

Worship Resources


A Service Focusing on Domestic Abuse



The Methodist Church
In Ireland



Safe
guarding
The Methodist Church in Ireland



*Domestic abuse has historically been cloaked in silence, treated as an issue that is to remain behind closed doors. Such an attitude has attributed to continuing abuse and violence on many **women, men, and children**. This time of silence needs to end, and a time of positive and empowering conversations needs to begin. We believe in a God who desires wholeness and restoration, not destruction and abuse. God's concern for the vulnerable and oppressed, taken alongside the direct commandment to 'love one another,' would imply that God does not intend, or condone, people to perpetrate or suffer from domestic abuse. We have an opportunity in our worship to reveal this heart of God, and to advocate for freedom and justice for those who are trapped in cycles of abuse.*

*This worship resource sets out some **suggestions** of how you could introduce this conversation into your church community. It is meant as an opener to conversation that could be complimented further with use of bible study materials and alongside the Safe Place Training being provided by ONUS & MCI. It is important to acknowledge at the beginning of this service that this could be a difficult subject to dwell on, as there will be members of the congregation who have been affected by domestic abuse, either directly or indirectly. The aim of this material is not to cause anxiety, or to be intrusive in any way into people's personal stories, however, it is important to acknowledge such pain exists within our communities and seek to hear God speak into that pain. The emphasis of this service is not on abuse, though we will acknowledge that, but rather the emphasis is on the love of God, a God who seeks to set the captives free and bring justice to the oppressed. This should be stated to the congregation being mindful of those who may be triggered by the subject material.*

Included in this resource are several worship suggestions that should help you develop a service suitable for your setting.

Call to worship

Lamentations 3:22-23 (NRSV)

'The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.'

Prayer of Approach

Into your presence we gather.
In humility, we bow our heads.
In praise, we raise our hands.
In surrender, we give our hearts.
Speak to us, by your Spirit.
Challenge our perceptions and increase our love.
Make us your vessel for justice, change and peace.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Prayer of Adoration

Almighty God. Creator, Provider, Healer and Friend, we are filled with praise as we think on you. You created all that is seen and unseen, and you saw that it was good. We marvel at the goodness of your creation, and the skill of your hand. We praise you that in your goodness, you have created each, and every one of us. You have crafted us with love and care, and we bear your image. Teach us how to live out that wonderful image as we love and care for one another, with the same love and care that you have shown to us in Christ. For your goodness, compassion, mercy, and love, we praise your name. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, our hearts are heavy as we think about the abuse that exists within our communities, our families, and our friends. In a space that should be safe, many live with tension and fear. Forgive us when we have turned our face away instead of offering our arms to help. Forgive us when we have been silenced by our own discomfort instead of raised our voice along with their cry for help. Strengthen our voices, that we may shout for justice and advocate for freedom. Grant us wisdom as we communicate your Word. Forgive us when we have used this unwisely and aided abuse and prolonged oppression. Forgive us for the past and lead us on to a better future, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Supplication

Giving Lord, we thank you for all that you have done for us.
We thank you for your grace and mercy shown to us in Christ.
We thank you that you have the power to change and heal and restore.
Into our chaos, bring your order.
Into our brokenness, bring your healing.
Into our restlessness, bring your peace.
Set us free from the bondage of worry and fear, so that we might live in the fullness of your love and life.
May your Kingdom come this day in our lives. Amen.

Children's Talk Ideas

Here are two suggestions of bible stories that could be used to share with the children as part of this service. How you communicate these will depend on the age group and number of the children in your church. These do not directly relate to the topic of domestic abuse, rather point to the nature of God, and God's presence with us, which can teach and strengthen a child for seasons of challenge in their life. Please be aware that you may have children in your service who could be sensitive around the topic of abuse. Your children's leaders should be made aware of the theme of this service and be prepared to listen well and support any children sensitively. They should also be ready to report any disclosure that may be made to them, in line with MCI Child Safeguarding Policy.

1. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

As you share this story, you could use a video, or pictures on a screen to help.

For example:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osfQg4yKtq8>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLzdQtetedc>



Alternatively, you could consider getting the children to improvise and act out the story while you narrate it. Have fun with it.

The emphasis you should make with this story is about how we are called to love and care for one another. We should not pass by when we see someone suffering but should be ready to show love. Love is what God requires of us, for love is what God has shown to us.

2. Joseph sold into slavery (Genesis 37)

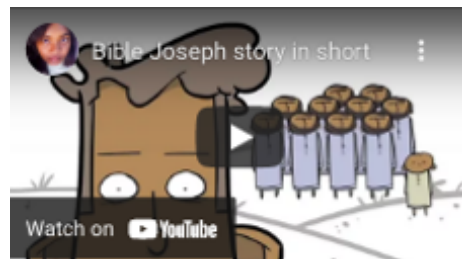
The story of Joseph could be told using a video which gives a glimpse into his wider biblical story.

Some examples of this are:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnlqKPIZQzI>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iq3iXjNPSuY>



The part of the story where Joseph is sold into slavery shows that sometimes family relationships can be difficult. However, family is meant to be a safe place where people are loved and valued. A point to emphasise in the story of Joseph is the presence of God with Joseph. Joseph trusted that God was with him in all circumstances, and God was with him. We can be encouraged through this story to trust in God and know that we are not alone.

Whichever story you use, think carefully about the words you use, and the emphasis you place. This is an opportunity to grow and nurture young minds. Likewise, the adults are listening too. Be aware that your wording could trigger a listener both positively and negatively, so take care and think this section through well.

Poem

I got flowers today (©Paulette Kelly, 1992)

I got flowers today!
It wasn't my birthday or any other special day.
We had our first argument last night;
And he said a lot of cruel things that really hurt;
I know that he is sorry and didn't mean to say the things he said;
Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today.
It wasn't our anniversary or any other special day.
Last night, he threw me into a wall and started to choke me.
It seemed like a nightmare. I couldn't believe that it was real.
I woke up this morning sore and bruised all over.
I know he must be sorry. Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today!
And it wasn't Valentine's Day or any other special day;
Last night he beat me and threatened to kill me;
Make-up and long sleeves didn't hide the cuts and bruises this time;
I couldn't go to work today because I didn't want anyone to know—
but I know he's sorry; Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today! And it wasn't Mother's Day or any other special day;
Last night he beat me again, and it was worse than all of the other times;
If I leave him, what will I do? How will I take care of the kids? What
about money?
I'm afraid of him, but I'm too scared and dependent to leave him!
But he must be sorry; Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today....
Today was a special day—it was the day of my funeral;
Last night he killed me;
If only I would have gathered the courage and strength to leave him;
I could have received help from the Women's Shelter, but I didn't ask for
their help;
So, I got flowers today—for the last time.

Readings

Psalm 55: 1-23 *This is a long reading, and uncomfortable to read/hear, but worth reading in full and sitting with the torment of the Psalmist.*

James 1: 19-27



Suggested Sermon

Today we are thinking about domestic abuse. Perhaps it seems an unusual subject to come from the pulpit on a Sunday, yet sadly it is not an unusual subject to be lived out behind the closed doors of many homes. Domestic abuse affects women, men, and children. It is prevalent within our communities and can be found within our pews. As we come to think on this today and to consider Scripture, we ask that God would reveal to us his heart and love for each of us, and to stir in us a passion to love one another as he loves us.

Hopefully as you listened to the bible readings from Psalms and James, you sensed the heart of God within them. A heart of God that is about love and peace and presence.

The Psalm was a difficult one to hear, it speaks of much fear and anguish in the life of the Psalmist. The words are full of violent imagery and the sense of betrayal comes towards the end. The subheading to this Psalm is entitled as 'A prayer for a false friend'. The sense of betrayal in these verses is increased because the violence and the threat came from someone who should have shown love and companionship. There's something that tastes so bitter about that kind of disappointment and betrayal. A bitterness felt by many, as someone who they thought would be their world of joy and happiness, actually becomes their fear and their wounds. There's a violation in a covenant of love when violence and abuse enter in.

The words of the Psalm are difficult to listen too, yet, weaved within the pain and the terror is a sense of hope, a sense of trusting in a God who is faithful and just. The Psalmist declares: *'As for me, I call to the God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning, and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.'* The Psalmist writes amid his pain, yet concludes with the words, *'But as for me, I trust in you.'* Words that are beautiful and challenging, words that speak a glimmer of hope. The terror, the violence, the betrayal all still exist for the author, but he clings to the truth of a God who has the power to save.

And so that Psalm in a service like today, encourages us to know that regardless of current challenges, we have a God in whom we can place our trust. Let's hold tightly to that truth as we move on.

The NT reading from James is more instructive about our responsibility in life. It speaks to us about anger and makes clear that we should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Quick to listen. Slow to speak. Slow to become angry... not often the teaching of the world in which we live, where most are actually slow to listen, quick to speak and quicker to become angry! But here we have, once again, the people of God being called to live differently than the culture around them. There is an expectation from this passage in James that we should want to live as God requires and that within that, we should seek God's heart for the wounded and vulnerable and be active in how we respond. The passage ended with these words: *'Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.'*

Our two passages are very different, yet they both have something to say to us as we think of this issue of domestic abuse. One speaks hope... a hope that trusts God to be the rescue and strength amid violence and betrayal. The other speaks action... action that alleviates suffering and that reflects a different way of living.

As already mentioned, domestic abuse is prevalent in our culture and society. Statistics from across the world show that many are suffering, and that human rights are being violated within the home at an alarmingly high rate.

Domestic abuse is: Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: Psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional, and spiritual abuse.

Let's be very clear, domestic abuse is not just acts carried out against women, as many men are also victims. It is also not limited to spousal or intimate relationships, as often domestic abuse can be between family members, parents, and children. What motivates or initiates abuse within these relationships is diverse and broad and often hard to pinpoint... but the damage is uniformly destructive. It could be said that while the statistics illustrate a staggering presence of domestic abuse in our communities, it is the damage inflicted behind the statistics which is even more concerning. The destructive nature of domestic abuse corrupts societies understanding of family and home and transforms the home as a safe place or sanctuary, into a prison of terror and pain.

Diana Garland in her book *Family Ministry*¹ points out that violence in the home by a family member, is much more likely than violence at the hands of a stranger. She makes an interesting comparison that during the Vietnam War, 58,000 service men died in combat-related deaths at the hands of an enemy, and during the same time period, 54,000 women died at the hands of an intimate partner, at the hands of a lover. What is striking about these statistics, aside from the irony of the closeness of totals, is that one of these groups will be remembered as heroes, whilst the other will not be thought of at all.

The PSNI recorded 31,848 domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland in 2020, which was one of the highest 12-month periods recorded since 2004/05.² Of these incidents, 70% were from female victims and 30% from male victims. Safe Ireland recorded that on average, 2,018 women and 550 children in Ireland received support from a domestic abuse service every month from September to December 2020.³ Women's Aid Ireland currently states that 1 in 4 women in Ireland have experienced domestic abuse, and Men's Aid Ireland records that 1 in 7 men have also experienced domestic violence.⁴

¹ Garland, Diana, *Family Ministry*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999). (p.592)

² PSNI: Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes reported by the Police Service in Northern Ireland; <https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/domestic-abuse-statistics/2020-21/q3/domestic-abuse-bulletin-dec-20.pdf> retrieved on 18 March 2021.

³ Safe Ireland: Tracking the Shadow Pandemic – Lockdown 2, <https://www.safeireland.ie/further-increases-in-women-and-children-contacting-a-domestic-violence-service-during-the-second-lockdown-of-2020/> retrieved on 18 March 2021.

⁴ www.womensaid.ie & www.mensaid.ie

The statistics are harrowing, but what is worse is that these are probably not even accurate in stating the reality of the problem. Many cases of domestic abuse go unreported because there still exists a silence and a shame that stops victims from speaking up and seeking help.

Governments and charities are trying to focus funding into this area, and are seeking to re-educate society, and reduce the silence and shame associated with domestic abuse. However, the reality is that often our justice system fails, and the vulnerable are left more wounded and exposed. It's a bleak picture, and today we are only skirting around the surface. When you read the stories of victims and hear of the violence that is carried out behind closed doors it is beyond heart-breaking.

The Church has not always responded well to this subject. Honestly, we should feel shame when we read stories of how the Christian community have failed to protect the needs of the vulnerable. Many stories exist of ministers/pastors that told women to stay in abusive conditions because that's what submission to her husband meant, or, that they should remember that Christ called us to a life of suffering. Equally, our historic position of celebrating patriarchy has added shame to many male victims, who are made to feel like they have failed in being a man if they are experiencing abuse from a female partner.

Catherine Clark Kroger, in her article 'The Pastor and Domestic Violence' records this story:

*'Only yesterday I was told of a Christian woman who escaped a viciously cruel marriage and went to consult her pastor. The man of God, wishing to restore domestic peace and harmony, sent the fearful congregant back to her home along with his well-meant prayers and good advice. Two days later the woman was dead, slain by the hand of her husband.'*⁵

We have much to repent.

We have a responsibility to discern scripture well, and to draw out God's heart from the verses it contains. The picture that is built for us, is of a God of justice. A God who is filled with love and whose mercy and compassion on the vulnerable and oppressed is both rich and gracious.

It is true to say that scripture is full of passages that speak of violence. There are many occasions where brutal violence is carried out against women, and problematic passages that portray God in angry and abusive images that speak of great violence. These have often been used to justify abuse. However, when we examine scripture as a whole, and seek to find the nature of God within the message it speaks, we see a God who does not justify anger or abuse, but a God who seeks justice and who lavishes love. And actually, the teaching that has for many years justified women as victims has been distorted, for often in those stories where women have been mistreated and abused;

⁵ Kroeger, Catherine Clark, 'The Pastor and Domestic Violence', Catalyst Resources, <http://www.catalystresources.org/safeguarding-the-lives-of-the-sheep/>

God is the one who is at work restoring and redeeming that woman and punishing those who have perpetrated such action against her.

God is also the one who directly instructs his people to care for the widow and the orphan, to look after and protect the women and vulnerable. And the teaching on marriage that has seen submission as being ruled by a big stick, needs corrected, for those passages speak of a union between husband and wife that is based on mutuality and respect. It speaks of valuing one another, of working in partnership, and in fact, the responsibility of a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church is one that is significant in its demand. Christ loved the church, his body, so much so that he died for it. Husbands surely cannot read that passage and see permission to treat their wife as some sort of possession to control or beat down, rather, it is quite the opposite, she should be lavished with love, just as Christ loves the Church.

As we look to Scripture and think on domestic abuse, we should hopefully conclude that abuse is not found in the heart of God, and God's love and care for people is that they would experience freedom from oppression and bondage. As a Church, we are called to speak God's love and freedom into the bondage that is domestic abuse. We need to ask God's forgiveness for the times when we have allowed silence or turned our face away. We have need to repent for the historic traditions that have fuelled an abuse to women in particular, and that have taught Scripture in a way that leads to death instead of life. We are also called to continue to be people who seek to care for the orphan and the widow, the abused and the vulnerable, the broken and rejected. This is the mandate of the Gospel message.

Does that mean that we are called to have uncomfortable conversations... yes!
Does that mean that we might be inconvenienced in order to help others... absolutely!
Does it mean that we have to look at the darkness of the world head on in order to shine light... it certainly does!

There is such brokenness in our pews, in our homes, in our shops and communities. For too long we have permitted abuse to exist there. This is not a reflection of the God we know, or the people he calls us to be. How might God be asking us to change this reality?
How might God be asking you?

We each have the responsibility to inform ourselves well on the reality of issues such as domestic abuse. Take time to read and learn with an open mind and open heart. If you know, or come into contact with, someone who is struggling with an abusive relationship then listen well and support, but most importantly signpost them to agencies that can support and help them effectively. Be aware of dangers that might be before them in their journey to freedom, and don't add to them by trying to rush ahead. With great love, walk at a slow and steady pace the lengthy journey to wholeness.

Mother Teresa is known to have said, 'Not all of us can do great things, but we can all do small things with great love.' What small things, to show great love, might God be prompting in you?

Our Scripture passages spoke love and action. Our reality in relation to domestic abuse, is in desperate need of both. May God challenge us in our individual lives, and in our life here as a community, as to how we might best speak hope in our actions. Please God, may we see a change in the statistics that show such abuse and hatred, as God brings freedom and healing to those who are wounded, and transformation for those so intent to harm.

If you have been listening to this morning and feel affected negatively in any way by this conversation, then please speak to someone on the ministry team or make contact with your minister after the service is over.

Lord God, as you remind us of your great love for each of us, challenge us as to how we show that love to others. Fill us with courage and compassion to love one another well. Amen.

Spoken Word Reflection

Below you will find a script which you can use to prompt thought and reaction. It would be best read by three people. The first voice would read the stories of domestic abuse. The second voice would read some unhelpful remarks that are often used. The third voice would read a verse of scripture to illustrate the value and worth that God places on us.

These stories are based on true events however names have been changed. Sources used are from Women's Aid & Man Kind Initiative.

Alternatively you may prefer to use a recording of this "Spoken Word Reflection." If so, you can access the video using this link <https://vimeo.com/649880931/1bd34b0245>

VOICE 1: Margaret's Story

Every week Margaret and her husband attended the church where they were married over 40 years ago. Her husband was seen as an upstanding member of the community and active in the life of the church. However, on a regular basis he abused his wife in the bedroom. Margaret believed that she had to obey her husband because he continually quoted scripture at her to support his abuse. When he would hit her, it was on parts of her body that no one could see, and if they were at times visible, she would stay in the house until they had healed.

One day, Margaret went outside to put something in the bin and stopped to talk to her neighbour for about 20 minutes. Returning to the house she noticed 10 missed calls from her husband. When she returned his calls, he did not answer. Later, he arrived home to quiz her on where she had been, and who she had been talking to without his permission. Margaret knew what was coming but could not get away.

That evening Margaret's arm was broken, and she received stitches to a nasty gash on her head from 'falling down the stairs.' This was something she could not hide. Friends came to visit, her minister came to visit, all asking what had happened, but Margaret was too scared to explain. She feared her husband. She felt ashamed. She was scared no one would believe her. If her husband was such a good godly man to everyone else, then maybe this was her fault. Perhaps she needed to be a better wife. Perhaps she got what she deserved.

Margaret felt she had no choice. She had to forgive. She had to stay.

VOICE 2:

"You have to give him another chance, we are taught by Jesus to forgive."

"This will cause a lot of difficulties in the church if you tell anyone about this."

"I'm sure he didn't mean it; he must have been worried for you."

VOICE 3:

Jesus said, 'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.' (John 10:10)

VOICE 1: Michael's Story

Michael was married to his wife for six years. The emotional abuse started first, and Michael was rarely allowed to go anywhere by himself. When at work, his wife would constantly phone him throughout the day. When he tried to leave, she emotionally blackmailed him by overdosing on tablets. The first time she assaulted him, she stabbed him viciously. The second time, she followed him around the house punching him in the head, hitting him with a pint glass. It was ferocious and Michael feared for his life. The most shocking attack happened on their wedding night. She beat him, kicking and punching Michael repeatedly, when he tried to leave, she threatened to kill herself. Michael was once again attacked after his honeymoon because the scars from her attack had ruined their photos.

Michael hoped that it would get better. He feared for his own life, but he also feared for hers. He had to stay.

VOICE 2:

"Man up, she's only a woman."

"You must have provoked her somehow."

"A real man would control his wife."

VOICE 3:

Jesus said, 'Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.' (John 13:34)

VOICE 1: Lily's Story

Lily is 63 years old and has been married for nearly 40 years. She is the mother of grown-up children who now do not live at home. Each evening, Lily prepares dinner for her husband coming in from work. Each evening, her husband complains about his dinner. He has been doing this every day of their marriage.

Lily has tried to talk to her husband about the dinner situation, but he calls her stupid, pathetic, a useless waste of space, lazy. Often this tirade of verbal abuse is accompanied by the dinner plate being smashed on the floor or against the wall. With each year that has gone by, Lily's fear has increased. She is afraid to speak to her husband. In fact, she is afraid to speak to anyone in case they too will see her as a stupid, pathetic, lazy, waste of space.

On one occasion, she built up the courage to speak to her minister, only to be advised of some cooking classes that she could sign up too. This conversation affirmed to Lily that it was her fault. She needed to change. She was everything her husband called her. She had to stay.

VOICE 2:

“Oh well, just be thankful he doesn’t hit you.”

“I’m sure you’re just being oversensitive. Maybe he had a hard day at work.”

“Practice makes perfect.”

VOICE 3:

The apostle Paul says, “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour.” (Romans 12:10-11)

VOICE 1: John’s Story

John was married to his wife for 10 years before he felt strong enough to leave and divorce her. During their marriage his wife was violent to both him and their son. She had an alcohol abuse problem, which only made the violence worse. But she would use this as an excuse after every attack and promised to change. John even attempted suicide twice throughout their marriage because he did not know where to go for help. During the final attack, John was stabbed in the head by his wife. He managed to leave the house bleeding profusely and got to a public telephone. He just about managed to ring 999 before he collapsed. He woke up in hospital with no memory of how he got there. Throughout the relationship John told no one of the abuse he was suffering. She had made him feel like it was his fault and he blamed himself for all of it. After they separated, John was kept from seeing his son for 2 years. But following a very lengthy Court process he was eventually granted sole custody.

John knew that love and abuse could not coexist. He could not stay.

VOICE 2:

“The only reason for divorce is adultery. If she didn’t cheat, you can’t leave her.”

“You must be exaggerating, she’s only a woman.”

“Think of your son, he needs his parents to stay together.”

VOICE 3:

The apostle Paul says, ‘Let all that you do be done in love.’ (1 Cor. 16:14)

VOICE 1:

Story after story, there is abuse, violence, fear, shame. Victims are all around us, searching for a way to become a survivor. How will you respond?

VOICE 2:

Your words, your advice, your opinions can make the difference between freedom and captivity. Acceptance and shame. Will you use your words wisely?



VOICE 3:

Jesus stood up to read...

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)



Prayers of Intercession: Behind Closed Doors

(Adapted from CSR Sunday Material 2018)

(Bidding: Light of the world; **Response:** Come in your power)

Let us pray,

God of creation, we praise you for your care for all whom you have made.

Into the darkness of that which is hidden, come and bring your revelation of life, peace, and justice.

Light of the world... **come in your power**

Behind closed doors where women, men and children are suffering abuse or violence, Lord God, make your presence known. Hear the cry arising out of pain, fear, and isolation. Into the despair, may the hope of the gospel be heard. Into inflicted and false shame, bring your truth, healing, and beauty. May the power of the abuser be broken. Lord, change the hearts of those who oppress others. And give grace to all, that truth would be heard.

Light of the world... **come in your power**

Behind closed doors where support and help is needed, we pray for agencies like Women's Aid, Tulsa, Men's Advisory Project, and others, who strive to assist those suffering domestic abuse and seeking after justice. We pray your blessing, protection, and provision on their work. We pray too that you would give us, your church, the courage to stand up for those in need, and to offer our support and encouragement to valuable agencies.

Light of the world... **come in your power**

Behind the doors of our government buildings and courts, we ask for your wisdom in abundance. May care of the vulnerable be their primary concern as they consider provisions and advocate for law and justice. May they have a restlessness to see freedom for all who are held in the captivity by others.

Light of the world... **come in your power**

Behind the closed doors of our own homes, come Holy Spirit. We might present a pretty picture to others at times, but you see the real picture. We invite you to come beyond the doors of our home, and behind the closed doors of our hearts. Forgive us for anger, resentment, greed, and words spoken against others. Forgive us if we have remained silent, whilst others have suffered. Forgive us if we have failed to love, as you have loved us.

Empower us with your strength and remind us that we are each valuable in your sight. Such a truth means that there is no excuse for abuse.

Light of the world... **come in your power**

Behind the closed doors of our business, our financial affairs, our dealings with others, we dare to ask you to take your place, O God. For our everyday life, for what we will be engaged with this time tomorrow, and for the rest of the week. Lord take your place. Give us integrity, honesty, courage, and compassion.

Light of the world... **come in your power**

Lord, open the doors of our own hearts. As we pray for your kingdom to come, as we pray for your will to be done here on earth as it is in heaven, we are disturbed. We are the ones who can respond to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the shamed, the sick, those in bondage. You are the Light of the World who told us that we are the light of the world! Take our bodies, our voices, our intellects, or abilities, our opportunities. Empower us, by your Spirit, as we step out to be your hands and feet in this world.

Light of the world... **come in your power**

May your Kingdom come in power, on earth as in heaven. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Benediction

In the love of God, we have gathered.

In the strength of Christ, we now depart.

In the power of the Spirit, we journey on.

God bring healing, God bring freedom, God bring love.

The blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remain with us always.

Amen.



Suggested hymns

(STF - Singing the Faith; MP - Mission Praise; HP - Hymns & Psalms)

Brother, sister let me serve you	STF 611	MP 1261	
Everyone needs compassion	SFT 627	MP 1168	
For the healing of the nations	SFT 696		HP 402
Give me a heart that will love		MP 165	
God, how can we forgive	SFT 613		
God, I look to you		MP 1276	
God loves you and I love you	STF 614		
Hold fast, my soul		MP 1284	
I will speak out	STF 702		
Jesus' hands were kind hands			HP 393
Let the weak say I am strong		MP 1085	
Light in my darkness		MP 1325	
Lord, the light of your love	STF 59	MP 445	
Make me a channel of your peace	STF 707	MP 456	HP 776
Make way, make way	STF 264	MP 457	
Man of sorrows! What a name		MP 458	HP 228
My hope is built on nothing else		MP 1334	
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty	STF 88	MP 564	HP 16
The church of Christ in every age	STF 415		HP804

Follow-Up & Response

It is important to be mindful of the fact that some in your congregation may be triggered by this subject of domestic abuse. Please allow space for them to feel safe to speak to someone or to ask for prayer. If you have a prayer ministry team, inform them before the service of this subject, so they can be prepared.

Ensure you have contact numbers of local agencies available in case someone needs to take note of them.

If your Church has not already registered as a safe place, seek out this training being run by ONUS and MCI by contacting the MCI Ministries Team.

Consider following up this sermon by using the additional bible study material that look more closely at specific stories of abuse in the bible. These could even be used as a template for other sermons depending on the age profile of your congregation. (Some of these passages include violent incidents that may not be suitable for children).

Make sure to read A Response to Domestic Abuse, prepared by the Safeguarding Board for the Methodist Church in Ireland. <https://irishmethodist.org/safeguarding> It includes helpful advice and guidance about how to respond and support someone experiencing domestic abuse. Equally it outlines some key theological teaching that have been used harmfully, and a fuller list of agencies and contacts.

Make this conversation on domestic abuse a more regular one. Look to support the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence or acknowledge White Ribbon Sunday as an annual service in your church rhythm.

