

MINISTERS FORUM NEWSLETTER

INFORMATION MINISTERS CAN USE

MINISTERING TO THE ABUSED: DOMESTIC/FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE CHURCH

Ephesians 5:20 -33; 6: 1-4

*Ephesians 5:17
"therefore be not unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is speaking to one another in Psalms and singing to the Lord... wives submit to your husbands... Husbands love your wives ... Children obey your parents in the Lord... fathers do not provoke children,,,,"*

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"Where there is no vision, the people perish

Precious Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ of Nazareth. In this month's Newsletter focus will be on Domestic and what is commonly called Family Violence among members of the church and the role of the pastor in addressing these issues. Over the past five (5) months I have been involved in a project sponsored by an international organization to address, among other things Gender Based Violence which speaks to ending this kind of violence in Jamaica with emphasis on women and girls. While there are many men who are being abused by women; the emphasis is on the female because statistics have shown that men are the main perpetrators of violence in the home and by extension wider society

Domestic Violence occurs because the abuser believes that abuse is acceptable, justified, or unlikely to be reported. This belief has produced intergenerational cycles of abuse in children and other family members, who may feel that such violence is acceptable or should be condoned. Very few people see themselves as abusers or victims because they consider their experiences as family disputes that just got out of control. In some countries, Domestic Violence is often seen as justified, particularly in cases of actual or suspected infidelity on the part of the woman, and is legally permitted. Unfortunately this belief is shared by many persons in the church.

Generally speaking Gender (men/women) Based Violence (Domestic violence) is said to be among the most underreported crimes worldwide for both men and women. According to informal report from police officers in Jamaica Men face additional gender related barriers in reporting, due to social stigmas regarding male victimization, and an increased likelihood of being overlooked and scoffed at by citizens –including police officers who are sarcastic towards men who report that they are beaten/abused by women.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in the U.S.A reports that: every an estimated 1300 women die each year as a result of domestic violence; nearly 5.3 million incidents of interpersonal violence occur and approximately 2 million women are injured. In Jamaica it is reported that over the past ten (10) years domestic and Intimate partner Violence has increased significantly especially with men being the main perpetrators who also ended up killing themselves after killing their spouses.

What is Domestic Violence?

Wikipedia website defines **Domestic Violence** as a pattern of behavior which involves violence or other abuse by one person against another in a domestic setting, such as in marriage or cohabitation. Within the context of Domestic



Violence there is '**Intimate Partner Violence**' which is violence by a spouse against the other spouse. It also involves violence against children in the family or members of the household

Domestic violence can take many **forms**, including physical, verbal, emotional, economic, religious, and sexual abuse, which can range from subtle, coercive forms to marital rape and to violent physical abuse such as genital mutilation and actions that results in disfigurement or death.

Domestic violence and the church

Domestic violence "happens within and beyond communities of faith in approximately the same prevalence rates," says Nancy Nason-Clark, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick, Canada. Dr. Nason-Clark who is also creator of the RAVE Project, a web-based series of resources that provides information and training for families of faith impacted by abuse has studied contemporary Christianity and violence for 20 years.

The studies conducted points to the fact churches are not readily equipped to address issues of abuse and need to be positioned to do something about domestic violence within families in the church instead of the holy hush that permeates many churches. She also pointed out that *many women and men are very frightened to talk about domestic violence "because it challenges the notion that families of faith have it together."*

Globally, the victims of Domestic Violence are tied to Power and control especially in abusive relationships where the abusers exert physical, sexual and other forms of abuse to gain control within relationship. The perpetrator (usually the male), which in the majority of cases/ situations [attempts to] control all aspects of the victims life (social, personal, professional and financial decisions). Because the role of the head of the household is usually the man as promulgated by the church, there is the belief that the women die daily in silence and are forces to comply though they would rather not.

Domestic violence (also named domestic abuse, battering, or family violence) as a pattern of behavior which involves violence or other abuse by one person against another in a domestic setting, such as in marriage or cohabitation.

What Women Wish Pastors Knew.....

Denise George, a gifted writer and the wife of theologian Timothy George, has published a new book called *What Women Wish Pastors Knew*. George writes. "We just cannot believe that a church deacon or member goes home after worship . . . and beats his wife." Tragically, however, George notes, some of these men justify their violence "by citing biblical passages."

Some men have misinterpreted scriptures such as in *Ephesians 5:22*, *1 Peter 3:1-7* which guides husbands to live with their wives considerately and to love their wives as Christ loved the church. The Bible also makes it clear that the church should not close its eyes to violent men. In *1 Timothy 3:3*, the church is told that when it comes to choosing leaders, they must find men who are "not violent but gentle," sober, and temperate.



According to Denese George the number of *domestic abuse in Christian homes is horrifying*, and the *church ought to play its role in creating awareness and guiding members and non-members into how to treat with conflict as against using violent means*. Contrary to popular views among Christians this is not a matter to be left to secular agencies; but it is *one mission field where the church is largely missing in action*.

“.....that sometimes pastors, albeit with good intentions, do more harm than good.....”

It is also the opinion of many including some pastors and ministers that, albeit with good intentions, do more harm than good because they are not equipped with the strategies to help those faced with Family violence (Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence - DIPV). Yes, there is always Divine Intervention, but the God that we are praying to expects us to use wisdom, knowledge and understanding to guide those who have these issues through a process of healing and restoration - *Pastors can you imagine how much more impact you will have if you were trained to counsel those affected*.

Why women/men stay in abusive homes/ relationship

Mrs. George's research has shown that women and men of faith often stay much longer in abusive relationships than those who are not. Some of the reasons provided for staying/enduring by persons who are being abused include: financial insecurity making them unable to survive without the spouse, for the sake of the children and the belief that they will not be in the will of the Lord hence, will not make it into heaven and outright fear for their lives .

In fact one woman told me that she is staying in the relationship and forgiving her husband because she is trying to save her own self and not because she love her husband. One man told me that he stayed because of his children because he did not grow with his parents and it affected him to this point. The question is have these reasons achieved the desired objectives? Which brings us to ask whether or not these are good ideas and who has it helped?

Impact on children and other members of the family

According to researches reviewed when men and women are enduring abuse themselves, it is also hurting the children. One cannot be a victim of domestic violence living in a household with children and not be concerned about its impact on them. One Christian counselors is of the opinion that If parents are observing and are connected to their family members they will see that the children are already

SIVAM

A woman I'll call "Sivam" went to her pastor for help. "My husband is abusing me," she told him. "Last week he knocked me down and kicked me. He broke one of my ribs."

Marlene's pastor was sympathetic. He prayed with Sivam—and then he sent her home. "Try to be more submissive," he advised. "After all, your husband is your spiritual head."

Two weeks later, Sivam was dead—killed by an abusive husband who had “*feelings buried alive from childhood that never died*” bottled up inside from his parents abusive relationship. Her church could not believe it. Sivam's husband was a Sunday school teacher and a deacon. How could he have done such a thing?

Tragically, studies reveal that spousal abuse is just as common within the evangelical churches as anywhere else. This means that about 25% of Christian homes witness abuse of some kind.

Adapted from real situation



being negatively impacted, that they should seek safety for themselves and the kids from the abuser.

Over the years the practice of some church leaders is to insist, (on Scriptural grounds) that a woman must remain with an abusive husband or visa-versa. Historically women (who are abused) feel powerless and unable to make changes because they are fearful of what might happen; however, in recent years more people have been 'running with their children because a pattern has developed, for example, in Jamaica where the perpetrators are taking the lives of not only the persons being abused but their own lives. In a number of these cases children are left behind without both parents

What should pastors do?

- a. *Acknowledge that Domestic Violence/abuse in the church is a problem, and learn how to counsel families wisely –*

The first step is to be equipped to counsel/work with abuser and abused. Be prepared to answer questions that will be asked such as: 'Why has God abandoned me?' 'I promised forever 'til death do us part. Why is this taking place?' 'How can I be a better Christian?' ...Pastors need to be in a position to listen to what the heart cry is and respond with the toolkit that is available to them as a result of *their training and knowledge of Scripture.*

When pastors have an awareness of some of the dynamics of abuse, they are able to listen with ears that are attuned and are able to harness their repertoire of spiritual helps to offer a spiritual counsel and augment a survivor's journey towards healing."

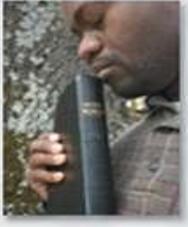
"Sometimes it's as simple as praying with the victim without placing blame... giving them a selection of five or six passages to look over and think about

- b. *Establish the perpetrator's responsibility for his behaviour needs to be an ongoing dialogue or intervention of Counsellor or other related persons ;*
- c. *Counsel abused and abuser along the lines of self-help activities*

These should happen through "Talk therapy and Narrative therapy" where they are allowed to speak freely or release their issues in writing.

- d. *Pastor must be an effective listener/very good listener*
- e. *A pastor also needs to know what kind of resources are in the community, to know who to call when someone calls and says, 'I'm having problems with my household. Know where are the contacts for the shelter, safe houses? Etc.*
- f. *Include Domestic violence in Pre-marital Counselling:*
Counseling about Domestic Violence with non-abusive, soon-to-be married couples during pre-marital conversations must be encouraged.

The question is often asked whether *change and reconciliation can occur when each individual in an abusive situation receives professional domestic violence counseling?* The answer is 'yes' if all parties commit themselves to doing so along with ongoing divine intervention. There's always hope and God never takes delight in abuse of men, women, children, or anyone.



*Ministers, as you are well aware most cases of domestic violence go unreported. Many victims try to justify their abuser's actions, and try to convince themselves that the situation will improve. Please bear in mind that domestic violence situations frequently escalate; what may begin as occasional intimidation, threats of Violence, or aggressive sexual advances, can escalate physical assault, and even murder. If you are in or aware of these situations it must be addressed. If there are children, keep in mind that when children witness a domestic violence situation, it can lead to them developing violent behaviors later in life because 'feelings buried alive never die'. **Be Blessed***

Appendix 1

Domestic Violence/Family Violence can be physical, emotional, social, psychological, economical/financial, spiritual or sexual. Being victimized by a situation of domestic violence can create feelings of helplessness and even self-doubt, so it's important that you understand the different signs of abuse so that you can identify the problem and get help.

Physical Abuse: is the most recognizable form of domestic violence. It involves the use of force against the victim, causing injury (e.g. a punch or a kick, stabbing, shooting, choking, slapping, forcing you to use drugs, etc.). Remember that the injury doesn't need to be a major one. Consider, for example, that your abuser slaps you a few times, causing only minor injuries that don't require a visit to the hospital. Is that domestic violence? Yes. The slapping would still be considered domestic violence.

Emotional Abuse: involves the destruction of the victim's self-worth, and is brought about by persistent insult, humiliation, or criticism. Emotional abuse can be a difficult type of domestic violence for many people to understand, since, on the surface, it appears to be quite common in unhealthy relationships. Most commonly, evidence of emotional abuse is combined with other abuse (physical, financial, sexual, or psychological) to bring a domestic violence charge.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse is a common form of domestic violence which includes not only sexual assault and rape, but also harassment, such as unwelcome touching and other demeaning behaviors.

Financial and Economic Abuse: is perhaps the least obvious. Financial abuse may take on many forms, such as a husband preventing his wife from obtaining an education or a job outside the home. **Financial abuse** is extremely common, particularly when families have pooled their money into joint accounts (with one partner controlling) and where there's little or no family support system to help. **Economic abuse** is similar to finance which is basically denying the individual access to money, including his/her own, demanding that the family live on inadequate resources, incurring debt in the victim's name, selling victims possession etc. Often, the victim is completely dependent on his or her partner for money. With no access to money except through the abusive partner, the victim is completely at the abusive partner's mercy. The abusive partner may withhold money for food, clothing, and more.

Psychological Abuse: is basically a catchall term for intimidating, threatening, or fear-causing behavior. This behavior must be persistent and significant. A wide variety of behaviors fall under the umbrella of psychological abuse. Some common examples include: preventing the victim from talking to people unless they have been given 'permission,' preventing the victim from leaving the house, threatening the victim with violence or emotional blackmail for doing something the abusive partner doesn't agree with, etc.

Intimidation: Smashing things, destroying possessions, harassing the victim (phone calls/sending messages/emails etc), loitering near home or work place - staking etc

TYPES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

For more information on Domestic Violence & Human Trafficking Call: 478-2640

Want to talk to a Christian Professional Counsellor?
Contact Mrs. Vivienne Tomlinson 7587776