STATEMENT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

This statement aims to give clarity to the issue of Domestic Violence and Abuse, (N.B) and the role of Church regarding best practice when facing individual cases of Domestic Abuse. The statement will also include recommendations for possible future action for both church clergy and also the wider church family regarding these cases. A list of relevant organisations, both statutory and voluntary is also included for use when sign-posting/supporting those individuals affected by domestic abuse and abuse.

Domestic abuse and abuse, is defined as threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, abuse or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation) by a current or former intimate partner or family member’.(1)

Domestic abuse and abuse is persistent and intentional. Domestic abuse is a crime.

It should also be borne in mind that not all abusive relationships involve physical abuse. The term “coercive control” is used to describe relationships within which there is a misuse of power, control and inequality, where individuals are manipulated and become enslaved, through for example the threat of extreme physical abuse, death, losing custody of children, losing the family home and/or all of the above. It is such “coercive control” that is responsible for Domestic Abuse in relationships.

Types of Domestic Abuse

1.       Physical Abuse such as hitting, biting, using weapons, burning, murder

2.       Sexual Abuse such as rape, sexual assault, enforced pregnancies

3.       Financial Abuse such as debts, no access to money, destruction of property

4.       Emotional Abuse such as threats, isolation from family and friends, name calling

5.       Abuse using children such as threats to remove children, encouraging children to take part in abuse, threats to harm children

It is rare for one type only to exist; rather it is more usual for several types of abuse to co-exist. This maximises the controlling behaviour and diminishes the capacity of the victim to address the situation and to make subsequent healthy decisions regarding their future. The list above, while useful, does not therefore necessarily portray the extent of human suffering, humiliation and abject fear that individuals are living with daily. Many stories and reflections are truly harrowing; as victims endure what to many appears the unendurable.

The church should also be aware that it is in the interest of the abuser to lie, their modus operandi as such is one of manipulation along with the presentation of a believable façade to all others outside of the domestic setting.

As followers of Christ it is our responsibility to show our compassion for those who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse. The Methodist church should have a zero tolerance to domestic abuse.

Ministers and lay workers should also be especially aware that the sanctity of marriage is never allowed to become a haven of sanctuary for an abuser.

Practical Intervention and Assistance

Ministers must in all circumstances defer to advice given by those agencies and statutory bodies that can best protect the individuals experiencing domestic abuse. The charity Women’s Aid have many years of experience in the field of domestic abuse and offer specialist services to those who are affected by or who have experienced domestic abuse. The FAQ’s page on the Women’s Aid website (2) will be particularly useful as a first step for those who have the well-being of others in their heart and who wish to better inform themselves on the subject.

When an issue of Domestic abuse does come to the attention of a Minister or church member it is imperative that the issue is treated appropriately. The Northern Ireland Office publication “Responding to Domestic Violence and Abuse: Guidelines for Faith Communities may prove useful. (3) The following points are fundamental;

* The Minister or designated person must never attempt to intervene or discuss a domestic abuse concern with the perpetrator.
* The safety of those concerned is always of paramount importance.
* The victim of domestic abuse (whether child adult or elderly) is to be listened to and believed.
* They need to be supported and should be encouraged to take steps towards keeping themselves, and where needed, their children safe.
* It is to be noted that women are at most risk of extreme abuse ending in severe injury or death when the partner believes the woman is preparing to leave the relationship. In 30% of relationships where there is Domestic Abuse it began when the women was pregnant. (4)

Children who have witnessed domestic abuse or suffered an abusive relationship are often adversely affected in the long term. However the term “emotional resilience” of children is important (there is a growing field of research) and this will continue to gain significance. The role of the church family should come to be one which nurtures the resilience of children, and where the child may feel valued and loved. The “Taking Care” manual should already be adopted by churches and this shows a clearly defined reporting process which allows for appropriate action to be taken should a child disclose, or whether there is cause for concern regarding the care and safety of the child. (5)

If the church’s role is indeed “to serve the present age” then it is essential that we engage with the issues of Domestic Abuse. It is especially noteworthy that both the Republic of Ireland (6) and United kingdom (7) have seen a significant cut in funding to domestic abuse services: a 14% cut in ROI since 2009 and a 31% cut in UK funding from 2011-2013 (6). Those who are affected remain amongst the most vulnerable in our society. We believe the church must be an advocate for those who are suffering abuse in any form.

In conclusion the following are recommendations

Church councils and executives should be encouraged to develop a policy for dealing appropriately with Domestic Abuse when it arises. To be able to signpost those who are or have been abused to the various agencies offering help, safety and support.

Ministers and lay members should work to increase awareness of the issues around Domestic Abuse in congregational life, through preaching and teaching and to find creative ways of relating that to church membership.

The church should proactively engage with and support the work of agencies such as Women’s Aid

To recognise that perpetrators of domestic abuse require specialist professional help, most likely away from the family situation

Every church should become a “safe place” (8). Ministers, designated persons lay members should have the responsibility to initiate training on how to attain “safe place” status.

References

1. Stopping Domestic and Sexual Abuse and Abuse in Northern Ireland 2013-2020 Public Consultation Document December 2013

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dsva-strategy.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dsva-strategy.pdf)

1. Women’s Aid NI

[www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

1. Responding to Domestic Violence And Abuse: Guidelines for faith Communities

Northern Ireland Regional Steering Group on Domestic Violence

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/faith_communities_guidance.pdf>

1. Women’s Aid NI

[www.womensaidni.org/domestic-abuse/domestic-abuse-statistic](http://www.womensaidni.org/domestic-violence/domestic-violence-statistic)

1. Taking Care Manual IMYCD

<http://www.irishmethodist.org/imycd/resources>

1. Irish Examiner, “Domestic abuse lines get five calls per hour”,

Wednesday 11 June 2014

[http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/domestic-abuse-lines-get-five-calls-per-hour-271648.html](http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/domestic-violence-lines-get-five-calls-per-hour-271648.html)

1. The Guardian, “Britain is going backwards on abuse against women”.

Sunday 30 March 2014

[http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/30/britain-abuse-against-women-domestic-abuse-funding-cuts](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/30/britain-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-funding-cuts)

1. Women’s Aid

[www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

Useful Links

Amen (a support and information service for male victims of domestic abuse)

St.Anne’s Resource Centre

Railway Street

Navan

Co.Meath

Helpline: 046 9023 718

www.amen.ie

Barnardos Northern Ireland

542-544 Upper Newtownards Road

Belfast BT4 3HE

Call 0289067 2366

Broken Rainbow UK

Domestic Abuse charity

Call 0800 999 5428

help@brokenrainbow.org.uk

CONTACT Independent Counselling

1st Floor, Lanyon Building

Jennymount, North Derby Street,

Belfast, BT15 3HL

Call 02890

Lifeline 0808 808 8000

Domestic & Sexual Abuse Helpline

Call 0808802 1414

Text support o 07797 805 839

Email 24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org

Safe Ireland

Unit 5 Centre Court

Blyry Business Park

Co. Westmeath

Call: 00 353 90 6479078

www.safeireland.ie

Women’s Aid Federation NI

129 University Street

Belfast BT7 1HP

Northern Ireland

Call 02890 249041

info@womensaidni.org

Women’s Aid Republic of Ireland

5 Wilton Place

Dublin 2

Call:01 6788858

Helpline: 1800 341 900

[www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)