



Notes to accompany the Charter for churches

Notes to use alongside the leaflet 'It doesn't happen here', and to accompany the suggested Dignity Coalition Church Charter

part of the Dignity initiative



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- ✚ How do we as churches and individuals respond to issues of domestic abuse?
- ✚ Is your church a safe place for someone who is vulnerable and afraid?
- ✚ Do you know what services there are in your community to support and empower someone who has been abused?
- ✚ What can we do to challenge and change attitudes that allow abuse to happen?

The issues around domestic abuse are difficult ones - difficult for us in the society we live in today, difficult for us in the church, and difficult for individuals who may be facing personally the challenges that living in an imperfect world can bring, either for themselves, or for someone close to them. It is much easier for us to think that 'it doesn't happen here' and hope that it will all quietly go away.

What are the facts?

- ✚ Abuse is the misuse of power.
- ✚ Findings from the British Crime Survey 2001¹ show that 13% of women and 9% of men suffered domestic violence (abuse, threats or force), sexual victimisation or stalking in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- ✚ Women experienced on average twenty incidents and men seven.
- ✚ The Survey also shows that women make up the overwhelming majority of the most heavily abused group - 89% of the most severely abused people were women, and of these, 32% had experienced four or more incidents of domestic violence from the perpetrator of the worst incident, compared with 11% of men.

Why a Charter, and how do we use it?

The Charter for Churches which the Baptist Union promoted through the *Decade To Overcome Violence* (2001-2010) was written initially by the Women's Group of the Gloucestershire Churches Together, and shared as a statement for local churches to use. It is one part of the process of standing as a gospel people in a violent world. We need to declare that we will seek to bring about change in attitudes and practices that allow domestic abuse to continue, to be unchallenged and hidden. That charter was adapted so that it built on the resolution from the Baptist Union Council in November 1999, and affirmed at the Baptist Assembly in 1998.

¹S Walby and J Allen, *Domestic Violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*, Home Office Research Study 276, March 2004.

The Day to Count: A twenty-four hour snapshot of research and statistical gathering of information was carried out on 28 September 2000. The agencies involved were varied and wide-ranging from the Police to Women's Aid, Victim Support and Relate. On that ordinary September day, the following statistics emerged:

Every minute police in the UK receive a call about domestic violence. On that day,

- ✚ 81% of the calls were women attacked by male perpetrators
- ✚ 8% were men attacked by women
- ✚ 4% were women attacked by women
- ✚ 7% were men attacked by men

These situations include partners and ex-partners, both currently living together and living separately.

In 1999, 37% of women murder victims were killed by a present or former partner (two women a week) compared with 6% of male murder victims. (*Annual Statistics England and Wales, Home Office, 1999*)

In any one day, nearly 7,000 women and children are sheltering from violence in refuges in the UK. An estimated 19,910 women and 28,520 children stayed in a refuge during the year ending 31 March 1998 (Women's Aid, 1999). On the **Day to Count**, 300 women asked for refuge in the UK, and could not be accommodated in already full refuges.

E Stanko 'The Day to Count: A Snapshot of the impact of Domestic Violence in the UK', in *Criminal Justice*, Feb 2000

At the Baptist Assembly in 2004, in addition to welcoming the proposals contained in the Government's Domestic Violence Crime and Victims' Bill, member churches, Associations and Colleges were called to take seriously the abuse faced by individuals within our local congregations and neighbourhood communities; to commit to making our churches places where both women and men can find informed, responsible protection, justice and support, in cooperation with local services; and to use the resources available to enable them to respond to this call in a creative and responsible way. Each statement in the original charter and the refreshed text of the CH2 pdf The Dignity Coalition Church Charter, is a part of the church response to that call as the fellowship takes steps together to consider these issues that are rarely discussed

With ongoing acknowledgement of the work of the Women's Group of the Gloucestershire Churches Together and Restored, the Baptist Union stands with BMS, BUW, BUS and IBN in supporting the Dignity Coalition Church Charter. It

is designed to encourage local churches to make space in the church agenda to promote good policy and practice in our pastoral caring. The Charter could be pinned on a notice-board so that those coming in know where the church stands. If your church would like to sign up to this Charter and receive a certificate to display in your church building, go to **[bmsworldmission/dignity](https://bmsworldmission.org/dignity)**

Notes and expansions to the specific points of the Charter:

2 Repentance

Jesus said "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and **if he repents**, forgive him" (**Luke 17:3**). It is so often assumed that a Christian will forgive and forget easily, but forgiveness is not easy. It may be impossible to forgive until the offence has been named and acknowledged. Repentance involves the perpetrator fully acknowledging the wrongdoing, and making a commitment to turn from it. It may also mean accepting change in the perpetrator's life that is not necessarily in line with his wishes - for example, moving from the home and from the church fellowship. Repentance does not mean returning to the original position - rather it means a complete turning around, and making a new start. Nor do forgiveness and reconciliation mean going back to the original relationship - both mean a new beginning.

3 This church accepts that domestic abuse is a serious problem

Domestic violence is a crime. It refers to a pattern of violent and controlling behaviour by one adult in an intimate relationship with another. It may include repeated physical abuse, or take the form of sexual or psychological threats or abuse and control. The most harmful abuse is carried out by men against female partners, but can also occur by women against men, and in same sex relationships. It is rarely a one-off event, and is more common than most people realise. It may result in isolation of one partner who is unable to see friends or family alone, or take the form of attack against property or pets. People experience domestic violence regardless of social class, age, race, or lifestyle. It happens in your community, and may happen, or have happened to someone who is a part of your church fellowship.

4 Undertakes to listen, support and care

Women who have been abused, whether physically, sexually, emotionally or mentally, do not ask for help easily. There are still so many myths around, perpetuated often unwittingly by attitudes in society towards women, that make it incredibly difficult to ask for help.

It may be difficult for someone of either sex who has been abused to be able to acknowledge that it is not their own fault or that it is not something they have done that causes the violence to happen. And so the violence becomes hidden, the victim becomes in some ways invisible, and often **wants** to be invisible. Each

occasion when we fail to listen to words barely spoken, or just hinted at, or each time we unwittingly turn away, we add another layer to those already making the victim invisible. Unless we are acutely aware, we shan't ask the right questions, or create the right atmosphere in which it is possible to speak or to ask. The first steps will always be to ensure safe boundaries, assure someone of confidentiality, to believe what is being said and to give priority to their safety.

6 Local support agencies

The key agency is Women's Aid, or in some parts of the country, Refuge, both of which produce excellent leaflets, and training videos, and may run a Women's Refuge in your area. Both the Police, who frequently have a Family Unit, and Social Services, are committed to working with victims, children and perpetrators. So too are the Probation Service. You will also want to know the numbers to use locally for the Samaritans, Rape Crisis, and the NSPCC. Many areas now have a Domestic Violence Forum which brings together statutory and voluntary agencies. Other useful contacts are the Housing Department, drug and alcohol advisory services and Citizen's Aid.

It may be that someone is only able to break the silence much later, and now needs to work through how to pick up the pieces, to be free to get on with the rest of life. At this stage, it is likely that professional counselling or other professional help will be more appropriate, which may be through the NHS or other agency. It helps to be familiar with what resources are locally available as well as more specialised national groups like National Association of Christian Survivors of Sexual Abuse (CSSA National), Minister & Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (MACSAS) and Respect (UK Association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes). There may be a good Christian Counselling service nearby, or the Regional Representative of the Association of Christian Counsellors will be able to put you in contact. The role of the church then is to continue the journey alongside the individual, respecting their decisions, and supporting them in their life choices.

9 Made in God's image

Living a new model of what it means to be human, is a challenge to us to think through how we live in a violent world.

Violence in family life may be a reflection of the fact that violence occurs in other areas of life. Where violence is seen as a legitimate use of force to attain socially approved ends, there is the risk that this can be generalised to other areas of life. Violence in war is sanctioned; sexual domination and violence is increasingly portrayed on TV, videos, in films, and in advertising. 'Violence against women is also seen as an integral part of a patriarchal system in which social institutions and human relationships are hierarchically organised and held in place by an ideology that socialises people into believing that this is 'right, natural and sacred'". (Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada)

Church language can be beautiful, but can also be exclusive; so many of our words appear to be for men only, and would be seen in other contexts as sexist.

Years of tradition have dulled our perceptions of what we say in a church setting, yet someone coming in from outside might get mixed messages. Lines in hymns such as 'By this, shall all men know that you are my disciples' or 'I thy true son' or 'bring many sons to glory' need an understanding of what is meant, but not said.

We need to play our part in eliminating discrimination against women simply by influencing attitudes and conversations, challenging the common perceptions of women which surface in everyday conversation. The church can contribute to the public debate on women's rights and the need for equal opportunities.

Recent research among young people revealed a significant level of acceptance of violence in a relationship. This renews the awareness of a need for modelling equal respectful relationships and teaching that allows open discussion of anger and violence and that violence in a relationship is not acceptable.

10 Good practice guidelines

An advocate is someone who speaks for those who cannot easily express their views and feelings, and may not be taken into account in the ordinary business of church life. Increasingly, local churches are appointing a Children's Advocate, in conjunction with the *Safe to Grow* guidelines. The impetus for promotion of an advocate for those damaged by domestic violence comes from the issues raised by the Decade to Overcome Violence, accompanied by an increasing awareness in Government and society that domestic violence is a serious crime, and also of the close links with child abuse.



Ideally, an advocate will:

- ✚ become a voice for victims and survivors, in considering how the church functions as an inclusive community and provides pastoral care,
- ✚ act as a contact person for concerns regarding domestic violence, and maintain links with the community services,
- ✚ support and monitor implementation and use of guidelines concerning domestic violence.

It may be helpful to share the tasks, and to have more than one person to share the responsibility.

In general, good practice will include:

- ✚ consultation and dialogue within the church and local community,
- ✚ developing links between the church, community and service providers,
- ✚ developing a domestic violence / abuse policy,
- ✚ having copies of *Breaking the Silence Wanting Change* and other appropriate leaflets available,
- ✚ regular training,

-  regular review of policy and practice,
-  establishing clear lines of support and communication.

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Contact Numbers

24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247

Run in partnership by Women's Aid and Refuge. Support, help and information for women experiencing domestic violence. If you wish, they will refer you to a local refuge and advice service or other sources of help, in strictest confidence. Open twenty-four hours a day, with trained support workers to advise you.

Women's Aid **www.womensaid.org.uk 0117 944 4411**

Refuge **www.refuge.org.uk** (admin calls) **020 7395 7700**

Men's Advice Line www.mensadvice.org.uk 0808 801 0327

Information, support and advice to men experiencing domestic violence. Open 9-5 Monday –Friday.

Action on Elder Abuse National Helpline: 0808 808 8141

Support for older people experiencing abuse, open 9-5 Monday-Friday.

National Child Protection Helpline (NSPCC) 0808 800 5000

The Association of Christian Counsellors www.acc-uk.org 0845 124 9569

Ask if there is a Christian Counselling Service nearby, or phone the above number which will be able to give you the number of the Regional Representative for your area or the nearest counselling service.

RESPECT 0845 122 8609

National phone line for perpetrators or professionals seeking advice

Local Women's Aid or Refuge services (local phone book and online)

Other leaflets in the series

For Churches:

CH1 *It doesn't happen here* - BUGB Leaflet

CH2 *The Dignity Coalition Church Charter* - BUGB Leaflet

CH3 *Notes to accompany the Charter for churches* - BUGB Leaflet

For victims / survivors:

S1 *Breaking the silence... wanting change* - BUGB Leaflet

For Ministers:

P1 *When the silence is broken... what does the law say?* - BUGB Leaflet

P2 *When the silence is broken... prepared to listen* - BUGB Leaflet

- P3 *When the silence is broken... marriage... where do you stand?*
- BUGB Leaflet
- P4 *Why do women stay? Towards a spiritual understanding* - BUGB Leaflet
- P5 *What churches need to know about pastoral support for abusers*
- BUGB Leaflet
- P6 *Agencies which may be able to help* - BUGB Leaflet

BUGB leaflets may be copied freely or are available from **www.baptist.org.uk**

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