

# A2A DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

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## Testimony from an abused wife who was Children's Ministry leader in her church -

"I attend a Missionary Alliance church..unfortunately, I was totally unaware of their stances on marriage: <http://www.cmalliance.org/about/beliefs/perspectives/divorce>..When I went to church leaders about abuse in my marriage, they supported my husband, while removing me from my leadership role in children's ministry. They haven't emailed or talked to me, making me feel like I'm an outcast.

<https://cryingoutforjustice.com/resources/church-positions-on-abuse/>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Domestic Abuse (“D.A.”) includes verbal, emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual, and financial abuse between people domiciled together.
- With estimates of more than one in five domiciled Australian adults experiencing Domestic Abuse, this is an issue that pastors and church leaders cannot ignore and must address.
- Pastors need to be aware that incidents of violent physical assault by someone in an intimate relationship against someone they are domiciled with, may be a criminal offence which pastors must encourage to be reported to Police.
- Heated exchanges between family members where hurtful things are said happen due to our fallen nature do not necessarily constitute D.A. unless they intentionally continue.
- Pastors should explain to their congregations God’s plan for how those in an intimate relationship are to treat each other and correct misunderstandings around those passages which have been used by spiritual abusers.
- Pastors should not seek to cover up reports of domestic violence made to them by a victim.
- Pastors are strongly encouraged to refer cases of DA to trained professionals.

## Do

- *Listen* to domestic abuse victims
- Show *belief*
- Offer practical assistance such as child-minding, or removal to a refuge. “Do you have a safe place to stay?”
- Advise reporting any incidence of violence, which is a criminal offence, to Police
- Encourage protection for the abused and any children involved, which may mean separation
- Record in writing an accurate report of the allegations made

## Don't

- Interrogate the abused - especially for sordid details, and most especially for sexual details
- Make the victim feel guilty for being abused
- Tell the abused they must submit to their abuser
- Condemn the abused for not honouring their wedding vow of *loving for better and for worse*
- Discourage a victim of domestic violence from reporting their assault to Police
- Use the children of the abused as interpreters if dealing with a non-English speaking victim
- Have physical contact with the victim
- Expect them to make any major decision - such as leaving for a shelter

# 1. Preamble : The Need

The prevalence of domestic violence in Australian general society is deeply concerning. Churches should now expect that those they are reaching out to will reflect these alarming statistics. This calls for local churches to adopt policies which will adequately address the growing need to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected within their own families. It is becoming apparent that many pastors have unwittingly endangered family abuse victims who have come to them seeking help and have been counselled to return home and “submit”. This policy document will seek to offer wisdom for pastors and church leaders who want to be both faithful to Scripture and protective of those in their charge.

## The Data

We acknowledge that domestic violence can and does occur by females to men, however, according to the Australian website, *Our Watch*, “The following basic statistics help demonstrate the prevalence and severity of violence against women:”

- ~ **On average, at least one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner in Australia.**

(Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), 2015.)

- ~ **One in three Australian women has experienced physical violence, since the age of 15.**

(Cox, P. (2015) [Violence against women: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey 2012](#), Horizons Research Report, Issue 1, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), Sydney; and

Woodlock, D., Healey, L., Howe, K., McGuire, M., Geddes, V. and Granek, S. (2014) [Voices against violence paper one: Summary report and recommendations](#), Women with Disabilities Victoria, Office of the Public Advocate and Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria.)

- **One in five Australian women has experienced sexual violence.** (ibid)
- **One in four Australian women has experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner.**  
(ibid)
- **One in four Australian women has experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner.**  
(Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2012.)
- **Women are at least three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner.**  
(In 2012, 17% of all women and 5% of men had experienced violence by a partner since the age of 15. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), [Australian Bureau of Statistics \(2013\) Personal Safety, Australia 2012, Cat. No. 4906.0](#), Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Canberra.)
- **Women are five times more likely than men to require medical attention or hospitalisation as a result of intimate partner violence, and five times more likely to report fearing for their lives.**  
(Mouzos, J. (1999) [Femicide: An overview of major findings, No. 124](#), Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, pp. 1-6; Statistics Canada (2003) [Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 2003](#), Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Ministry of Justice, Canada.)
- **Of those women who experience violence, more than half have children in their care.**  
(National Crime Prevention (2001) Young people and domestic violence: National research on young people's attitudes and experiences of domestic violence, Crime Prevention Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Canberra; and Cox (2015).)
- **Violence against women is not limited to the home or intimate relationships. Every year in Australia, over 300,000 women experience violence – often sexual violence – from someone other than a partner.**  
(ABS (2013). Survey extrapolated to population figures on the basis of 3.8% of all women surveyed reporting having experienced physical or sexual violence from a non-partner in the past 12 months (and approximately 9 million women over the age of 18 in Australia).)

- ~ **Eight out of ten women aged 18 to 24 were harassed on the street in the past year.**

(Johnson, M. and Bennett, E. (2015) *Everyday sexism: Australian women's experiences of street harassment*, The Australia Institute, Canberra.)

- ~ **Young women (18 – 24 years) experience significantly higher rates of physical and sexual violence than women in older age groups.**

(ABS (2013). In the 2012 Personal Safety Survey, 13% of women in this age group reported having experienced violence by a man in the last 12 months. This was the highest proportion of any age group.)

- ~ **There is growing evidence that women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence.**

(Cox, P. (2015), and Woodlock, D., Healey, L., Howe, K., McGuire, M., Geddes, V. and Granek, S. (2014).)

- ~ **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience both far higher rates and more severe forms of violence compared to other women.**

(For example, Indigenous women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults than non-Indigenous people. Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2014).)

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/Understanding-Violence/Facts-and-figures>

In an ABC TV report on domestic violence within Australian churches produced by the *7:30 Report*, they give this opening anecdote -

The culprits were obvious: it was the menopause or the devil.

Who else could be blamed, Peter screamed at his wife in nightly tirades, for her alleged insubordination, for her stupidity, her lack of sexual pliability, her refusal to join him on the 'Tornado' ride at a Queensland waterpark, her annoying friendship with a woman he called "Ratface"? For her sheer, complete failure as a woman?

Family and domestic violence support services:

The abuse went on, day and night, as Sally bore a child, worked morning shifts at the local hospital and stayed up late pumping breast milk for her baby.

She was deeply exhausted, depleted and worn.

The night before Sally finally left her husband and the townhouse they lived in on Sydney's northern beaches he told her she was also failing her spiritual duties.

“Your problem is you won't obey me. The Bible says you must obey me and you refuse,” he yelled. “You are a failure as a wife, as a Christian, as a mother. You are an insubordinate piece of s\*\*t.”

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-18/domestic-violence-church-submit-to-husbands/8652028>

This report by Julia Baird with Hayley Gleeson contains many interviews with Christian women - including pastors' wives - who not only endured physical, emotional, psychological, financial, violence, but when they approached their senior church leaders for help they were told that it was their duty as a wife to *submit* to their husbands for better and *for worse*. This frequently led to these women undergoing further, and even worse, physical and sexual abuse. Disturbingly, Baird and Gleeson state that Christian churches in Australia generally, and their denominational leadership, have been negligent by not responding appropriately to domestic violence within their churches.

In the past couple of years, concern has been growing amongst those working with survivors of domestic violence about the role the Christian church of all denominations can either consciously or inadvertently play in allowing abusive men to continue abusing their wives.

There is therefore an urgent need for churches and their denominational support to provide clear policy guidelines for how can better respond to instances of domestic violence within our churches.



## 2. The Definitions of Domestic Abuse & Violence

In defining *domestic violence* (DV) many organisations are now employing the broader term, *domestic abuse*. While ‘violence’ conjures the impression of physical hurt, the use of the term *abuse* encompasses hurt caused in a variety of ways where the hurt may be repeated humiliation, unreasonable deprivation, or physical pain.

In a 2011 background briefing to Federal Government Parliamentary Inquiry, Liesl Mitchell, from the Social Policy Section of the Department of Parliamentary Services, noted -

There has been much debate regarding the most appropriate terminology to use for violence between spouses and partners. Objections have been raised to both ‘domestic violence’ and ‘family violence’ (the terms most often used), as well as use of terms such as ‘victims’ of domestic violence.[B Fehlberg and J Behrens, *Australian family law: the contemporary context*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2008, pp. 177–179.] This background note generally uses the term ‘domestic violence’ and refers to ‘victims’ of domestic violence as these are the most-commonly used and best understood of the alternatives. The broader term ‘family violence’ is used in relation to Indigenous people, as it is the preferred term in many Indigenous communities.

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship in domestic settings.[A Morgan and H Chadwick, *Key issues in domestic violence*, Summary paper, no. 7, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), Canberra, December 2009, p. 1, viewed 28 October 2010, [http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/5/6/E/%7B56E09295-AF88-4998-A083-B7CCD925B540%7Drip07\\_001.pdf](http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/5/6/E/%7B56E09295-AF88-4998-A083-B7CCD925B540%7Drip07_001.pdf)] These acts include

physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse [Ibid]. Defining forms of violence, its perpetrators and their victims, is complicated by the many different kinds of intimate and family relationships and living arrangements present in Australian communities [For a discussion of the complexities involved in defining family and domestic violence see: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Conceptual framework for family and domestic violence*, cat. no. 4529.0, ABS, Canberra, 2009, viewed 6 December 2010, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4529.0/>]. Domestic violence is most commonly perpetrated by males against their female partners, but it also includes violence against men by their female partners and violence within same-sex relationships.

The traditional associations of domestic violence are with acts of physical violence within relationships occurring in the home but this understanding fails to grasp the complexity of the phenomenon. The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and Children (NCRVWC) found that:

... a central element of domestic violence is that of an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling one's partner through fear (for example, by using violent or threatening behaviour) ... the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics used by the perpetrator to exercise power and control ... and can be both criminal and non-criminal in nature [National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and Children (NCRVWC), *Background paper to Time for Action: The National Council's plan to reduce violence against women and children, 2009–2021*, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), Canberra, 2009, p. 13, viewed 28 October 2010, [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/np\\_time\\_for\\_action/background/Documents/Background\\_Paper\\_to\\_Time\\_for\\_Action.PDF](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/np_time_for_action/background/Documents/Background_Paper_to_Time_for_Action.PDF); Department for Planning and Community Development, *Family violence risk assessment and risk management framework*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2007, p. 21, viewed 19 September 2011, [http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/581757/risk-assessment-risk-management-framework-2007.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/581757/risk-assessment-risk-management-framework-2007.pdf)].

Domestic violence includes:

- emotional abuse—blaming the victim for all problems in the relationship, undermining the victim's self-esteem and self-worth through comparisons with others, withdrawing interest and engagement and emotional blackmail
- verbal abuse—swearing and humiliation in private and public, focusing on intelligence, sexuality, body image or the victim's capacity as a parent or spouse
- social abuse—systematic isolation from family and friends, instigating and controlling relocations to a place where the victim has no social circle or employment opportunities and preventing the victim from going out to meet people

- economic abuse—controlling all money, forbidding access to bank accounts, providing an inadequate ‘allowance’, preventing the victim seeking or holding employment and taking wages earned by the victim
- psychological abuse—making threats regarding custody of children, asserting the justice system will not believe or support the victim, destroying property, abusing pets and driving dangerously
- spiritual abuse—denial and/or misuse of religious beliefs or practices to force victims into subordinate roles and misusing religious or spiritual traditions to justify physical violence or other abuse
- physical abuse—direct assaults on the body, use of weapons (including objects), assault of children, locking the victim out of the house, sleep and food deprivation, and
- sexual abuse—any form of pressured/unwanted sex or sexual degradation, causing pain during sex, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly and criticising or using degrading insults [NCRVWC, *Background paper to Time for Action*, op. cit., pp. 13–14; S Tually, D Faulkner, C Cutler and M Slatter, *Women, domestic and family violence and homelessness: a synthesis report*, (prepared for the Office for Women), FaHCSIA, Canberra, August 2008, p. 5, viewed 17 August 2011, [http://fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/synthesis\\_report08/Pages/default.aspx](http://fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/synthesis_report08/Pages/default.aspx)].

Family violence is a broader term referring to violence between family members as well as violence between intimate partners. This term also covers a complexity of behaviours beyond that of direct physical violence. The Australian and New South Wales Law Reform Commission’s review of family violence law in Australia recommended that state and territory legislation ‘should provide that family violence is violent or threatening behaviour, or any other form of behaviour, that coerces or controls a family member or causes that family member to be fearful’ [Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) and New South Wales Law Reform Commission (NSWLRC), *Family violence: a national legal response: final report, volume 1*, ALRC Report 114/NSWLRC Report 128, ALRC and NSWLRC, Sydney, 2010, p. 17, viewed 5 September, [http://dpl/Books/2010/ALRC114-NSWLRC128\\_FamilyViolence.pdf](http://dpl/Books/2010/ALRC114-NSWLRC128_FamilyViolence.pdf)].

[http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BN/2011-2012/DVAustralia](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2011-2012/DVAustralia)

The British Government uses the following definition for domestic abuse -

Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.

*Responding to Domestic Abuse - Guidelines for those with pastoral responsibilities*, Church House Publishing (Anglican), The Archbishops' Council, 2006

It is worth noting that domestic violence (where) -

... acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship in domestic settings.

- is a criminal offence and ministers are obliged to encourage such victims of these crimes to report these incidents to Police.

# 3. Theological Framework

The *home* is meant to be a safe place which is free from abuse, intimidation, degrading and demeaning language and conduct, and intentional physical harm. It is designed by God to be a place where its members enjoy love, nurture, protection, provision, care, and support. A family home is generally founded on a marriage which then most naturally leads to children being added to that family. It is in the family home that a father and mother each represent complementary aspects of God and His character to their children. While a father particularly represents the Father-heart of God, a mother particularly represents nurturing

## The Trinity

Our understanding of the Trinity informs us about how we are created to be in *community* since we are made in the image of God. The language of the Trinity is *filial* language, that is, terms such as *Father*, *Son*, and *Comforter*, is family language. God has established the family unit of father, mother and children as one of the sacred ways to make Himself known to us.

Thus our picture of *family* and *home* is one where there is love, nurture, comfort, hope, redemption, grace, justice, and responsibility. Since the Trinity is utterly joyful in each others company, the family homes of those seeking to honour God are also places of joy, laughter, and happiness. This is why abuse within the family home undermines this picture of the Godhead.

## The Fall

Due to our mutual share in Adam's fall into sin, none of us now accurately reflect the beauty of God. This means that even the most sanctified members of the most sanctified families will stumble and sin. This regrettably results in heated exchanges between family members where things are said that should not be. It means the siblings squabble. It means that brothers who play-fight may take things too far. It means that a spouse may hit, kick, punch, slap, pinch, or clench, their spouse in a heated moment of weakness. These 'moments' cause hurt. They are testament to our fallen nature. But, unless they intentionally continue, an incident does not necessarily designate someone as an "abuser".

Even under the Old Covenant, when Cain's heart was filled with envy and bitterness toward his brother Abel, God declared-

The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

Genesis 4:6-7

How much more under the New Covenant with the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives are we expected to demonstrate restraint and self-control?

for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Second Timothy 1:7

Therefore, any appeal a believer makes about being "forced" to inflict physical pain on their spouse is Biblically exposed as a lack of self-control and submission to the Holy Spirit. Similarly, comments such as "she had it coming", made by a spouse-abuser, are to be confronted with the truth of God's Word and rebuked.

# Hermeneutics

Many of the abused Christian wives interviewed by Baird and Gleeson had had their Christian husbands justify their abuse by citing Ephesians 5:22-24.

¶ Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Ephesians 5:22-24

One wife reported that when she protested to her husband that what he was asking her to do was *sin*, he said that it was *a greater sin* for her not to submit to his request to commit this sin!

Several of these women also stated that they had sought help from their church leadership or denominational authorities for helpful intervention but had been told that they needed to return to their husbands and submit to his authority despite almost certain harm and abuse being the result.

These responses to instances of domestic violence within Christian marriages reflect an appalling hermeneutic of the Scriptures. It ignores the four foundational principles of sound hermeneutics which are -

1. Always read a Scripture in its context.
2. Always have the Scriptures interpret a Scripture.
3. Always note the original audience's understanding of a Scripture.
4. Never interpret a Scripture so that it contradicts the overall message of Scripture.

The context of the Ephesians 5 passage includes submitting *to one another* -  
submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Ephesians 5:21

It also implores husbands to *love their wives as Christ loves the Church* -

¶ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

Ephesians 5:25

Physical, verbal, and/or sexual, abuse is never 'loving' and can therefore never be justified by twisting this Ephesians passage.

¶ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

First Peter 3:7

Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture would demand that a believer always keep a clear conscience before God - despite what their authorities might coerce them to do.

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:29

The original audience of this passage, the Ephesians, would never have understood the Apostle Paul to be saying that a wife must submit to her husband's beatings or abuse. This is especially the case when the Apostle goes on to say -

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

Ephesians 5:28-29

The overall message of Scripture instructs husbands to love, cherish, and honour their wives by treating them gently, kindly, and with respect.

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5:33

No husband has either the right to beat his wife and claim the Bible permits him to do so, or coerce her to commit sexual or any sin under the guise of



‘Biblical submission’, and certainly, no pastor should endorse or tolerate such abuse of women or the Scriptures!

An Anglican Church Committee report into domestic abuse noted the following theological insight about the relationship of sin, marriage, family and domestic abuse -

Theology must take account of the insight from developmental psychology that all human relationships are conditioned by domestic experiences. Learned behaviour and attitudes within the family unit have effects, for good and ill, upon subsequent relationships.

Marriage and other intimate relationships have potential for healing: in the emotional affirmation and support which couples offer to one another, the psychological hurts sustained in earlier life can be contained and overcome. Conversely, those hurts may contribute to the failure of relationships and as a result may be reinforced and deepened.

In Christian understanding sin includes both what we do and what is done to us through the relationships and systems in which we live. A realistic view must recognize both that human beings act under the impact of negative influences and temptations, and that they have some degree of control (depending on circumstances) over what they do. Sometimes people choose evil and even find fulfilment in it.

Responsibility for domestic abuse is not mitigated by the factors that condition the behaviour of perpetrators. However, the destructive dynamics of sin must be taken into account when thinking about the possibility of change. Because of the traumatic and life-threatening effects of domestic abuse, sober realism about the behaviour of perpetrators is necessary. Despite his compassion and hopefulness, Jesus reserved strong words of condemnation for the abusers of children (Matthew 18.6) and the Churches must not compromise in their identification of domestic abuse as sin.

Responding to Domestic Abuse - Guidelines for those with pastoral responsibilities, page 19

## **Divorce**

If marriage is meant to picture the community of the Trinity where there is love, faithfulness, and happiness, divorce is a tragic distortion of that picture. God declares that He *hates* divorce.

“I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel, “and the one who is guilty of violence,” says the LORD who rules over all. “Pay attention to your conscience, and do not be unfaithful.”

Malachi 2:16 NET

Yet the God who *hates* divorce is Himself *divorced*.

She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore.

Jeremiah 3:8

God knows the pain of divorce *because He has experienced it*. His original bride, Israel, betrayed Him and committed adultery. Despite His constant pleas for them to return, they went from adultery into harlotry (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; 3:3, 6, 8).

then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols. And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations.

Ezekiel 6:9

## The Danger Of Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism’s hermeneutic is to interpret Scripture with a certain wooden literalism where Biblical words are treated as *unequivocal* (having only one meaning). This leads to the over-simplification of certain Scriptural passages which ignores the four foundational principles of hermeneutics mentioned and explained under the heading *Hermeneutics*. A Fundamentalist will state that it is never God’s will for any marriage to end in divorce. This kind of statement ignores the two dimensions of God’s will, (i) God’s desired will, and (ii) God’s decreed will. God *will*s that all people come to Him for the forgiveness of their sins, yet our Lord stated plainly that not all people will (Matt. 7:13-14). No one or thing can withstand, thwart, or hinder God’s *decreed* will from happening. For example, while it is God’s desired will that all people abstain from sexual immorality, it is not God’s decreed will that this *will* happen.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

First Thessalonians 4:3

Similarly, God's will is that marriage be a picture of the Godhead where there is love, compassion, faithfulness, care, and selfless consideration of the other, between a man and a woman, for life.

He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Matthew 19:4-6

Yet Christ acknowledged that due to the sinfulness of the human heart divorce had become a sad reality (Matt. 19:8). He made it clear that divorcing a spouse in order to marry another was akin to *adultery* (Matt. 19:9).

## **Divorce and Domestic Abuse**

Ministers should take every measure to bring healing to a marriage through wise, appropriate Biblical counsel. Divorce is never a *first* option and prayer is never the *only* option. Where there has been domestic violence great caution must be exercised by a pastor in arranging for an initial meeting with the abused and the abuser. If such a meeting is to have any chance being fruitful, the requirements for such a meeting should include -

1. Is abuser willing to meet with the minister?
2. Is the abuser willing to acknowledge the harm they are causing?
3. Does the abuser recognise the need to repent and be helped?
4. Will the abuser meet with the minister each week for the next four weeks?

If the abuser's response to these requirements is negative, separation, which should, where possible, be avoided, may become necessary to ensure the physical safety of the abused. Sadly, there are instances where the violence is, or is going to be, unrelenting due to the perpetrator being unrepentant and defiant. Under such circumstances, it is highly recommended that the pastor refer the couple to a trained professional.

## 4. Pastoral Responsibilities

Domestic violence is a criminal offence. Ministers should not seek to cover up reports of domestic violence made to them by a victim. Ministers must never discourage a victim of domestic violence from reporting their assault to Police. Ministers should demonstrate pastoral care towards those who report to them that they have been assaulted by their spouse or partner. This should at least involve *believing* a victim until a minister has substantiated reasons not to. Asking a victim for ‘proof’ of their abuse is tantamount to telling them that they are lying. Ministers should reassure the victim that their abuse is not their fault. They do not ‘deserve it’.

If there are children witnessing the abuse, the minister needs to let the abuse victim know that this is also harmful for their children. Pastors should make recommendations to the victim of abuse about shelters or refuges where they and their children will be safe. Care must be taken for how any move into a shelter or refuge is done so as not to increase the risk of abuse for the victim. This means that a pastor must be guided by what a victim wants rather than imposing a course of action upon them.

Ministers should document reports of abuse and note what course of action or referral was offered and keep such records securely and confidentially.

## Do

- *Listen* to domestic abuse victims
- Show *belief*
- Offer practical assistance such as child-minding, or removal to a refuge. “Do you have a safe place to stay?”
- Advise reporting any incidence of violence, which is a criminal offence, to Police
- Encourage protection for the abused and any children involved, which may mean separation
- Record in writing an accurate report of the allegations made
- Refer to a trained professional

## Don't

- Interrogate the abused - especially for sordid details, and most especially for sexual details
- Make the victim feel guilty for being abused
- Tell the abused they must submit to their abuser
- Condemn the abused for not honouring their wedding vow of *loving for better and for worse*
- Discourage a victim of domestic violence from reporting their assault to Police
- Use the children of the abused as interpreters if dealing with a non-English speaking victim
- Have physical contact with the victim
- Expect them to make any major decision - such as leaving for a shelter

# Preaching Plan

The pulpit is one of the minister's most influential means of pastoring those in their congregation. While we value being guided by the Holy Spirit to develop our preaching plan, we also need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's already inspired guidance in His Word as it speaks to major social issues, of which, domestic abuse is one of them. Here is a link to an example of addressing domestic violence from the pulpit- <https://vimeo.com/171082381>.

An example might be an exposition of First Peter 3:7.

¶ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

First Peter 3:7

This verse completely counters any justification by a Christian husband for using any form of abuse against his wife. It has a sobering warning for any husband about why God may choose not to listen to, or answer, their prayers. Preachers would do well to teach their men the implications of this verse.

- \* What does it mean for husbands to live with their wives in an “*understanding*” way?
- \* How should a husband *show honour* toward his wife?
- \* Since women are generally physically weaker than men, when does a wife need her husband to be considerate of this difference?
- \* Which part of this verse stresses that women are equal to men, and why would this have made Christianity such a radical way of thinking compared with the prevalent views of women at the time of Christianity's founding?
- \* Consider the level of God's interest in ensuring that wives are treated with gentleness and respect by their husbands by noting what he does to an abusive husband's prayers.
- \* How is a husband's role of: Protector, Provider, Pastor, to his wife and children, reflected in this verse?

# Referral List

Ministers should compile a referral list of resources such as:

- psychologist/s
- marriage counsellor/s
- a women's refuge/shelter
- mental health workers
- emergency childcare
- victim support groups
- and even trusted fellow pastors (especially wherever a pastor is dealing with a serious couple conflict within his own church and must remain neutral).

The intense nature of dealing with domestic violence necessitates the minister being able to debrief with a trusted pastoral colleague. Regular contact with an experienced peer or senior ministry colleague provides an opportunity to compare notes and share experiences.



# 5. Marriage Preparation

There are some marriages that should never have proceeded. In some cases, the difference between a happy, fulfilling marriage, and a conflicted marriage characterised by abuse is how the couple were *prepared* for marriage. Research shows that the most common reason for marriage failure is the lack of adequate marriage preparation. As a bare minimum, ministers should take a couple through their approaching wedding vows by explaining what each aspect of their vows to God and to each other means.

Below is a classic example of the twofold nature of marriage vows which should be explained to a couple before they marry.

## THE BRIDEGROOM'S VOW TO GOD

Having a full understanding of the privileges and obligations of the Christian marriage, **BRIDEGROOM'S FIRST NAME**, will you take this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the Holy estate of Matrimony? Will you promise to love her, comfort her, honour and keep her, in sickness and in health, for better and for worse, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto her, so long as you both shall live?

## THE BRIDEGROOM'S VOW TO HIS BRIDE

I **BRIDEGROOM'S FULL NAME** / take you **BRIDE'S FULL NAME** / according to God's Holy Word/ to be my wife/ to have and to hold/ from this day forward/ to share my faith in Christ/ to guide you and make my home with you/ for better, for worse/ for richer, for poorer/ in sickness and in health/ to love and to cherish/ until we are parted by death/ before God/ I pledge you my faithfulness.

## THE BRIDE'S VOW TO GOD

### **Then the minister says to the woman:**

Having full understanding of the privileges and obligations of the Christian marriage, **BRIDE'S FULL NAME**, will you promise to have this man to be your wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance, in the Holy estate of Matrimony? Will you respect him, and serve him, love honour and keep him, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto him, so long as you both shall live?

### **The woman shall answer:**

I will.

## THE BRIDE'S VOW TO HER GROOM

I **BRIDE'S FULL NAME** / take you **BRIDEGROOM'S FULL NAME** /according to God's Holy Word/ to be my husband/ to have and to hold/ from this day forward/ to share my faith in Christ/ to be guided by you and make my home with you/ for better, for worse/ for richer, for poorer/ in sickness and in health/ to love and to cherish/ until we are parted by death/ before God/ I pledge you my faithfulness.

Even if a couple can approach their wedding with a reasonable understanding of the vows they are about to make, they will come to know that they are vowing to treat each other with *consideration* and *respect*.

Ideally though, ministers should have already helped the couple to learn the art of developing intimacy through acquired communication skills and techniques for resolving conflicts. This will have included practical exercises for how the couple can transact their potentially heated differences in a reasonable and civil manner. It will also involve showing the couple the difference that allegiance to Christ and the Gospel makes to a marriage.

We strongly recommend that all A2A ministers undertake the *About Marrying* Training course for Religious Marriage Celebrants which gives the procedures for preparing a couple for marriage incorporating the five levels of intimacy and communication, resolving conflicts, preparing goals, planning a budget, raising a family and how to grow old together.

Adequate marriage preparation is one of the greatest tools that pastors have for contributing to the prevention of theological, Biblical, and cultural misconceptions of how a husband can treat his wife.