Faith House helps abused women, children

By CHERYL PAPA
Advocate correspondent

LAFAYETTE — Paula thought she had met the "perfect gentleman." But her hopes quickly faded when he began a string of emotional and physical abuse that would last for years.

Paula's life of fear and sorrow began shortly after the pair got together. He hit her once, then twice, and the abuse continued to increase.

She thought he would change after getting married, but he instead escalated the abuse.

"The beatings just got worse, and they happened more and more," said Paula, not her real name.

Paula said he was a jealous man, who constantly accused her of having sexual relations with other men. And he followed her regularly.

"I could just talk to a man, just say 'How are you doing?' and my husband would get angry and tell me that I must be sleeping with him," she said.

Paula said he always tried to control her.

"He held onto me like a prisoner," she said.

When he got angry, he beat her with his hands or with objects. He also has threatened her life.

After being abused by the man in her life over and over, and after always leaving and then returning home, Paula said she is finally ready to get on with her life without him.

As she reflects on the abuse she experienced, she relates that the primary emotion she feels is anger.

"Sometimes I wish I could just blow his brains out," Paula, who has a son, said from her temporary home, which is Lafayette's Faith House. The Faith House is a crisis
shelter for battered women and children.
Paula said she doesn't know exactly why she kept going back to him.
"I guess I was dependent on him, and I had no pride in myself," she said.
Paula said that he made her feel like she was worth nothing and that she couldn't accomplish anything.
She said she spent many hours just lying in her bed feeling depressed.
"It gave me the creeps just to have him touch me. He made me sick. I thought about poisoning him many times," said Paula.

Judyth Wier, a Faith House counselor, said some women go back to the abusive men in their lives because they have a tough time supporting themselves when they leave. Generally, women who flee that type of setting have a difficult time finding housing, she said.

Wier said the Faith House offers crisis services to battered women and children. It provides meals and shelter, counseling and help in getting started on a new life. The shelter offers various groups for the residents to get involved with, such as self-esteem groups and Bible study groups.

It is supported by churches and various organizations, such as the United Way, along with individual donations. Lafayette Parish government contributes $10,000, but the Lafayette City Council turned down the request for $10,400, according to Wier.

Wier said people generally stay at the Faith House for about 15 days, but they are allowed to stay up to 30 days. However, extensions can be given if needed. Also, homeless women can stay at the shelter for up to 72 hours.

Wier said the 30 days gives women time to think about their situation and begin a new life.
"The main thing is people know they are safe here," she said.
Paula said this last time that she left her husband she knew she had to get out of her situation, so she called the operator to find a shelter for battered women, and she got the phone number of the Faith House.

Paula said the Faith House has helped her get on with her life by offering her counseling and a support system. She is building her confidence.

Judyth Wier, counselor at the Faith House in Lafayette, said she is trying to get an apartment, and she has ideas for career opportunities.
"I just want to be happy. I want to find a man who will love and trust me, and who I can trust. I want a free life," she said.
Paula said women in an abusive situation need to free themselves from it.
"Please just get out of the situation," she urged. "It will never change. You've got to change it for yourself."
Wier said men who abuse women have misplaced anger. She said they are violent because they want power and control.
"You're not a bad woman because you cooked meatloaf instead of pork chops," she said.
Wier said that, after having time away from the abusive setting, many begin to realize what they have been living with, and what they have been living without.
"Being able to talk on the phone is new to some women," she said.
Paula said she is learning that the abuse wasn't her fault.
"Now I realize that it wasn't me. It was him," she said.
Paula said anything would set off her husband. If he had problems at work, he would come home and take them out on her.
She said he has a history of abusing the women in his life.
Wier said men have to learn how to communicate their true feelings to people.
"Men must take responsibility for their actions," she said.
Wier said society has conditioned men to take a more aggressive role and women to take a more passive role.
By getting women in more aggressive roles, such as politics, society could begin to change the way it conditions people, she said.
In order to prevent domestic violence, the public has to be made aware that it is a serious issue that has to be addressed, said Wier.
Also, laws involving domestic violence must be enforced, she said.
"An effort has to be made not to push this under the rug," said Wier. "Women in an abusive situation should just call us and tell us what's going on."
The Faith House telephone number is 232-8954.