**The Methodist Church** - **A response to the Report on Domestic Abuse**

CSR have taken the issue of Domestic Abuse under deliberation and a report was submitted to Conference in 2015. Following that report it was felt that a consideration of possible future action would be worthwhile.

This statement is the response to that report. The following proposals are regarded as the most appropriate way, for us as Church, to engage with the issue of Domestic Abuse.

There are two primary questions to ask: How do we engage with this issue? and how can we become meaningfully proactive?

Future action is suggested as follows: 1) The role of the Minister 2) the role of the Congregation and 3) the purpose of Mission and Outreach for the individual Church.

**MINISTERS**

1. As the Methodist Church has a zero-tolerance to Domestic Abuse, Ministers should speak to congregations openly and directly about the needs that arise due to domestic abuse.
2. Make your Church a ‘Safe Place’. All Methodist Churches should be known as Safe Places.
3. Contact Women’s Aid. They will be more than willing to come and talk but more importantly they are best placed to give a picture of need in your area. As domestic abuse may exist within a range of challenging socio-economic factors, this means that other statutory bodies are involved, e.g. Education, Social Services, Probation. Initial conversations with these agencies is crucial, in order to help give a clearer picture of where your Church sees its role in your community. Conversations with church members will identify those who have a heart for active outreach. There may already be some with knowledge or expertise (or equally importantly know of others) who will show a way to proceed.
4. Form a working group with a clearly defined purpose which has your active support and share its work with the congregation. Congregations need to understand and own the direction that Mission and Outreach is taking in their Church.
5. Learn to signpost appropriately and safely. The issue of domestic abuse is complex and multi-faceted. Professional agencies exist that are aware of the potential dangers. It must be remembered that women are at highest risk when firstly they have expressed a desire to leave their domestic situation or when their partner believes them to be preparing to leave and secondly, when they become pregnant.
6. Spiritual Need. Minsters should know that marital guidance is not possible in situations of current domestic abuse. However, If the abused and the abuser are currently living apart, have sought and are receiving professional relationship counselling, the Minister may (after seeking professional advice) offer spiritual comfort. Extensive and long-lasting emotional trauma is to be expected.

The role of a Minister is profound. It is they who can guide a congregation to recognise its purpose, to encourage, to help protect and to support those who are most vulnerable in practical ways.

**CHURCH MEMBERS AND CONGREGATIONS**

1. Establish a Working Group. Engage with local service providers and establish effective lines of communication. In practical terms this can just mean that when the local Women’s Refuge desperately needs nappies or warm clothes they have a phone number and feel free to call.
2. The establishment of a befriending service should be the aspiration of every congregation. The support and much needed encouragement that this can provide cannot be underestimated. This MUST be undertaken sensitively. Professional advice and guidance should be sought in order to ensure the establishment of meaningful relationships and the effectiveness and longevity of the service.

**MISSION**

As Methodists we take joy in often being regarded as especially friendly, welcoming and non-judgemental. We believe, and hold to be true, that Jesus came to free all without exception.

The truth is, it is our neighbours who are living lives imprisoned in their isolation and loneliness who feel rejected, worthless, and who know abject hopelessness. We are called to serve in this situation; it is part of our Mission. If these people who suffer and who are in actual need are not our responsibility as practising Christians, then whose responsibility are they? There must be a will and a desire to become involved knowing that this is God’s work.

Those individuals who have been abused and have left their relationship with no desire for reconciliation should know that the Church exists for them. Such a realisation can come about when there has been practical, and empathetically given, support. This may not take the form of traditional Sunday worship.

However, it should also be recognised that there will be those who have/are experiencing domestic abuse sitting in pews on a Sunday. Therefore, it is strongly advisable for both Ministers and congregations to be aware of what they can do, what they can offer, and what they can provide to ameliorate the hurt and suffering of those close to them.