



Archbishop Geoffrey Ad Clerum on Domestic Violence

Dear Colleagues

You may be aware of a post on the Radio National website on Tuesday entitled '*Submit to your husbands': Women told to endure domestic violence in the name of God*'. This is the second instalment of an ABC news investigation into domestic violence and religion. The material reports concern about the role the Christian church of all denominations can either consciously or inadvertently play in allowing abusive men to continue abusing their wives. This report was followed up last night on the *7.30 Report*, and with a further post today on the ABC news website.

The Radio National program makes the case that the church has not been proactive in playing its part to stop domestic violence and in fact may have been complicit in its continuing. Our natural reaction to this criticism may be defensive. In my view, a better reaction is to be active in making clear that domestic violence must stop and providing assistance to that end for victims and perpetrators.

I want to say very clearly that there is no excuse for domestic violence of any kind. The teachings of the church do not justify it and the scriptures do not justify it. Domestic violence and abuse are completely opposite to the Christian faith and its practice.

The program raises an important question i.e. what is the Church doing to stop domestic violence? I think it is true we have a role to play given we are part of the wider community and include in our congregations people who may be perpetrators or victims of this awful activity.

How we are responding:

1. A number of years ago a booklet entitled *Domestic Violence Handbook for clergy and church workers* was published in South Australia. While the passage of time may mean an update would be helpful, the booklet provides relevant information on forms of domestic violence, patterns and impacts of domestic violence, how to respond when domestic violence is disclosed by a victim, a perpetrator, or the child of a victim, plus contact details for helplines and further assistance. The booklet is distributed to people in our formation program and is also available to any clergy or church workers. I encourage you to familiarise yourself with the Handbook and make use of its resources. Feel free to contact Diocesan Office for a copy.
2. *Faithfulness in Service* contains a section on personal behaviour which highlights the problems caused by abuse, including family and domestic violence. The Code is clear that abuse of anyone is not acceptable. The Safer Churches training provided by this diocese includes training in *Faithfulness in Service* including the section on personal behaviour.

How can we respond?

One important way we can respond to the problem of domestic violence is through our preaching and teaching. I encourage you to make it very clear that abuse of any kind, including domestic and family violence, is wrong in all circumstances, that it cannot be justified from scripture, that perpetrating domestic violence is a choice and cannot be blamed on the victim nor can it be quickly forgiven without genuine repentance including amendment of life. It is also very important that we don't in our preaching and teaching give the impression that a victim of this sin should put up with or endure it. People who are victims of domestic violence need help and support, as do the perpetrators.

I encourage you to make known and available the contact details for helplines or websites where assistance can be found. One of those is: 1800 RESPECT (1800 737732) - a free 24-hour service for anyone who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault.

There are two prayers in APBA which might be of assistance.

Those Suffering Abuse (p209)

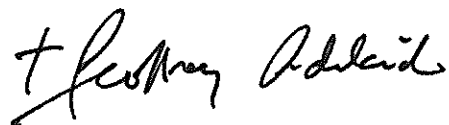
God, our redeemer and sustainer, we pray for survivors of violence, abuse and neglect. Give your power to the powerless, your fullness to the empty of spirit. Heal their wounds, free them from fear, and restore them to true health. Grant this through Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Those who abuse (p.210)

Judge of all the earth, God of justice, we bring before you all who abuse others. Turn the hearts of the violent from the way of evil. Fill them with a hatred for the damage they do, so bringing them to true repentance and amendment of their lives, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please join with me in doing all we can to make our church and wider community a safe place which reflects the love of God for all.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Geoffrey Smith', written in a cursive style.

The Most Reverend Geoffrey Smith
Archbishop of Adelaide

20. 7. 17.