

Dinah Project ends silence, pain of sexual abuse

By Patricia Lynch Kimbro
BANNER STAFF WRITER

David was only 7 when the abuse began. Within a year he was stuttering and lying to his mother.

He studied hard, thinking the A's he made would compensate for the bad feelings.

But they didn't.

"I grew up as a teen, not knowing who I was ... going on to college but never able to establish stable relationships," said David, describing the trauma he suffered as a result of sexual abuse.

David was one of several people who shared his story of pain and healing before the Metropolitan Interdenominational Church, during Sunday's worship service and community recognition of sexual violence.

The turning point in David's life began the day he picked up a phone and called a counselor.

"I need help," he said into the phone.

"That moment changed my life," said the young man, whose courage is helping to show the church that it must become a "safe place, a sanctuary" for victims.

When David ended his silence, his healing began, said Dr. Renita J. Weems, guest speaker.

"Silence is an enemy to truth," added Weems, who is a noted author, Vanderbilt University professor and ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Sunday's service introduced the Dinah Project, an organized church response to the crisis of sexual violence.

The Dinah Project took its name from Genesis 34, in which the rape of Jacob's daughter Dinah is described, Weems said.



BANNER PHOTO: FRED CLARKE

Dr. Cynthia Turner Graham is covered in layers of white cotton to dramatize the layers of repression and denial that the community has in regard to abuse.

"Upon learning of the rape, Dinah's brothers were outraged. They later avenged their sister by killing Dinah's rapist, Shechem, and his family.

"Like Dinah's brothers, we understand sexual violence to be the problem of the entire community. But rather than turning to vigilante violence, we believe that our righteous indignation can promote awareness, prevention and healing of sexual violence in our midst," Weems said.

The Dinah Project offers educational workshops for clergy and laity to promote awareness and appropriate response to the communitywide problem, said the Rev. Monica Coleman of Metropolitan Interde-

Please see ABUSE, page A2

People in the News

Abuse

Continued from page A1

nomination-
al Church.

Sexual violence crosses all economic, social, racial and gender barriers, Weems said.

But if victims stop keeping their secrets and tell their stories in a safe place, such as their

church, Weems said, their healing can begin.

"What does not kill us, makes us stronger and more fierce," Weems said.

"Our secrets are killing us. . . . tell your pastor, and if he doesn't want to listen, find a pastor who does," Weems urged.

For more information about the Dinah Project, contact the Metropolitan Interdenominational Church at 726-3876.