



The Church of Scotland  
Church and Society Council

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# Church and Society Council

## Report to General Assembly 2012

### Introduction

When the 2003 General Assembly endorsed the Church and Nation Report on domestic abuse, it affirmed its intention to acknowledge properly that women make up the majority membership of the church and that violence against them is a significant issue of concern. The lack of implementation of the 2003 Report<sup>1</sup> recommendations raises questions about us as an organisation which has not regarded these issues as a priority.

This Group was established to review the Church of Scotland's involvement in preventing and responding to domestic abuse in the light of the 2003 Report. In the 2003 Report there were several quotes from women who experienced domestic abuse. This Report begins with some quotes from people who have assisted in the process of putting this Report together and have worked closely with women who have experienced domestic abuse.

*"It was like a hostage situation – trapped, physically and emotionally. I never knew what would happen from day to day, or even from hour to hour. And to live with that level of terror and anticipation of damage and pain and fear, while trying to protect three small children, is obviously an impossible task. I don't know why I thought I could sustain it, but there was desperation to try.*

*The account of a victim included in a report by Dr Lesley Orr - **A Day to Count the Cost of Domestic Violence in the UK** presented to the 2003 General Assembly*

*"We must recognise that domestic abuse occurs across all faith communities, and yet it is considered unacceptable in all faiths. Faith leaders and communities have a responsibility to respond to this issue - it is important for survivors to know that they are accepted and supported by their faith community."*

Quote from Fiona Buchanan [Scottish Women's Aid Coordinator for Faith Communities]

*"The number of women being imprisoned in Scotland is still on the rise and statistics show that more than 80% are victims of abuse and violence. Attitudes towards domestic violence are not the only attitudes that need to be changed and we should take every opportunity that we can to point out to people that our prisons are filled not with monsters but with frail human beings who have certainly made mistakes and in some cases done terrible things yet none the less they are just as much a child of God as you or I. Were we to rid our country of Domestic Violence we would go a long way towards bringing down our numbers in prison."*

Rev Elaine MacRae (former Prison Chaplain)

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<sup>1</sup> Copy available from - churchandsociety@cofscotland.org.uk

Women who experience violence against them come from every walk of life so this is relevant to every parish. There are times and places when the violence is known to escalate or become even more treacherous than at other times, e.g. if the woman decides to leave; when the combination of alcohol and football makes some men even more aggressive than usual; when family tensions are at a peak. Women often experience controlling behaviour from their partners over what they can or cannot be involved in. This can result in women not being allowed to play their part in church life as they might like to.

There is a shared desire to make the church an organisation in which women experience equality and safety, being nurtured in a healthy and wholesome environment as people in God's own image. This was affirmed by General Assembly in 2003. In theology and practice there seems to be an inconsistency between what we say and what we do.

## Definitions

There are many working definitions for domestic abuse used by different organisations for the purposes of determining how policies will be developed. For the purpose of this report there are two main sources which serve as primary reference points. The first is from the Scottish Government Statistical Bulletin. The second is the Scottish Government definition of domestic abuse which defines domestic abuse as gender-specific and as a form of male violence against women. *There were 51,926 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland in 2009-10. 82% were female victims of a male perpetrator, 15% of victims of domestic incidents recorded by the police were men with a female perpetrator, and 3% of domestic incidents occurred in same sex relationships.*<sup>2</sup>

*“Domestic Abuse (as gender-based abuse) can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends)”*<sup>3</sup>

Men and women experience violence in different ways, and therefore the services and response requirements are different. Talking about ‘violence against women’ is a way of recognising this. Men do experience domestic abuse, but a gender-specific approach means that the differences in how the violences are experienced are more appropriately understood.

## Summary of current position in Church of Scotland

In 2003 the General Assembly received and approved a Church and Nation Report on domestic abuse. The recommendations of the 2003 Report were to be implemented by the church at every operational level with a report back to Assembly in 2005. In summary, the instruction from Assembly was to take the following actions:

1. Develop an integrated approach across the agencies of the church in order to tackle domestic abuse;
2. Display posters, leaflets and information about support services for those experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of gender violence;

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<sup>2</sup> Statistical Bulletin: Crime and Justice Series: Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland, 2009-10, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/11/11095346/32>

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Partnership on Domestic Abuse adopted definition of Domestic Abuse

3. Acknowledge in the context of regular worship the impact of domestic abuse and other forms of gender violence;
4. Pay particular attention to the use of language, images and symbols in worship;
5. Host special services to highlight the issue of domestic abuse;
6. Develop effective partnership relationships with local/national Women's Aid groups with a view to preventing domestic abuse;
7. Encourage and support individuals or groups who can be specially informed or trained as possible contact people in countering domestic abuse;
8. Draw up a charter outlining the church's position on domestic and sexual abuse, especially in respect of *Protection; Provision; Prevention* [the three areas of focus in the Scottish Government's approach to addressing its *Violence Against Women* agenda];
9. Collate and develop liturgical resources for use within regular worship so that the silence created by domestic abuse is broken;
10. Publicise participation in the United Nations' annual *16 Days of activism against violence against women*;
11. Provide education for (or ensure provision is made for) those training for leadership or ministry in the church, especially focusing on why a gendered-analysis is important;
12. Address the underlying theologies which may hinder the possibility of providing effective support to those who experience domestic abuse.

Between 2003 and 2005 there was no concerted effort made to implement these recommendations and, as a result, there was no progress report in 2005. In 2010 it was agreed to review the 2003 Report. This Review revealed that apart from the Guild and the National Youth Assembly, the Church of Scotland has fallen seriously short in the task it set itself. Since 2003 the Church has remained on the fringe of the socio-political discourse relating to domestic abuse through its own neglect of the issue. The Church of Scotland as a whole now needs to re-connect and re-invigorate its commitment to addressing the issue of domestic abuse. In the wider context the agenda has now broadened to include all violences<sup>4</sup> against women.

This Report is based on the understanding that the Church has not altered in its intention to address domestic abuse. The theological arguments which underpin the importance of addressing violence against women were thoroughly rehearsed and affirmed by the General Assembly in 2003. Other denominations have continued to develop these arguments and some of the key material is available for consideration<sup>5</sup>. The Church of Scotland now needs to apply itself to achieving two aims:

1. Implementing of a clearly expressed strategy for addressing domestic abuse as a matter of urgency.
2. Extending its approach to include the eradication of all violence against women, consistent with the Scottish Government's agenda to counter Violence Against Women.

The achievement of these two aims will involve working effectively in partnership with other faiths, denominations, organisations, and agencies. The Church of Scotland has a key role to play in the network of organisations committed to eradicating all violence against women.

### **Action Plan**

This Action Plan is designed to position the Church of Scotland as a significant contributor to the eradication of violence against women. We call on Councils, Committees and Agencies of the church to collaborate to deliver this Action Plan.

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'violences' is used to signify that the abuse women experience is often multiple and multi-layered.

<sup>5</sup> Further information available from - [churchandsociety@cofscotland.org.uk](mailto:churchandsociety@cofscotland.org.uk)

1. Each Council, Committee and Agency of the Church of Scotland to formulate three achievable goals in accordance with their remit which will address the issue of violence against women. In the full spectrum of these goals, domestic abuse *must* be seen to be addressed specifically within the fuller agenda of violence against women.
2. An Advisory Group (AG) to be appointed, consisting of eight members (minimum of 5 women) and experienced in the field of addressing violence against women. The AG to operate within the Church and Society Council and to act as a consultative resource to the Councils, Committees and agencies of the Church. The AG could be involved in the process of identifying goals for the Councils, Committees and Agencies (see 1 above).
3. Council of Assembly to be informed of goals set by each Council, Committee and Agency and to receive and monitor regular reports on progress made.
4. Establish a theological working group under the auspices of the Church and Society Council to identify theologies which may be either harmful or helpful in relation to the need to eradicate violence against women. This Group to publish its Report in 2013 for discussion at General Assembly 2014.
5. Sign up to the Zero Tolerance '*Employer's Pact*'<sup>6</sup>.
6. Re-draft and circulate to every Minister, Session Clerk and Guild Representative the '*It Doesn't Happen Here*' leaflet<sup>7</sup>.
7. Make resources available for use by local churches in their work with young people and children; for worship; or for special events (eg, prayer vigils or workshops) focusing on the eradication of domestic abuse.
8. In partnership with other faith groups, establish a network of men who support the Amnesty International White Ribbon Campaign. The network will identify and advocate ways in which men in the church can contribute towards the eradication of domestic abuse.

## Conclusions

Our task as a church is to bring care and compassion to the places where there is agony and brokenness. So, we must find ways to make a difference for abused women, be it in the country, our communities, or our local parish.

We recognise and welcome the statement brought to the 2011 General Assembly by the National Youth Assembly:

*"The National Youth Assembly recognises the importance of supportive communities and the role the Church can play in building these. We affirm that this is the best way to bring people together as well as reducing violence."<sup>8</sup>*

It remains that, until the issue of violence against women is eradicated, this remains a challenge and a responsibility for us all. This 2012 Report is an attempt to provide a framework so that a real difference for the better can be made. By working together on the recommendations which this report brings we will genuinely contribute to changing the public profile of the Church to that of an organisation which is proactive and positive in its affirmation of the equality and value of women.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/employers>

<sup>7</sup> The original leaflet is available from the Baptist Union of Great Britain

<sup>8</sup> 2011 General Assembly Blue Book, 22/4