



Ministry in the Midst of Tragedy

On Friday, August 7, 2015, Vermont state employees left

work and made their way to the parking lot together. There, a former client confronted and killed Lara Sobel, a social worker in the Department for Children and Families.

Jody Herring shot her because Lara played a part in a custody battle involving Jody's nine-year-old daughter.

One of the witnesses, the Washington County State's Attorney General, struggled with Ms. Herring to retrieve the gun and police apprehended her at the scene.

The killing shocked the residents of Barre, Vermont.

Religious leaders and social work professionals began to coordinate a response and planned a vigil in memory of Lara. However, the community was unprepared for what came next. On the following morning, a relative of Jody Herring discovered three slain family members in their home-Jody's aunt and two cousins. Authorities allege that Jody believed these family members reported information to social workers that was used to remove her daughter from her home.¹

Four slayings in less than twenty-four hours seemed impossible in their small town. One of the religious leaders who found himself in the midst of this unfolding tragedy, was Carl Hilton-VanOsdall. He is the pastor at First Presbyterian Church, a congregation whose

parking lot adjoins the parking lot where the shooting occurred. How do pastors and churches deal with the unimaginable when it occurs just outside their doors or in their community?

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I'LL TAKE THE "OLD NORMAL" OVER THE "NEW NORMAL"
ANY DAY.

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