

# Starters for Sunday

**Starters for Sunday**  
**27<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

**Advent 1 – Special resources for the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women**

These materials have been written for Starters for Sunday by the Church of Scotland Church and Society Domestic Abuse Review Group.

[Isaiah 64: 1-9](#)

[Mark 13: 24-37](#)

These 'Starters for Sunday' have been prepared for use within the United Nations '16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women' which runs from 25<sup>th</sup> November – 10<sup>th</sup> December. If, however, it is not possible for you to use this material on 27<sup>th</sup> November it could be used on another Sunday of your choosing. This resource has been prepared by the Church and Society Domestic Abuse Review Group which was set up by the General Assembly in 2010. At General Assembly in 2012 there will be a report brought to Assembly as a result of Church and Society, Ministries' Council, and the Guild working together on this issue. Therefore, it would be good if, having used this material you could give us some feedback. This will be useful information as we put together the report. Comments should be e-mailed to: [churchandsociety@cofscotland.org.uk](mailto:churchandsociety@cofscotland.org.uk)

Scottish Women's Aid have a fold-out card entitled '10 things faith communities can do to stop domestic abuse'. These are free and are available from Scottish Women's Aid (tel: 0131 226 6606; website: [www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)). You may also like to look at the Guild's material on domestic abuse ([www.cofs-guild.org.uk](http://www.cofs-guild.org.uk)).

This is the first Sunday in Advent which you may already mark by lighting the first candle on an advent ring/wreath. On this Sunday, you might also want to note when lighting the candle that this Sunday falls within the '16 days'. If your church sanctuary is open to the public during the daytime, it may be that you would want to have a candle lit for the duration of the '16 days' with a note beside it explaining what it is for. If you do plan for this, then make sure the candle is placed within a fireproof glass candle holder if it is to be left unattended even for a short period. Equally, it may be that the candle could be in an area where other activities take place (e.g., in a hall where a lunch club or children's activities happen).

You may want to consider having a retiring collection for your local women's aid organisation. If you produce an order of service, notice sheet, or use overhead projection, you could make sure that helpline information is provided.



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## **Isaiah 64: 1-9**

This is a prayer from people who are feeling powerless and oppressed. It is a plea to God who exists above and beyond the scope of everyday living to 'come down'; break the barrier between heaven and earth; do the impossible; and intervene. The people are pleading to be remembered and noticed. Whatever has happened, they are shaped by God and are now in times of desperation which means more love than ever is required.

In order for God to once again perform great works, the people also recognise their own failings. They have to be a people where God can live amongst them. In verses 5-6 two images are used to describe the guilt of the people: 'a filthy cloth' and a 'faded leaf'. The image of the filthy cloth is as though the people have contaminated something which began its life clean and fresh. The faded leaf, dead, and lifeless can easily be blown away.

For the theme this week this text lends itself to acknowledging that as a faith community we have not always done the right thing. For many women who have experienced domestic abuse or violence against them, the church has not been the place of sanctuary and healing for which they needed. The plea of woman in every generation is that their powerlessness and oppression might be brought to an end. Their cry to God is that now (and that 'now' is always) would be a good time to intervene – to once again redress the balance of power and remove the oppressive hold of violence.

It is God who has given us life and it is God who can now re-shape us. The petition of the people in verses 8-9 is emphasising that even though they have done wrong or not behaved as God wants them to, it is God who needs to now be part of helping them to become who they will be. As churches, this is an opportunity to re-shape our thinking, our behaviour, our worship, and our focus. Working as God's people to tackle the scourge of violence against women would be a significant expression of solidarity with all women who have been hurt or harmed by violence. Advent focuses on God's solidarity with us all – a solidarity which causes people to do all sorts of caring things for others.

## **Mark 13: 24-37**

This is a text with a strong apocalyptic theme and draws on other texts directly in verses 24 (Isaiah), 25 (Joel), and 26 (Daniel). Watchfulness is called for and the reader is urged to be alert at all times. Anticipation of something both dreadful and yet awe-inspiring is part of the waiting for God amongst us. The known world will be turned upside-down and things can never be the same again.



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Reading the 'signs of the times' is the preoccupation of many – prophecies regarding the destruction of the temple; the fig tree; heaven and earth will pass away. When all is said and done, however, we are reminded by the writer that we are in God's hands. Our vigilance should be focused on behaving as if God were to arrive amongst us at a moment's notice, catching us as we *actually* are rather than as we might like to *think* we are. By being watchful, alert, and vigilant we

are more likely to be a people who do God's will. This is about doing things *now* which will make a difference. Being watchful, alert and vigilant is not about waiting in a passive way for a moment in the future when things will happen. It is about putting things in place now. The integration of prayers, reflections, litanies, and sermons which address domestic abuse are not just for this Sunday. It could be that starting from now, you could make regular mention of those who experience domestic abuse.

For the theme this week to be consistent with the '16 days' this text could be used to highlight the need for us to absorb the task of working against violence against women as an integral aspect of our 'being church' rather than as an occasional theme on which we reflect.

- To be watchful would include watching out for one another.
- To be alert would include making frequent mention in our prayers and worship of women who experience violence against them.
- To be vigilant would include ensuring that effective safeguarding practice means we know how to respond when someone looks to us for sanctuary or support in the face of violence.

In our advent hopes and dreams, let our anticipation include anticipating a world where violence against women will be eradicated. In order to achieve this hope and dream, we need to be watchful and alert...and wait in eager anticipation that God will be revealed.

## Children's themes/talk

Your choice of theme may depend on the age group(s) which is most predominant in your church. Whichever of the following themes you might choose it would be a good idea at some stage to identify the person in your congregation who is the Safeguarding Co-ordinator. Give her/his name and ask her/him to stand, thanking her/him for what they do.

### *Possible themes/ideas*

- For younger children (up to 7 yrs) take some time to talk about what they do when someone else is hurting. A hug, a soft toy, or a plaster may be needed. The hurt may be seen or unseen, but what matters is that someone else cares and will listen to us. There may be a favourite book, story or song which helps when someone is hurting. Jesus was someone who noticed when someone was hurting – sometimes those who had been hurting for a long, long time – and he listened and comforted them.



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*It is important to keep this on the basis that it is about how they respond when someone is hurting. If you ask 'what happens when you are hurting, you may have some rather difficult situations to deal with which can't be handled in the context of a full congregational gathering. What matters is that you are giving the message that you and the church recognise that when someone is hurting then they need someone to listen and comfort them.*

- For older children (ca. 8-11 yrs) explore what we do when we feel angry. Invite the children to 'make an angry face'. What would be an angry way to stand? What might we do with our hands? What do we do when we get angry? This might include stamping our feet, slamming a door, stomping out of a room, shouting, etc, etc.

Talk about how do we get ourselves out of being angry: might include talking about what is making us angry, recognising that we have done something wrong, learning to share something, choosing *not* to punch or kick but to find another way. Emphasise that we all get angry at times, but it matters what we do when we get angry. It is not good for us or anyone else if we choose to hit, kick, punch or call someone names because we are angry. This is harmful.

Jesus' wants us to be people who don't harm others. This means that when we feel angry we need to choose not to hurt or harm others, but to do something which changes our anger. You might want to use the verse about 'turning swords into ploughshares' as an idea which is about turning away from being violent and angry to doing something useful.

*(Prayers, responsive liturgy and music suggestions can be found below.)*



# starters for Sunday

## **Prayers of thanksgiving and confession** *(with spoken response)*

In the silence, we wait for you, Creator God.

We wait, we listen and we hope.

We wait for a new world to be born;

We listen for words of comfort and

We hope for a new dawn.

***Come and lighten our darkness.***

In the course of our living we long for you, loving Christ.

We confess our complicit acceptance of violence;

We admit we harm one another in word and deed;

We need forgiveness and

We ask to be transformed.

***Come and lighten our darkness.***

In the anticipation of the future, we ask for guidance, Holy Spirit.

We are watchful, alert, and vigilant.

We watch and work for your truth;

We are alert and seek your wisdom;

We are vigilant and are committed to your ways of peace.

***Come and lighten our darkness.***

So, loving God, bring peace and hope to us today.

Speak truth and wisdom to our hearts,

And may Christ come and lighten our darkness. Amen.

## **Litany** *(to be done responsively)*

In the darkness of our pain...

**...let the silence be broken**

When we need to face difficult issues...

**...let the silence be broken**

When we are exhausted or at the end of our tether...

**...let the silence be broken**

When we need the courage to seek healing...

**...let the silence be broken**

When the cycle of abuse or violence needs to be stopped...

**...let the silence be broken**

When the silence is enforced through fear...

**...let the silence be broken.**

Hear now the word of God:

**...the silence *will* be broken.**



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## Prayers of intercession

After each section of the prayer and during the singing of the response (ie, four times) a ribbon could be tied around a candle; added into a flower display; or placed so that it hangs from the pages of the Bible. Purple would usually be associated with women's rights issues and a white ribbon would clearly identify with Amnesty International's White Ribbon campaign which is for men against violence against women. (see [www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk](http://www.whiteribbonscotland.org.uk))

## **Using the following response which can either be spoken or sung** **[CH4 276 - refrain]:**

*Wait for the Lord, his day is near.*

*Wait for the Lord: keep watch, take heart.*

God, your advent among us rekindles our hope for a world in which real justice and peace may be achieved for all. We thank you for those whose stories inspire us to believe that justice is your aim, and who stood for it firmly in the face of huge odds: Isaiah and Paul; Esther and Susanna; John the baptiser and above all Jesus, for whose coming again we prepare ourselves.

We pray today for those whose basic human rights are not respected:

- for the starving millions in a world full of rich resources;
- for the refugees and homeless, hounded from place to place;
- for women the world over who live in fear in their own homes;

*Wait for the Lord...*

- for those awaiting execution, whose voices are not heard;
- for women whose lives are in danger simply because they are women;
- for the victims of torture, who bear the scars deep inside even when released;

*Wait for the Lord.....*

- for children who suffer physical, emotional and sexual abuse from those who consider them to be without rights;
- for women who endure harassment, violence and rape;

*Wait for the Lord...*

- for those whose right of free speech is denied so that corrupt systems may be upheld;
- for women who have been silenced by threats and entrapment;
- for those who are oppressed on account of their religious or political beliefs;

*Wait for the Lord...*

Through the prophets you call us again, God, to act so that justice and peace can be established in our world. May your new community of hope be born in us and through us as we follow in the footsteps of the Christ-child, in whose name we pray, Amen.



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## Hymns

### *From CH4*

Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you	191
Sent by the Lord am I	250
Inspired by love and anger	253
Come now, O prince of peace	275
Wait for the Lord	276
Hope is a candle	284
Courage, brother ( <i>or sister</i> ), do not stumble	513
Longing for light, we wait in darkness	543
Spirit of truth and grace	608
Put peace into each other's hands	659
Brother, sister, let me serve you	694
We cannot measure how you feel	718
We lay our broken world	721
Christ's is the world in which we move	724
Lord of life, we come to you	782

### *From other sources*

Kindle a flame to lighten the dark  
Don't be afraid

*Wild Goose Songs, vol 1, p.135*  
*Come all you people, p.72*

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Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer or group and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland which can only be set by the General Assembly

