

Abuse and the Church's Responsibility (part 2)

Five Reasons Why the Church Should Get Involved:

1. Families are being destroyed by violence. Marriages are not being destroyed by women who leave an abusive relationship; it is being destroyed by the repeated acts of violence in the home.
2. Children are growing up believing that daddy hitting mommy is normal. The next generation of abusive men are now small boys watching their fathers batter their mothers.
3. For many women, their home is the most dangerous place to be. According to the American Medical Association, domestic violence is the number one threat to women's health.
4. The church has contributed to abuse in the home by failing to confront abusers, failing to provide safety for victims, and sending them back home to further abuse.
5. The church has a major role in protecting the victim and reducing violence. Instead of looking the other way and pretending the problem doesn't exist, or deliberately ignoring the problem to keep the family together at all costs, we need to ask ourselves "What would Jesus do?" The church has one thing to offer victims of domestic violence that all other social agencies and legal systems do not have: **HOPE!**

◆**Hope for victims to find safety and peace**, to find other women or support groups to provide encouragement, to receive assistance in meeting financial and daily needs, and to rediscover the person God made them to be

◆**Hope for children to live in a violence-free home**, and to learn the principles of scriptures in being a godly husband or wife through mentoring of church family

◆**Hope for abusers to find men who will hold them accountable**, and walk with them through the process of treatment and healing

◆**Hope for restoring families** whose lives have been broken and destroyed through violence, and breaking the cycle of abuse in future generations

◆**Hope because the power of Jesus Christ can change lives and redeem years of destruction and pain by using those experiences to help others**

What the church can do to help victims of domestic violence:

Educate

1. Include a 4-6 week study on family violence and the prevention of violence in adult Sunday School curriculum. *Invite guest speakers from a local shelter or FOCUS Ministries to educate congregation or small groups about domestic violence.*
2. Plan several sermons throughout the year on the subject of violence in the home. (**October is National Domestic Violence Month.**) Explain the various definitions of domestic violence, including verbal and emotional abuse, and take a strong stand against such behavior. Clarify that being given the responsibility of head of the home does **not** grant permission to punish or abuse.
3. Display brochures, newsletters, and information about domestic violence where people can easily access them. Post phone numbers for shelters, support groups, and national domestic violence hotline on bulletin boards and in church bulletins. Add books about the subject to your church library.
4. Educate your teenage girls and guys about domestic violence, and help them develop biblical ways to express anger.

Provide Safety

1. Adopt a shelter as a mission project or start your own shelter where women and children can have emergency and short-term housing.

2. Set up a network of homes as safe places for women and children in a crisis.
3. Provide wise counsel to the victim which will not put her in more danger, and know what community services are available to help her.
4. Provide a safety escort for women attending joint counseling sessions with abuser, and to court hearings.

Support

1. Start a support group for women or offer a meeting place for other organized groups like FOCUS Ministries.
2. Maintain an emergency fund to help meet the financial needs of women and children who are forced to leave because of violence in the home.
3. Continue to be caring and supportive, even if a woman refuses to leave an abusive relationship, or goes back into an abusive relationship before the abuser has changed.
4. Walk through the long process of healing and forgiveness with the victim and abuser as long as it takes. Don't give them "x" number of weeks to get better and then drop them. Be prepared to offer support and guidance for several years, not days or months.
5. Provide prayer partners for victims to be available day or night, and who will present prayer requests to a network of prayer chains, prayer lists, and prayer meetings. Let women know that they are being prayed for on a consistent basis.
6. Connect women with people in the church who can provide computer training, financial planning, etc.

Confront

Confront the abuser and encourage him to join a treatment program for abusers. Make available an accountability group for him where concerned men will ask him about his behavior on a consistent basis, and pray for and encourage him to continue his treatment program.

Help break the cycle of abuse to provide hope and healing for the next generation.