



Methodist Church in Ireland – Council on Social Responsibility

Social Responsibility Sunday

Suggested date: Sunday 28th January 2018

Conference has designated Sunday 28th January 2018 as Social Responsibility Sunday within the Methodist Church in Ireland. The Council on Social Responsibility would encourage all churches to mark this or another locally convenient Sunday. We are part of a movement earthed in social action as a natural outworking of our faith in Christ. The focus on this Sunday should seek to highlight that aspect of our identity. It gives an opportunity to celebrate what is happening locally.

We have provided some material that we trust Ministers and Preachers will find useful within the leading of the Sunday service. This year our main theme focus is in on Domestic Violence. There is a sermon outline covering this topic.

It is accompanied by suggested readings. You may not normally have a reading in the service that is 30 verses long. However, this may be one of those times when it is valuable to read the whole of Judges 19, so that people hear this dramatic, probably unfamiliar and gruesome story. The story of the Good Samaritan referenced in the sermon is probably familiar to most people, so you may choose not to read it instead for sake of time.

The children's story is an attempt to touch on family conflict and potential for violence. You will be the best judge of what tone and language to use with the children of your congregation. Indeed, this is true for the whole service. We are conscious that in some churches children may remain in the service throughout the sermon, so you will exercise your own discretion. However Domestic Abuse is a serious issue that we feel that the church needs to be real about, and so we seek to present the reality of it here.

There is a powerpoint presentation that refers to CSR, the three points of the children's address and the main points of the sermon. You may want to publish the Resource page in your church or make the top part of it available on your own notices.

Please also note that there is a facebook page that we encourage church members to 'like' as well as the CSR page on the Irish Methodist website. We would love to encourage one another with how Christians are grappling with and acting upon their social responsibility. Do let us know through the facebook page or by contacting the secretaries of CSR, Mrs Hazel Baird, shbaird47@gmail.com (NI) or Mrs Liz Parkin, lizparkinvec@gmail.com (ROI)

This is our second year to provide Worship Service material. We would really appreciate feedback regarding how helpful or not that it has been to you.



Potential Hymns

Brother, sister let me serve you	STF 611
Everyone needs compassion	STF 627
For the healing of the nations	HP 402, STF 696
God, how can we forgive	STF 613
God loves you and I love you	STF 614
I will speak out for those who have no voices	STF 702
Jesus' hands were kind hands	HP 393
Lord, the light of your love (Shine Jesus shine)	STF 59, MP 445
Make me a channel of your peace	HP 776, STF 707
Make way, make way for Christ the King	STF 264, MP 457
Man of sorrows! What a name	HP 228
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King	HP 16, STF 88
Sacred the body that God has created	STF 618
The church of Christ in every age	HP 804, STF 415

Children's Message

1. **Slide 4.** Joseph was part of a very big family. He had ten older brothers and lots of sisters too. In fact, they were mostly half-brothers and half-sisters. His father thought that he wouldn't have any more children, but then Joseph came along. His father treated him as the favourite. 'When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.' (Genesis 37:4)

Unfortunately, things like this happen in a lot of families for all sorts of reasons. People don't always get on well with each other. Sometimes brothers or sisters don't get on well or speak nicely to each other. Sometimes, even some parents don't always make the right decisions. Sometimes when life is hard for adults, they don't always react the right way.

We are to follow God and place our trust in him. As we do, both adults and children need to ask God for help to make the right decisions in life. As we follow Jesus, he gives us his love to help us love God more and to love the others around us in our family.

2. **Slide 5.** One day, things got really nasty for Joseph. Some of his brothers were so angry with him that they wished he was dead. But they locked him in a pit and then arranged for him to be sent off to another country as a slave.

The brothers had not dealt with their anger at an early stage. They didn't let God and his peace rule their lives. And later it became very dangerous, and hurt others.

We need to learn to love God and love others, especially while we are young. We need let God work in our lives. Because anger is very dangerous, and can cause trouble in families and later on.

3. **Slide 6.** God was with Joseph, and he had a very special role for Joseph in helping people get food when there was a famine.

Even if there is trouble around us, God is there for us. And others are too. Even if things are hard, this church is here to help all ages. As a church, we want everyone to live God's best for them.

Prayers of Intercession



'Behind closed doors'

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

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***

For those who suffer abuse or violence behind closed doors, God, make your presence known. Lord, hear the cry arising out of pain, fear and isolation. Into the despair, may the hope of the gospel be heard. Into shame, bring healing and beauty. May the power of the abuser be broken. Melt 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***

We ask you for your blessing upon Women's Aid and other agencies assisting those suffering domestic violence and seeking justice. But give us, your church, the courage to stand up for those in need. Give us honesty about the state of our angry hearts and willingness to obey your command to truly love our neighbour.

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 here, but come even further than the doors of our home, but behind the closed doors of our hearts. Forgive us for anger, resentment, greed and words spoken against others. That property we have battled over is all yours anyway. The words spoken against our brother grieves you.

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. As we wonder if have enough fodder for the cattle this spring, as we struggle to help the one we are caring for, as we sit a table away from someone who may be saying things about me, come Holy Spirit.

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

Behind the doors of Leinster House, be present O Lord. We ask for your wisdom upon all who are considering issues around abortion, the 8th amendment and a potential referendum. God of life, we ask for your protection upon the rights of all in the womb and your blessing upon mothers-to-be. May Irish society be such that the most vulnerable are cared for, and that those in need find the help and resources they need.

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

Behind the closed doors of Stormont, God, come and move upon political leaders. After a year without government in Northern Ireland, may there be changes that enable political agreement. We pray for all involved in Brexit related discussions and those most affected by them. We pray for good relationships and strong community in border areas. More deeply, we pray for the power of God to transform broken and divided hearts. Bring your reconciliation and peace. Transform our hearts and our society to the likeness of the Kingdom of God.

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

Behind the closed doors of containers, behind fences in south east Europe, behind coastlines, behind Libyan lawlessness, behind the tents of Paris, behind the scenes in Ireland, we remember those who hope for a better life. Who have had to flee violence, slavery, poverty. Who desire just the very basics of what we enjoy. Bring life, bring liberty, bring rest.

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

Lord, blast 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 as we step out. We won't wait for all the pieces to fit together, but we trust you.

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

Open the floodgates of your blessing, may your Kingdom come on earth as in heaven. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Suggested Readings

Judges 19

Psalm 55

Luke 10:25-37

James 1:19-27



Sermon outline

(Slide 9) Hope for the hope-less

Introduction

- At Conference 2016 the Council of Social Responsibility issued a response to the Report on Domestic Abuse which was submitted to Conference in 2015. In the response, the report stated:
 - 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 often our neighbour who feels imprisoned, isolated, lonely, rejected, worthless, or completely hopeless in their abusive relationship. We are called to serve in this situation; it is part of our Mission.
- Facts & Figures: **(Slide 10)**
 - NI – 2015-16¹:
 - 738 women & 520 children stayed in refuge and 267 women couldn't access refuge as it was full
 - 6212 women & 7296 children accessed community-based outreach support, allowing them to stay in their own homes
 - 24935 calls were managed by the 24hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline
 - PSNI responded to a domestic incident ever 19 minutes of every day.
 - ROI:²
 - In 2016, there were 16946 disclosures of domestic violence against women
 - In 2015 there were 5966 disclosures of child abuse
 - Women's Aid National Helpline responded to 15952 calls in 2016
 - It must be noted that many victims of domestic abuse are men, and that they may be particularly reluctant to report it. Domestic abuse takes place within a wide variety of relationships and home structures.

A gruesome reality – Judges 19 (Slide11)

- This Old Testament passage is an uncomfortable passage to read, not just because it deals with the graphic violence of rape and murder but because it seems to convey a message devoid of any hope or grace.
- The story of the Levite and his concubine serves both as an example of the social deterioration of a whole nation and as an illustration of themes found in distorted family relationships today.
- Notice that throughout this passage there is no dialogue between the Levite and his wife. She remains without a voice throughout the whole ordeal on a matter that affects her whole future. Very often today in cases of domestic violence the voice of the woman is not allowed to be heard.

¹ <https://www.womensaidni.org/assets/uploads/2017/01/WAFNI-Annual-Report-2015-16.pdf>

² https://www.womensaid.ie/download/pdf/womens_aid_impact_report_2015_executive_summary.pdf & <https://www.womensaid.ie/about/policy/natintstats.html#X-201209171229530>

- Not only does this woman not have a voice but as we see in this passage she becomes a dispensable sacrifice used as a substitute to protect the Levite. She is raped, violated by a crowd of men all night and left for dead at the door of the home where they were staying.
- Not only does this woman suffer the worst brutal savagery of her life but there is no one to come to her aid.
- She had been betrayed by her husband, who days before had the intention of wooing her back to him, now she had nowhere to turn to and literally clung to the only hope for life that she had left, the threshold of a stranger where her master was staying. One might think that now would be a prime opportunity to go out to her to speak tenderly to her but no compassion is expressed. “Get up!” he commands callously, “we are going.” But there is no answer, so he put her on a donkey and proceeded to return to his home where her body is grossly violated by dismemberment to build his case of wrongdoing done to him before the entire nation of Israel. In this last violent act, the Levite uses her body to communicate to the eleven other tribes how he had been violated by the tribe of Benjamin. From beginning to end this nameless woman is a victim with no voice, a victim with no choices; except between her husband and her father, the two primary men in her life. The unnamed concubine in this story is a metaphor for all the nameless women who silently suffer and endure public and private abuse in every society including our own. Her story is important for all women whose fate is determined by wrongdoing men.³
- Judges 19 begins with an important phrase, ‘In those days Israel had no King.’ The book finishes with that statement and adds that, ‘everyone did as he saw fit.’ In contrast, in the next book, Ruth, the Hebrew hearer would note the first person’s name mentioned, Elimelech, meaning ‘God is King’ and then read of two women treated well despite the potential danger they could have been in. What a contrast!

Do not turn a blind eye – Luke 10:25-37 (Slide 12)

- The reading from Luke’s gospel tells us the very familiar story of the ‘good Samaritan’
- In this familiar passage of the Good Samaritan we meet three different people who come across a victim.
- Sadly the Priest and the Levite chose to cross the road and pass by the victim of violence on the other side of the road.
- We can speculate and perhaps even justify why they chose to ignore the victim of violence but today with all the knowledge we have about Domestic violence we can no longer ignore the problem before us.
- Sadly, throughout history the Christian church has often been reluctant when it came to assisting the victims of domestic violence and has remained silent about the injustice being perpetrated. We have left the ‘good Samaritans’ outside the Church such as Women’s Aid, the hospital and medical profession, the police, and the Government to stop and minister to the

³ <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/domestic-violence-worship-resources.pdf>

victims of domestic violence, to tend to their wounds, to find a safe place for them to stay and to pay the cost in both time, effort and money.

- At the centre of our faith, is Christ who was violently whipped, beaten, mocked and killed. God identifies with the abused of today in a profound way. His followers must reflect his compassion.

How can we respond? (Slide 13)

- First it would be ensuring that we assist the victim. The good Samaritan bound up the wounds, poured oil and wine on them and put the victim on his donkey took him to the inn and paid for his care – for victims of domestic violence today it might mean that we have to assist them get to the hospital, help look after their children, find them safe alternative accommodation, assist them financially, refer them to the police, to counselling, go with them if they have to attend court. Practical, helpful supportive assistance is what is initially needed
- It also means that the church should be a safe place for women to come and tell their story.
- But in our story we must go one step further than the Good Samaritan – we must do something to prevent the next person who takes the road from Jerusalem to Jericho from becoming a victim of violence.
- **(Slide 14)** 18months ago Carlow Methodist Church began a journey with their local Women's Aid. Their minister and members of the church council met with the manager of Carlow Women's Aid to learn about the services they provided and the work they were involved in. Through these conversations the church discovered two things that they were able to help with. Firstly the Women's Aid centre needed help to transform an outside space and members of the congregation undertook this task and transformed and brightened the area. Secondly, they discovered that Women's Aid were taking around 20 or so women every month to the court in Carlow on Family Law Day to get Protection and Barring Orders. The court in Carlow has no waiting area and no way of separating the victims of domestic violence from their perpetrators, but is next door to the Methodist Church. Now, each time the court is sitting for Family Law, the Methodist church opens its hall for Carlow Women's Aid and their clients and provides them with lunch before they have to go back into court.
- **(Slide 15)** "In Ballymena we started with a phone call to the local refuge to see if there was anything we could be of help with and also to offer our support. The lady who answered cried, as she explained that no one before had ever bothered to ask what help was needed. We began a monthly visit bringing a chinese takeaway up to the refuge. This has not been easy for some of our ladies. So much conversation that we consider normal is not appropriate. We don't ask what school their children come from. We dont ask about future plans. We just show support, good humour and love where we can. Many of the Women stay at the refuge temporarily, so building long term relationships is not our focus. Our aim is to plant seeds. Methodist women come, they smile they are not judgmental and they do not ask for anything at all in return. We believe that helps to demonstrate a small fraction of unconditional love. We are in regular contact to see how we can be of help. If there is an urgent need for toiletries or children's clothes, then we can be of practical help. An Important aspect is building

relationships with support workers and staff. If they would like to run a 'Cook It' course then they know we will provide our resources. Free!!

If they want to run a fundraiser we will provide our facilities: a warm comfortable Room/hall, and ladies to provide tea and tray bakes." (Elaine McDonald)

- **(Slide 16)** Women's Aid give support south and north of the border. Despite the title, Women's Aid also provides support for male victims of Domestic abuse. In South Antrim, Women's Aid has established a social enterprise called Onus. Onus operates 'Safe Church' training and are happy to have a conversation with churches, church groups or districts about how they could help, anywhere in Ireland. There is also the White Ribbon scheme that shows a stand against domestic violence.
- Those involved in supporting victims of domestic abuse generally have mixed feelings about the role of churches. On the one hand, they recognise churches and ministries where those who have been in abusive settings have found support, hope, community and a way forward. However, there have also been church settings where women in an abusive marriage have been given unhelpful advice that has allowed the abuse to continue. More generally, there is concern about how often churches may use gender language or portray gender roles. It is helpful for us to ask, what messages do we send out to those in need. Do we subtly suggest as a church that we have everything sorted in life and that there are not problems within our families or homes? Or are our churches places where people have genuine safe space to ask for help? Or to let others know that they are struggling, and find compassionate support?
- **(Slide 17)** How aware are we of the needs in our area? What conversations could we have with others in our community about the needs that are out there? What conversations could we have with support agencies? What messages do we send out? Let us be well heard – this is a place where the weary and brokenhearted can find safe refuge. The ministry of this church is here to listen, to support, to bless and refresh. If there is fear already in your life, may there be no extra fear in seeking help here. May we all truly reflect Christ and his peace.

Potential Resources relating to CSR and Domestic Violence



The statements on Domestic Violence to the Conferences of 2015 and 2016, as well as other CSR documents can be found on the Irish Methodist site: www.irishmethodist.org/csr

We have a Facebook page. We'd love to be able to highlight on that page areas where Christians and churches are taking their social responsibility seriously in today's society, so please do get in touch.

Women's Aid are active across Ireland, with local branches. Here are their national websites and helpline numbers.

ROI: www.womensaid.ie 1800 341 900 NI: www.womensaidni.org 0808 802 1414

Onus training: www.onustraining.co.uk

The White Ribbon scheme to make a stand against domestic violence. www.whiteribbon.org.uk

Rev Cheryl Patterson's Masters Dissertation on 'Gender Justice as a Mission Imperative: The Methodist Church in Ireland's response to Domestic Violence,' is a useful read. She is happy to send it to you if you email her on cherylanniep@hotmail.com

Here are a number of sites that may also be useful in regard to highlighting in the church the issues around Domestic Abuse.

<https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/domestic-violence>

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/prayer-for-domestic-violence-prevention-month-october>

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/methodist-special-sundays/women-against-violence-sunday/>

https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/end_violence_women_suggestions.pdf

http://iawn.anglicancommunion.org/media/62873/16_days- sermon ann drummond 2013.pdf

<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov/campaigns/40-days-to-end-violence-against/week-6-stories-from-around-the-/reflection.html>

<http://www.united-church.ca/worship-special-days/national-day-remembrance-and-action-violence-against-women>

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/domestic-violence-worship-resources.pdf>

<http://www.covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2014/06/AVA-DV-Sunday-Liturgies-Prayers-and-Readings.pdf>

<http://www.sabbathofdomesticpeace.org/resources/worship.htm>