smith Theatre Gallery on Oakland Community College's Farmington Hills campus. The exhibit features all different kinds of art from poetry to water color.

The exhibit continues through June 4. Gallery hours are 6-9 p.m. on Thursdays and 12-5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. Admission is free. Call 471-7602.

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