THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:
A SILENT OR ACTIVE VOICE TO BROKEN FAMILIES

by

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The Church is called to serve and equip its ministers and members to care for families. The call or mission of the Church is readily defined by the Lord in the last chapter of Matthew (28:18-20). In short, we are “to go.” The instruction from the Lord “to go and make disciples” also involves the ministry of help and support to those who are victims of a reckless and, in many circumstances, violent society. Churches, and especially the clergy, may be under the impression that domestic violence is not an essential issue facing the Church today. In Genesis, Holy Scripture calls immediately for the healthy construct of the family. That same call is in the epistles of Peter and Paul. The Bible confirms that brokenness and abuse in the home must be dealt with. Families of every socio-economic level, cultural, and religion encounter domestic violence. It is wide-spread and epidemic throughout the world. Restoring families and immediately seeking safety for victims of domestic violence are essential aspects of the Church’s call. The Church cannot, as it typically does, remain passive and detached from the cry of domestic violence victims. In fact, in many instances, churches are, sadly, unaware that families are in trouble and lives are forever being impacted by family violence. The perpetrators of violence typically mask the issues of their violence and seek refuge in the church when the violence has become a legal matter.

The Bible speaks plainly concerning the call of husbands to love their wives, yet the disclosure of violence by the victim is seldom taken to clergy. The Church must change and appropriate pastoral care and support for the victims and the abuser. The Church is not currently perceived by victims of domestic violence as a place to go to for support, yet the family is the basic
component of every church. If the most primary component of the Church does not seek support from the Church, what is the future of the Church? The response of the Church in situations of domestic abuse matters. To sit passively and deny that physical, emotional, and sexual abuse are present in the local church is deceptive to the body of Christ and its leadership. Church leadership is called to provide assistance to, seek safety and health for, and serve as an advocate for the victims of domestic abuse. To contend that family abuse is not a problem or act as if it does not exist perpetuates violence and leaves the “least of these” as vulnerable victims of violence and abuse.
To Deborah Mangum Saul who has modeled the love of Christ
by her ministry to others, to our sons, and
to those who are hurting
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The family is understood to be the base component of the local church community. However, the emotional, spiritual, and even physical condition of the abusive nuclear family is not readily observed or, many times, even recognized by the local congregation. Many psychologist and sociologist make the emotional health of the abused spouses and children the center of their life’s work, especially when domestic violence is and has been a detriment to the victims. Unfortunately, throughout the United States, families that are members of local congregations are, at times, victims of domestic violence. Many of these families exist without a voice or a place to turn for help in our American society—and many do not see the Church as a source of help.

The 2009 Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review (Fatality Review) states that “survivors of domestic violence continue to struggle with isolation generated within their relationships and helping systems; we must create safer places in order for survivors to come forward.”¹ Faith-based approaches for intervention to domestic violence are practically non-existent, and it is concerning that the Church is not one of the first places that victims of domestic violence go to for help. Therefore, one of the most critical responsibilities of faith-based communities must be for clergy and church leaders to provide support to victims of

domestic abuse. These victims of family violence need their place of worship to also be a place of refuge, providing them emotional, spiritual, and physical support.

**Illuminating Domestic Violence in the Church**

At the beginning of this thesis, a working definition of domestic violence is needed to clarify the context of the study. Cynthia Crosson-Tower defines domestic violence as intentional acts of violence imposed on one partner by the other, or between adult partners, usually resulting in harm. Abusers use coercion, deception, manipulation, and humiliation to gain power over their intimate partners.\(^2\) The prevalence of domestic violence impacting families is not a topic that is easily discussed at the weekly Wednesday evening “pot-luck” supper because broken relationships in American households are seen as private matters. Even when there is evidence of abuse, it is common for congregations to look in the other direction in an effort to discount or disregard one of the greatest travesties in our country—the destruction and abuse of the most basic unit of society, the family.

Depicting families realistically and not discounting or denying the brokenness that pervades the nuclear families are two essential steps the Church—clergy, church leaders, and members—must take if domestic violence is to be stopped. The Church cannot choose to remain ignorant about violence in the home, or put on blinders to the violence that we must, as Christians, first acknowledge and then address. The *Fatality Review* reports a remarkable finding from its research. Referring to the three years prior to the project, the report states, “Since the beginning of the project, victims of domestic violence are more likely to disclose

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the abuse to someone in their faith community than they are to seek help from the police.”

This does not mean that victims of family violence are actively seeking support from the faith-based institution. It does, however, imply that church is considered by some to be a place where victims see the potential for assistance during one of the greatest trials a family may face. The question for Christians in the United States is: Will we, the Church, be a resource and a stronghold for victims, or will we permit violence and abuse to continue without much effort to intervene?

A Concerning Look at Violence in the Home

As we explore the critical nature of the violence within the home, there are eye-opening aspect to the subject and degrees of severity for violence in the home. Many families live years in a in a cycle of violence. (See Figure 3.) Domestic violence that ends in the death(s) of a family member(s) is not commonly discussed. If the violence is not acknowledged, then there is no intervention. Without intervention, violence in the home has a propensity to escalate. Sadly, deaths attributed to domestic violence are not the exception. Analysis shows that fatalities resulting from family violence are becoming more and more common.

David Adams, author of Why Do They Kill?, discusses the severity of domestic violence which results in homicides and suicides, and urges readers to take a serious look at the startling statistics that call society and faith-based institutions to acknowledge that “approximately 1,800 adults are killed by their intimate partners annually in the United States. . . . Annually, about 30 percent of the killings of women by their intimate partners in the United States are murder-suicides. A sizeable proportion of the other murders are

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preceded by suicide threats or attempts by the killers.” In other words, it is important to keep in mind that the behavior of the perpetrator of domestic violence is probably not uncharacteristic behavior. Neither is the violence likely a one-time event that, unfortunately, ended in the death of a spouse. When a victim of domestic violence becomes a fatality, society, family, and the Church must ask these questions: What were the signs indicating that the victim was in danger? What specific steps could have been taken to support the victim of domestic violence? If we recognized that the victim was in trouble, were there efforts made by civil and religious support groups to come to the aide of the victim?

In Counseling for Family Violence and Abuse, Grant L. Martin states,

It’s estimated that almost two to three million spouses have experienced abuse at the hands of a mate. It’s estimated that at least one-sixth of all American couples experience at least one violent incident each year. One-fourth of all couples have at least one such violent episode sometime during their marriage. . . . In an attempt to identify how evangelical pastors deal with spousal abuse, a questionnaire was sent to several thousand pastors of conservative Protestant churches. Although the response was very low (7 percent), the results confirm the widespread presence of battering. Seventy percent of the pastors indicated wife abuse occurs “sometimes” to “often” in Christian marriages. Eighty-four percent of the pastors had counseled six or more victims of battering. Wife abuse is more prevalent in Christian homes than most people believe, but, as one minister observed, guilt within the church keeps it repressed. Data and clinical experience suggest that the incidence of abuse is all too common within the church. Almost all pastors and counselors, at one time or another, will deal with someone who parallels the experience of David as recorded in Psalm 55:5

My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. I said, “Oh, that I had wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest—I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and the storm. . . . If an enemy were insulting me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God. . . . My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant. His speech is as smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his

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5 All scriptural references are either from the ESV Study Bible, English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV), copyright 2008, or from NIV Life Application Study Bible , New International Version of the Bible (NIV), copyright 1991.
words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords (Psalm 55: 4-8; 12-14; 20-21/NIV).\(^6\)

One can easily identify with the fear the psalmist conveys in Psalm 55. In the midst of broken relationship, trust and companionship are violated. In place of love and commitment, fear is the predominant emotion that drives the relationship. The heart of a wounded spouse seeks and delights in the hope that the abusive spouse will be transformed and that, in the near future, the violence that continues to worsen and cover every waking moment like a cloud of despair will one day cease to.

**Clergy Misconduct—a Barrier to Domestic Support**

Over the past two decades, there has been increased media attention on sexual misconduct in American churches. This has resulted in greater safety monitoring and prevention techniques for clergy, lay leaders, and elders, particularly for those who provide care and programs for children and youth. Criminal, financial, and psychological background checks are meticulously administered prior to the ordination or hiring of clergy to ensure that churches are providing safer environments for its members. In one denomination researched regarding the prevention of sexual misconduct, all clergy and full-time church employees are required to have a four-hour course that discusses, in detail, the issues of sexual misconduct in the church and methods for procuring safety and protection for all members from the oldest to the youngest members. The Anglican Mission in the Americas, an orthodox Anglican movement from Rwanda, Africa, requires a training called

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Avoiding the Millstone. The training is based on this scripture passage: “It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble” (Lk 17:2/NIV).

The attention to the care and safety of children at church is a great priority due, in part, to the legal liability for which places of worship must take responsibility. However, there is a need for a growing awareness and responsibility on the part of the Church for the safety of children beyond the church doors. The Church’s concern for safety must extend into the home, just as families sees their “church home” as an extension of their family life, both socially and spiritually. The question for clergy and church leaders today is: What steps should a church leader take if he or she knows a member(s) of a family connected to the place of worship were in danger at home due to a violent spouse, parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt, older sibling or anyone living in the house and acting out violently or abusively and jeopardizing the physical well-being of others?

In a recent Avoiding the Millstone training conducted for clergy in Georgia, there was a discussion regarding the protection of a family patriarch who was guilty of sexual misconduct with his own daughter. A participant in the training asked, “Is it required that the clergy, when confronted with the information of sexual misconduct or violence, report the crimes and abuse to local authorities?” Legally speaking, this question is difficult to answer because some states require clergy to report incidences of family abuse and other states do not have such a requirement. In the state of Georgia for example, clergy are not required by law to report known cases of family violence and are not considered to be mandatory

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reporters. However, the question then presents itself, who is the clergy called to defend from physical and sexual abuse?

According to the *Fatality Review*, “a significant number of perpetrators and victims of domestic violence interacted with a religious community, church, temple, or mosque in the five years prior to the homicide.” One of the most startling statistics revealed by the *Fatality Review* is that 30 percent of the domestic violence victims were affiliated with a church and 18 percent of the perpetrators of fatal violence also had a connection to a place of worship prior to the devastating crime. These statistics are undeniably concerning and represent a trend that is consistent for victims and perpetrators over the past five years. In light of these statistics, the objective for Christian churches must be to acknowledge that the issue of domestic violence exists in a percentage of the homes represented by the people that worship in our local churches. The Church, then, must provide support and safety for victims who suffer or are in physical danger due to family violence.

The Basic Institutions of Any Community—Family, State, and Church—Key Groups in the Prevention of Violence and Abuse

In a multi-denominational Bible study, this author facilitated a discussion on the prevalence of domestic violence in the home. Those participating in the Bible study were Caucasian, Christian men between the ages of forty and sixty years. The group met weekly on Monday mornings. The men were all married. Many had high school-aged or grown children. All the men were active in their particular church and denomination. They participated in the Bible study as a tool for personal spiritual growth and discipleship.

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9 Ibid.
The Bible study included a component for building awareness that many clergy and church leaders avoid engaging in the topic of domestic violence because many assume that domestic violence is not a problem in their church! Hopefully, that is the case today. However, this facilitator received a very negative response as the topic was introduced. There was an undertone to the comments that spoke volumes and seemed to ask, “Do we really need to discuss this?” There was a brief silence when the group was presented with the statistic that 30 percent of the women in the state of Georgia who died as a result of domestic violence had been connected to a church. But the most interesting aspect of the study was when the group was told that domestic violence is a very real and traumatizing problem for families in the Church. Eighteen percent of those who took the life of their domestic partner were also connected to a church. Almost one-fifth of the perpetrators of domestic violence admit that they are affiliated with a place of worship. Still the violence persisted. Lives were lost and everyone in the home of that uncontrolled violence is forever impacted. Hence, the Church must first acknowledge that domestic violence is not separate from the Church but is, on the contrary, very present in the Church. Just because the actual family violence is not taking place on the church campus does not mean that the members of our churches are not under constant attack in their homes, living in fear on a daily basis.

As the familial problems of anger management and destructive behavior between husband and wife are the most common in society today, there is a growing awareness that violence and abusive behavior was never the plan in God’s creation. Neither is it justified by scripture. Clergy and church leaders must be aware of domestic suffering in the life of a family associated with a church. But this is easier said than done because solutions to dysfunction in the family are rarely easy. So where does the problem of domestic violence
originate, and how can a victimized family reconcile that the God of creation would permit a husband/wife to physically harm his/her spouse? If the victim of the domestic violence is a child who is emotionally and physically abused, the child may ask, “Where are you God in the midst of my pain? Please God, make dad stop hurting us. Every day I am scared he will hurt me.”

Family violence and abuse is not new. John Currid, writing in, “Why Do I Suffer?—Suffering and the Sovereignty of God,” says that

suffering in its many manifestations is due to sin. When our first parents sinned, as related in Genesis 3, the effects of that act on all creation were immense. First, humanity itself was greatly affected in all aspects: (1) Because of their sin, the man and woman were alienated from God. After the sin, they heard God in the garden and they “hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees in the garden” (3:8); (2) They were alienated from each other. Prior to the sin, they had been naked before one another, a symbol of complete openness and intimacy. Now they covered themselves because they were ashamed. They have fear rather than fellowship; . . . (5) They were alienated from themselves. The entire imago dei (image of God) was twisted by sin, and so mankind is now corrupt in all aspects of its being.\(^\text{10}\)

If then, the world is fallen and is separated from God in and through sin from the time of the fall in Eden, there should be little wonder why the brokenness of original sin would not have its lasting impact on families throughout history. In the first book of the Bible the Lord speaks to Eve after she has eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Gn 3:16/NIV).

According to the Bible, the call for the marriage relationship is represented as the pinnacle of God’s creation on the sixth day.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. . . . God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day (Gn 1:26-31/NIV).

According to the *Life Application Study Bible NIV*, “God made both man and woman in his image. Neither man nor woman is made more than the other in the image of God. From the beginning, the Bible places both man and woman at the pinnacle of God’s creation. Neither sex is exalted and neither is depreciated” (Gn 3:16/NIV).

The importance of understanding the value of man and woman as God’s creation provides the reader of the Bible with the understanding that value and respect for humankind is of tremendous importance to the Lord. Understanding that both sexes are created in the image and likeness of God indicates that both man and woman have intrinsic value and incredible worth. Endorsement of abuse and violence among those who are married is never supported in scripture. In fact, the Bible clearly expresses the significance of the Lord’s most precious creation by saying, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. . . . God saw all that he had made and it was very good” (Gn 1:27, 31/NIV). The most central unit of God’s creation is the family. The other two basic institutions for people are state and church. Together these three units constitute the most essential components, or social framework, for biblical order.

The second component of society as depicted in the Bible is the social governing body that is referred to as the state. It was always intended that the Lord would be king over his people. But the Israelites wanted to have human governance as was the custom of the surrounding nations. Instead of mirroring the call of the Lord and his will, the Israelites wanted the leadership of a physical king in and around them. In the Old Testament book of I
Samuel, the reader sees the direction of the Lord in allowing the Israelites to have a mortal king who would speak on behalf of the people and serve as a leader in a world that was becoming more and more dependent on human will and determination. These are the instructions that the Lord gave to Samuel regarding the Israelites' request for a king.

Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. . . . But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles” (1Sm 8:7-8; 19-20/NIV).

It was the desire of the people, as recorded in scripture, to have governance. And it was granted to them.

The New Testament speaks about the governing bodies and calls believers to submit to the authority of the government in power. The Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans speaks directly to the call and authority of governing structures. He writes,

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience (Rom 13:1-5).

Finally, the third basic component of society is church. Church is the completing factor in structure and formation of God’s people. It was intended by Christ, that the formation of the Church would take place and serve as a means for the spiritual maturation of the people called to follow Christ. Prior to his ascension, Jesus instructed his followers to work collectively to fulfill the Great Commission. Jesus tells the disciples, “All authority in
heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, 
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching 
them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the 
very end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20).

With the framework of family, state, and church being the three basic institutions 
referred to in the Bible, these same three institutions are critical links when a family is 
impacted by domestic violence. All three institutions must serve as part of a systematic 
approach to advocate for victims and provide means for procuring safety and health in 
relationships that are toxic and harmful for one or more members of a family. The bottom 
line is that family, church, and state all have important roles to play in the detection of, 
response to, and prevention of domestic violence. The Church, which has remained 
removed from the matter of domestic violence in many instances due to lack of training and 
efforts to build greater awareness locally, may be the critical links to ending the unnecessary 
pain of domestic abuse. If not confronted and dealt with, domestic violence can continue on to plague future generations.

**Faith Institution Leaders and Awareness of Domestic Violence**

The intended audience for this paper is clergy, elders of congregations, and those who 
serve in any church ministry, especially in ministries to families. The purpose of the paper is 
to build an awareness of the responsibilities of and the role each leader plays in the care and 
support of victims of domestic violence. Clergy may feel the freedom and be readily inclined 
to quickly transfer the problems of suspected violence or known violence to local, board-
certified counselors. To the victim’s detriment, the critical pastoral care dimension is
neglected because a church leader seeks the most expeditious way to deal with the domestic violence. And while pastoral care is not a substitute for psychological or psychiatric counseling, the biblical headship of the church should not stand aside when a family is clearly in need of support, direction, and intervention from its church.

In a world filled with violence and in societies where acts of violence seem to be permissible, confusion regarding the role of the faith-based institution (such as the church, temple, and synagogue) can easily become cloudy. In some Christian denominations there is a sense that violence by the husband, although not condoned, is not grounds for the state to intervene, much less the church. In the Quran, the relationship between husband and wife is described as follows:

Men are protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them by their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) chastise them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance); for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all). If you fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family, and the other from hers; if they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation for Allah is full of knowledge, and is acquainted with all things (Sura 4.34). 11

Sadly, the marriage union in the Islamic faith is open to the idea of bigamy and sexual relations with young girls. It is recorded that

Muhammad began intimate relations with the girl [Aisha] when she was only nine years old. She was, in fact, the only woman Muhammad married that was a virgin. Islamic scholars do their very best to justify this unconscionable action. Some scholars assert that Aisha was unaware of the implications of marriage until she reached puberty. Other scholars attempt to revise her age. Still other Muslims simply

argue that she reached puberty quite young and, therefore, was physiologically capable of such interaction with Mohammad.\textsuperscript{12}

One of the greatest social criticisms of Islam is the maltreatment of women. Pages could be written about the family dynamics of husbands and wives that have developed as a result of following the Quran. Americans may not know that Muslim men are permitted to have as many as four wives (Sura 33:50).\textsuperscript{13} Women are permitted one husband only.

In a country where sexual misconduct by clergy has been so devastating to the Christian culture and has caused cultural Christians to flee further and further from the church, there is a sense among Americans that faith-based institutions are not part of the solution to domestic violence. Instead, they are seen as a large part of the problem. In many ways, clergy are not trusted. Accusations against and distrust of the clergy has risen astronomically in the last two decades. Why, then, should victims seek out a spiritual leader for help? Is trust in the Church a viable course for families that are in the midst of a crisis at home?

Debi Bartlotti, a nurse clinician, lived and worked for thirteen years with women who lived on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Muslin Women in Crisis, Bartlotti gives disheartening testimony to the plight of Muslim women in the home. Regarding her many encounters with female victims of violence, Bartlotti writes, “A large woman dressed in colorful velvet dress flowing down to the floor came to an antenatal exam. As I listened to her chest, I notice huge black and blue marks all over her back and buttocks. Through the small braids ringing her face, I heard a quiet voice utter one word, the Pashto word for


\textsuperscript{13} Ali, 78.
brick.” This is but one example of present-day domestic violence linked to faith, of abuse justified because of strict adherence to faith practices.

Regardless of whether it is a result of a particular faith and the “sacred writings” of the given faith or faith institutions refraining from coming to the defense of the victim, domestic violence is a moral and humanitarian issue confronting the Church and people of faith. So what, then, is one to say to a Muslim woman who reads this passage from the Quran:

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High Exalted, Great (Sura 4:34).

One problem with the text is the hopelessness that can result from male dominance and powerful assumptions that may be invalid and potentially harmful. In the case of the Quran, the text may give way to creating a rationale for the husband to take physical retribution against his wife.

As ordained clergy, this author has on several occasions met with women from conservative or fundamentalist churches, who, as a last resort, have left their husbands due to repeated infidelity. After numerous attempts to reconcile and preserve their marriage, the women left their churches because the elder boards that sought to restore the marriages encouraged the women to continue to forgive their husbands even though the husbands continued to be unfaithful. This author notes that in at least one

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situation, the woman remained in the relationship for fear of abandonment and physical retaliation on the part of the husband.

Unfortunately, the pastor or the elder board of the large churches these women attended did not, in all cases, support the women. The foundation for the lack of response on the part of church leaders is supported by this passage from Titus: “Train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (Ti 2:4-5/NIV). Further discussion of what the Bible says about the family, the most basic component in the Church, is taken up in chapter two of this paper. But here it is important for the reader to understand that the collective approach of a church toward domestic violence, sexual misconduct and abuse, and the value placed on women in the home directly correlates to the Church’s reputation as a place of safety and support in a dysfunctional and violent society.

Faith Trust Institute (FTI), an innovator in video education for faith-based institutions, has many resources that address crisis topics that impact all denominations and faiths. In a brochure titled, “What Every Congregation Needs to Know about Domestic Violence,” the most frequently asked questions and corresponding answers about family-related violence are listed. Short pamphlet resources like these are most effective for victims of domestic violence. In the midst of violence and abuse, reading lengthy self-help material is not always option due to lack of time and funds. Finding avenues that lead more quickly to advice can be very comforting to these victims.

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16 Faith Trust Institute, “What Every Congregation Needs to Know About Domestic Violence” (Seattle, WA: Faith Trust Institute, 2009), 1.
The same is true for clergy. Readily available resources for support and advice, such as FTI’s short pamphlets, are critical for clergy as a first step in helping a family that needs immediate support. An example of quickly accessible guidelines is provided in Table 1. There we find the answers to one of the most important questions facing clergy.

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<td>Answer: Form a committee to address domestic violence</td>
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<td>Answer: Encourage the clergy to speak out against domestic violence from the pulpit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answer: Invite staff from local domestic violence programs to make educational presentations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answer: Designate a day or a month for educating and activating the congregation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answer: Offer pre-marriage counseling dealing with equality, conflict, violence and control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer: Offer meeting space in your church or synagogue to the local domestic violence program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer: Contribute financial support to local domestic violence programs.</td>
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Table 1. Clergy Involvement—Initial Steps to Support Victims of Violence

In another FTI publication, Rabbi Julie R. Spitzer notes the value of the marriage above and beyond the costs of violence in the home. She comments on a traditional approach in dealing with domestic violence:

For centuries, shalom bayit (household harmony) has been the hallmark of Jewish homes. It has been one of the few mitzvot (commandment) accorded primarily to women. But it has also become a prison for many of those same women. “So he beats you once a month? That’s only twelve times a year. How bad could that be? Your responsibility is to make shalom bayit. Go home to your husband. You can make it better.” This is the advice given to one woman who was brave enough to seek help from her rabbi a few years ago.

Because this thesis seeks to make a strong appeal to the clergy and church elders regarding the ministerial response to family violence, these questions must be asked: Is the

17 Ibid.

18 Toby Landesman, “You Are Not Alone—Solace and Inspiration for Domestic Violence Survivors Based on Jewish Wisdom” (Seattle, WA: Faith Trust Institute, 2009), 19.
Church open (i.e., are the Church’s doors open wide) and welcoming to the victims who are inclined to remain silent but need the support of the local church in the midst of domestic violence, abuse, and assault? Is the faith-based institution to be a place where victims feel encouraged to go for emotional, spiritual, and physical assistance? Seeking answers to these questions, a book written by James Leehan quickly captured the attention of this author. In *Pastoral Care for Survivors of Family Abuse*, Leehan guides clergy who will or will not represent the love of Christ:

> Few clergy or others in the caring professions in our society know how to respond to this problem [family violence]. When we become aware of active cases of family violence we are uncomfortable. We feel that if we do anything we are intruding; we are interfering in a family matter. In most cases, all we do is report the incident to the appropriate agency, knowing with relief that we are fulfilling the requirements of the law. Then we let the authorities take over.¹⁹

This perception may lead to a “hands-off approach” toward domestic violence in the place of worship. If clergy never preach on the topic or if resources are not made available that help victims understand that a faith-based advocate is available, those in the church will continue to be uneasy about the matter of domestic violence. Leehan writes, “One of the keys to developing a pastoral ministry with persons who have suffered abuse is to make it known to one’s congregation that one is knowledgeable about such issues. Once members of a congregation become aware of a pastor’s sensitivity, concern, and knowledge, they will be anxious to share their struggles and seek assistance.”²⁰ This is encouraging because when clergy are actively involved (or at least available) and equipped to step in and assist the

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²⁰ Ibid., 116.
family, they can have the greatest impact on ending domestic violence that, in many instances, goes unchecked and is often ignored by the victim’s place of worship.

The Fatality Review examined the circumstances and consequences of domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities in Georgia between 2004 and 2009 for the purpose of saving lives and holding abusers accountable. The report indicates that the role of clergy as a resource for combating domestic violence, though misunderstood, is critical. Further, the report states,

When we think about systems and resources, we often overlook the role of religious organizations in survivor’s lives. There have been many instances when clergy have reprimanded a woman for leaving an abusive husband, coercing her into quick forgiveness and reconciliation before the perpetrator has actually changed his behavior. Sadly, the first response many women have heard from clergy, after revealing the abuse suffered at home, is ‘What did you do to provoke him?’ Safety must trump other congregational concerns, and victim blaming is especially damaging to victims already weakened and hurt by systematic isolation. Women who are hurt should never have to choose between safety and the support of their congregation.21

Wendy Lipshutz is a domestic violence counselor for Shalom Bayit of Jewish Family and Career Services in Atlanta, Georgia. She is an advocate for victims of domestic violence and abuse and has given much support to her faith community. Lipshutz notes that

we have found that when rabbis and other faith leaders speak out, they can make a big difference in assisting those suffering from abuse. It is imperative that our synagogues become sanctuaries of peace—that rabbis speak from the pulpit about abuse, that Jewish community leaders and educators create communities where survivors of abuse know that they are not alone.22

One of the big steps any faith-based institution can take is to ask the question: Who should clergy of the local church, synagogue, or mosque call when a case of domestic violence is identified in the faith-based institution? The Fatality Review takes a powerful stance on the

21 Dickinson, 2009 Fatality Review, 12.

22 Ibid., 15.
matter, noting that the church or faith-based institution has an integral role in the battle against family violence. The approach is to team with the local church by building awareness and helping clergy be part of the solution for ending violence. Researchers for the *Fatality Review* state,

Faith communities are active agents in the lives of many people involved in domestic violence fatalities, so it is important to identify faith community responses to domestic violence that are safe and effective. It is also essential to learn what’s currently not working, and what can be done to better prepare faith communities to protect survivors in their congregation. . . . It is profoundly important for faith leaders and domestic violence advocates to cultivate mutual trust and collaboration so that they can respond more effectively to victims’ complex needs.  

For the past three years, this author has served on the domestic violence task force for the county in which he lives. One of the greatest motivators for working with the task force is the passivity and apathy toward domestic violence that seem to be present in the Church. It is as if communities will say, “If we ignore the problem of violence, it will go away.” But the opposite is true, and a response is absolutely needed by the Church and all faith-based communities and organizations. Fatalities from domestic violence can be prevented if clergy and church leaders take steps to acknowledge that domestic violence is a real threat in families. When those suffering family violence are supported and see the faith-based institution as an ally seeking to support the very broken and hurting in our communities, death can be avoided.  

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23 Ibid.
CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW MODEL AND VIOLENCE AT HOME

The measuring stick for safety and accountability in the family is typically seen as law enforcement. Essentially, local, county, and state statutes are instituted to protect the victim of violence. When law enforcement is called to the scene of family violence, the officer has the job of determining what offense(s) has transpired and who has broken the law by assaulting or harming a domestic partner or member of the family. For the purpose of this paper, the scope of research will center on those couples who are married and the impact of abusive behavior on the spouse and children.

Let it be said from the outset that the measure or use of violence is never justified, never. How does one know this to be the case? Simply by reading the plan of creation as detailed in the first book of the Bible. In Genesis we see God’s precious creation completed with the creation of woman from the rib of man. Adam was incomplete and God made woman from the rib of man. Out of man came the source of Adam’s completion—a suitable helper. According to Genesis 2:20-24:

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.
The value the Lord places on the marital relationship and the value of the family are evident from the beginning of the Bible. In Genesis, the reader quickly recognizes the value of the marital relationship and the symbolic and covenantal union established between husband and wife. In *The Book of Common Prayer*, the service of holy matrimony calls the man to say, “In the name of God, I, N., take you, N., to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.”¹ The bride follows, repeating the same vow taken by the groom.

When we consider the vows made in Christian marriage, acts of violence committed by a spouse against his/her spouse are in direct opposition to the vows that include promises to love and cherish. In the blessing of the wedding service, the officiant prays, “By the power of the Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing upon this man and this woman. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads.”² How difficult it must be for an abuse victim to encounter society, especially members of the Christian faith, who negate or reject God’s intention for marriage, which is a call to love, mutual respect, and edification.

Because marriage is an important covenant bond made before God, there must be a high value placed on marriage and family. Great attention must be paid to scripture and the way in which the Lord directs those who are married to live in peace, one with the other. This being the case, how is it, then, that violence would ever be accepted or condoned by the Lord and the Church? In all instances, scripture serves to reinforce

² Ibid., 430.
God’s value of all persons, conveying God’s design for the way in which men, women, and children are to live together.

Unfortunately, the reader of God’s word can focus on a single text or verse of scripture without reading the text in context. As a result, God’s will and purpose can be misinterpreted. Many female victims of domestic violence will flee from relationship with a church because they have been told by church leaders that the Bible instructs them to submit to their husbands, even in the most abusive situations. The justification is found in Ephesians: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands” (5:22-24/ESV).

This misapplication of scripture causes us to turn to scripture to answer these questions: Does the Lord, in the Old and New Testaments, condone and support the use of violence by the husband against his wife? Does scripture require a wife to remain in an abusive marital relationship if her life or the lives of her children are at risk? These are difficult questions to answer given that society and, in many cases, the Church avoid addressing the issue of domestic abuse.

But, in fact, the Bible does address the issue of domestic violence. Immediately following the biblical directive for a wife’s response to her husband (Eph 5:22-24/ESV), the text then speaks to the husband:

Love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water with the word, so that he might present her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. . . . In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.
He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh (Eph 5: 25-26; 28-31/ESV).

Focusing only on the first verse of this passage (and not considering the entire passage) distorts and confuses the message intended by the Apostle Paul. In terms of domestic violence, using scripture to entrap and hold wives as physical and emotional hostages is sinful. Further, it is cause for great concern when the wife assumes that she is to submit to physical, sexual, emotional, and even spiritual abuse by her husband.

John MacArthur helps us understand that huptasso (to relinquish one’s rights), when used in the Greek middle voice (as it is in Eph 5:21/ESV and, by implication in 5:22), emphasizes the willingness to submit oneself. God addresses those who are to submit. That is, the submission is to be a voluntary response, a giving up of one’s independent rights to other believers—in this case, to the wife’s own husband. A husband is not to treat his wife as a servant or as a child, but as an equal for whom God has given him care of and responsibility for provision and protection, to be exercised in love. The wife is not the husband’s to order about, expecting her to respond to his every wish and command. As Paul proceeds to explain in considerable detail (Eph 5:25-33), the husband’s primary responsibility as head of the household is to love, provide for, protect, and serve his wife and family—not to lord it over them according to his personal whims and desires.

It is important to stress that condoning abusive behavior toward a spouse was never the intent of the biblical text. How could such an interpretation ever be supported

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when woman was created from man and when the Old Testament scripture directly implies that the creation of man and woman in their image was good (Gn 1:31)? The *ESV Study Bible* commentary discusses the intimacy in creation and the call to purpose of joining man and woman. The writer of that commentary places emphasis on the scripture saying, “When no suitable companion is found among all living beings, God fashions a woman from the man’s own flesh. . . . The text highlights the sense of oneness that exists between the man and the woman. Adam joyfully proclaims, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’” (Gn 2:23/ESV).

The idea of man and woman becoming one flesh as a model for marriage and relationship in covenant before the Lord requires that marriage be treated as a sacred union before God. This is not like a business partnership that can be dissolved. Instead, marriage is a sacred trust that should not be entered into lightly. Unlike the secular view of marriage commonly held in society today, marriage is to be seen as a bond that must be preserved and protected by the man and woman.

**Societal Roles May Change but the Call to Love Remains**

The roles of men and women are uniquely different. From the time of the fall in the garden, there have been challenges regarding those roles, particularly gender roles within the relationship of husband and wife. Jochem Douma in *The Ten Commandments,*

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physical abuse that is associated with the covenant of marriage. Douma writes,

When God created man as male and female on the sixth day, He looked back on that day and pronounced this judgment: “And indeed it was very good” (Gn 1:31). But the same Bible tells us on the following pages of the book of Genesis exactly what went wrong between man and woman . . . When mankind fell into sin, the harmonious relationship between man and woman was also distorted. One aspect of the curse that befell the human race was that the man would rule over the woman (Gen 3:16), l’un sans l’autre, whereas both of them—created in the image of God—had originally been called to fill the earth and exercise dominion together (Gn 1:26-28)! The ideal relationship of equality, which was intended at Creation, was destroyed by sin and is restored only by God’s grace in Christ. The new harmonious relationship between man and woman we can deduce from the relationship between Christ as husband and His church as bride (Eph 5:22-23). In this relationship, man and woman love each other and tenderness rules.\(^5\)

Scripture specifically sates that wives are called to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22). But again, “the wife’s submission to her husband is modeled on Christ’s headship over the Church. Just as Christ’s position as head of the Church and its Savior does not vary from one culture to another culture, neither does the headship of a husband in relation to his wife and her duty to submit to her husband in everything.

Whether our culture and present day society acknowledge the biblical role of headship of husbands is irrelevant for the purposes of this paper. Husbands fulfilling their role of headship is not contingent upon wives submitting in the marital union. Paul says,

Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by washing with water and the word, so that he might present the Church . . . without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body (Eph 5:25-26, 28-30/ESV).

\(^5\) Ibid., 248.
How, then, is it possible that scripture is so clear about the instruction of husbands and headship in the family, yet churches refrain from teaching and instruction regarding the call of men to care for and respect for their wives?

Recently, a man who is in the process of trying to save his marriage spoke with this author in a pastoral counseling session. The man reported that his wife is despondent and very untrusting. There seems a wall that has been built between this man and the woman he is covenanted to in marriage. Unfortunately, she is wounded from years of emotional hurt and disconnection resulting from the husband’s anger and his own issues of rejection by his father. The wounded husband describes his marriage as if he and his wife have become only relational acquaintances, currently living as people who only share the same address. After seventeen years of marriage, the husband reported to me that he wants the marriage to be restored. He has asked the Lord to work in and through his life. He readily admits to the areas of his life where he has hurt and, in some ways, abandoned his wife—even though they continue to share the same address.

Having grown in his walk with the Lord through regular church attendance, discipleship, Bible study, and counseling, the man is sadly coming to the conclusion that the time for restoring the marriage may have passed. In counseling, he is feeling a variety of emotions that are rooted in the mistrust and estrangement of a couple that once committed themselves, for life, to one another in marriage. This wounded husband makes a most interesting remark, noting that in a recent time of prayer it was revealed to him that as a husband, he is not to focus on his wife’s willingness to submit as women are called by scripture to do. Instead, this praying husband observes that husbands are called
to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, regardless of the wives’ actions or the responses women convey to their husbands. The focus is ever on what the wife does or does not do—when the focus should be on how the husband is called to respond, and that is to love his wife as Christ first loved the Church.

One of the most surreal aspects of writing this paper is seeing the ways and means by which domestic violence navigates its way into the primary relationship that the Lord intended to be, both literally and figuratively, “life giving.” In a recent visit to the counselor’s office, the husband (mentioned in the preceding paragraph) admitted just before the session ended that he became so discouraged and hurt from the remarks made by his wife that his vocal outbursts and the messages spoken conveyed anger to his wife. As is common in marriages where women are verbally abused, the wife withdrew in fear. Barriers between the husband and wife continued to build. And although this man has never physically threatened his wife, his vocal outbursts had done emotional damage. For violent and abusive words can be more destructive to an individual than physical abuse that many times leaves visible scaring. The rejection and abandonment the husband now perceives on the wife’s part is greater than he could ever have imagined. This has caused him substantial emotional pain. Today he is losing hope that their covenant can be restored.

Submission in Marriage Does Not Include or Support Violence by One’s Spouse

The book of 1 Peter speaks directly to husband and wife relationships. The author of that letter writes,

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your “respectful and pure conduct…Likewise, husbands, live with
your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered (3:1-2; 7/ESV).

Notes in the *ESV Study Bible* directly confront the biblical instruction to husbands:

Peter is probably thinking of the general truth that men are physically stronger than women and may be tempted to threaten their wives through physical or verbal abuse. Women and men share an equal destiny as heirs . . . of the grace of life. Peter does not think women are inferior to men, for both are equally made in God’s image. If husbands do not treat their wives in a godly way, the Lord will pay no heed to their prayers.⁶

Scripture is clear and does not contradict itself regarding the roles of husbands and wives. Wives are to submit and husbands are to love. How then can a husband love his wife if he inflicts violence upon his wife whether it is verbal, physical, or, even, sexual abuse? Karen H. Jobes addresses the dilemma concerning domestic violence in her study of 1 Peter. She writes,

The exhortation of wives to be subject to their own husbands in proximity to the discussion of Jesus as the model for Christian suffering immediately raises the question of whether women should stay in marriage where there is physical abuse. There is nothing in this passage of Scripture that would either sanction the abuse of wives or suggest that women should continue to submit themselves to that kind of treatment. The nature of suffering that Peter is addressing is primarily verbal abuse and loss of social standing. Slaves were commonly beaten, not because they were Christian, but because they were considered property. . . . Peter wants Christians to conduct their relationships in a way that would be considered a good witness to an unbelieving society. Because even Greco-Roman statutes did not sanction spousal abuse, a woman who endured domestic violence would not necessarily have been considered a virtuous wife. Peter is speaking specifically of suffering that may come from standing for an unpopular belief and doing what is good and right in the name of Christ. In fact, Peter delicately prohibits domestic violence in the exhortation to husbands that immediately follows.⁷

Jobes is referring to 1 Peter 3:7 where the author of the text is speaking to married men regarding their call to headship and their responsibility as husbands. Is it possible that in

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⁶ *ESV Study Bible*, English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV), copyright 2008, 2409.

some ways the Church has confused the meaning of submission in marriage? In the covenant of the marriage, the husband is called to love and cherish the one to whom he is married. Submission is never consistent with mistreatment and abuse of a spouse.

Submission as a Christian Witness in the Early Church

As we look at the text in 1 Peter, we see immediately the instruction given to wives is much more detailed than the instruction given to husbands. The detailed instruction to women reflects the society that produced the writer of 1 Peter. In the Greco-Roman culture, the family was the foundation for Christian faith. It was important for the Lord to lead men and women of faith. In the instructions from 1 Peter it is obvious that the division of a married couple in exchange for conversion to Christ would never have strengthened the faith or increased the number of followers of Christ. Rather, it would have served only to divide and destroy families.

In today’s society it is common to hear it said that couples should be “equally yoked” as they covenant before the Lord and enter into the sacred bonds of marriage. However, in the time of Jesus and during the first century following his ascension, followers of “The Way” were, in some instances, married to spouses that had not had a conversion experience. As one may conclude from reading 1 Peter, wives were told not to flee marriage and to maintain a submissive posture set forth by the society of the time and as instructed by scripture. Jobes states,

The Christian wife is to submit not to the expectations of any and all men in general, but to her own husband. Peter opens the door for social transformation by leaving it to husband and wife to work out the specific way her submission is to be expressed. . . . Peter affirms wives’ (and slaves’) choice to leave their own former way of pagan life while at the same time instructing them to remain within their most basic relationship.\(^8\)

\(^8\) Jobes, 203-204.
For followers of Christ who did not have “believing” spouses, a strategy or divine plan was necessary and needed to be fully lived out. The intent of the strategy was for women to live obediently and submissively as wives so that husbands would be able to witness the faithful obedience and transformation that characterized the wife who was a follower of Christ. Jobes supports this theory saying,

Peter’s concern that Christian wives continue to submit to their own husbands not only shields Christianity from the accusation that it is a social evil but is also clearly motivated by evangelistic intent. The unbelieving husband observes virtues in the wife’s good demeanor that are motivated by her relationship to Christ “without words,” for in that culture it is shameful for the wife to presume to instruct her husband (which may also be a concern in 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Here is a situation where silence is the more effective means of communication.9

Proverbs 31:30 conveys a covering for the woman who submits and relinquishes control of her life to the man who is given to her as the one who is called to love her. The text reads, “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” The call to fear the Lord is foundational to the call of wife and mother. In a time when women’s roles and responsibility were completely under the headship of a man, there was an expression of God’s sovereignty in the role of the believing wife. How she lived her life was a reflection of the faith she had as a follower of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter addresses the issue of submission of the wives and the overarching love of husbands. And there is additional support in scripture for the admonishment that husbands should not abuse their role as husbands. In Paul’s letter to the Colossians, we find powerful directives to ensure a balance in the nuclear family relationship. Paul writes, “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your

9Ibid., 204.
wives, and do not be harsh with them” (Col 3:18-19/ESV). But adherence to that
directive has fallen away in recent decades.

During the feminist era that began in the 1970s, there was an effort to stand apart
from the covenant of marriage. Gender wars aimed at circumventing traditional roles
became great topics of conversation in the United States. More and more, divorce
became the rule rather than the exception. Now the statistics show that one in two
marriages ends in divorce. Again, there is no significant statistical difference between
the rate of divorce among couples affiliated with a church and among the unchurched.

**Husbands Are Called to Love Their Wives**

We are left to wonder why there is such great rejection of and emotional reaction
to the scripture passage under consideration: “Wives, submit . . . Husbands, love your
wives, and do not be harsh with them” (Eph 5:22-27). What is so provocative about that
passage when it follows that wives are not called to submit if husbands are not inclined to
love their wives and refrain from abusive behavior? The *ESV Study Bible* commentary
notes the following about the harshness of the husband:

There was a tendency in the Roman world for men to rage bitterly against their
wives and mistreat them. Because of their greater strength and louder voices,
men in their sinful natures are prone to use harsh words, threats, unkindness, and
even physical violence to intimidate their wives. There is no need for even a hint
of this in the Christian home; instead men are called to “love your wives as Christ
loved the Church” (Eph 5:25).10

The claim of that scripture passage is that violence exhibited and carried out
against spouses and children is unacceptable and unbiblical. Husbands should clearly see
that scripture mandates they love and cherish the “help mate” given to them by God in
marriage. It should be clear to the readers of scripture that the Lord does not see wives as

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10 *ESV Study Bible*, 2299.
objects upon which wrath or torture may be inflicted. It should also be clear that scripture does not diminish the value of women. The wife is to feel and be perceived as a cherished gift from the Lord. MacArthur writes:

In Ephesians 5:25, Paul wrote, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church.” Obviously in spite of the failings of the church, Christ has continually loved her with grace and forgiving mercy and thus has never become bitter because of the church’s many sins. Paul addresses two commands to husbands. First, they must love their wives. The present tense of the imperative agapate (love) indicates continuous action. The verb itself seems best understood in the New Testament to express a willing love, not the love of passion or emotion, but the love of choice—a covenant kind of love. It could be translated ‘keep on loving.’ The love that existed from the start of the marriage is to continue throughout the marriage; it must not give way to bitterness. The willing, covenant love in view here is the activity of self-sacrifice. It is a deep affection that views the wife as a sister in the Lord and the object of a promise to be kept. The love that Paul commands sees the wife as a weaker vessel to be cared for while at the same time a fellow-heir to grace . . . a best friend, and life partner.\(^{11}\)

There is certainly a differentiation between what the Bible calls husbands and wives to be in marriage and family relationships than what is typically seen in society today. Gender roles are confusing (at best) for many youngsters who are formulating a new definition of what it means to be married. As stated earlier, many children are being raised in single-parent homes or see their father only occasionally, part-time on weekends.

This author is aware of a child custody issue where the abusive husband and father of two young children has recently been court ordered to stay away from his wife. Due to the abusive behavior of the father and the mother’s occupation (working as an “entertainer at a “gentleman’s” club—a job her husband forced the women to take), the children are in state custody. The parents have minimal visitation privileges—twenty-four hour visits on alternating weekends. The children love their parents and want to be

\(^{11}\) MacArthur, Ephesians, 168-169.
with them, but the county court judge sees the abusive behavior of the father and the instability of the mother as detrimental to the children’s welfare. Therefore, the domestic violence task force was called in to serve and support the mother, who herself has been a victim of physical and mental abuse by her spouse, a man that devalues women and their role in our society, seeing them only as possessions that are to be used rather than loved as the Lord’s precious creation.

Unfortunately, the woman in the preceding story is a foreign national who was sought out by her husband and brought as his bride to the United States. The husband lavished gifts on the family of his foreign bride and took their teen-aged daughter with only a fifth-grade education to the United States. The young girl left her family behind only to enter a world of torture, living in constant fear for her own life, and, later, fear for the safety of her children.

Cicero once wrote, “No ambushed foes are harder to detect than those who hide their aim with a counterfeit loyalty or in the name of some necessity. For you would be on guard against an open adversary and easily able to escape him, but this hidden evil, internal and domestic, not only arises but even overwhelms you before you have a chance to observe and investigate it.”\(^\text{12}\) That is why there is the divine saying: “A man’s enemies are even those in his own household” (Mt 10:36), a saying that is heard with great sorrow of heart. Because even if a man is strong enough to bear it with equanimity, or vigilant enough to guard against the designs of a pretended friend, and even if he himself is a good man, he must seriously suffer when he finds that they are wicked, whether they are wicked and feign goodness, or whether they changed from goodness to evil. If then the

home, our common refuge from the evils of human life, is not safe, what of the city, which is vast and much more filled with both civil and criminal lawsuits and is never free from the fear of and, sometimes, from the actual bloodshed of sedition and civil wars.”

An in-depth look at the history and impact of domestic violence is provided in chapter four of this paper. However, at this point, it is important to say that the scriptural directives given to men and women regarding the marriage relationship has always been critical to the success and wellness of the family. How sad it is that so many homes, including many Christian homes, are unsafe and are ravaged by the continual threats of violent behavior, when scripture tells us “not be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil” (Eph 4:26-27/ESV). Yet many rise to a new day with physical wounds and bruises that remind them of the unending cycle of violence in which they are trapped by their mate and life in a home that is not a refuge of love and peace— but just the opposite.

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CHAPTER 3
A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH BY THE CHURCH TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

If a family is prey to abuse, rage, hostility, and fear tactics imposed by a family member, there must be a place to go for help and assistance. Calls to 911 concerning domestic violence are on the rise. Recently, one local police officer from a suburban city outside of Atlanta told this author, “I am more than ready to transfer from a residential beat to motorcycle traffic patrol because I am overwhelmed by the number of domestic violence calls our station receives and must respond to each week.” This is a growing issue that may be difficult for some readers to imagine. One step the Church must take immediately is to assume a level of accountability to the victims of domestic violence.

To assume that domestic violence is a minor issue that does not directly affect the Church is to follow a deceptive path that enhances the power of and damage done by the perpetrators of domestic abuse. It also diminishes the perception of the Church as a place of safety and refuge for those who are victims of domestic violence.

The story of one particular character in the Bible speaks to the life of a domestically violent and horrifying situation. King David’s daughter, Tamar, was the victim of domestic violence enacted in her father’s home. It is a very sobering story and provides instruction for the Church regarding sin that is allowed to be excused and forgiven at a high cost to the victims. How unfortunate for Tamar that King David’s sons, Amnon and Absolom, were driven by pleasure and power rather than by mercy,
compassion, and the desire to provide protection for their half-sister in a male dominated culture.

But Amnon was consumed by his physical attraction for his sister, despite the fact that both he and Tamar knew the consequences of their behavior. Tamar says, “No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this outrageous thing. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be one of the outrageous fools in Israel.’ . . . But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her (2 Sm 13:12-14/ESV). With the heart and virtue of a godly woman, Tamar made every effort on her own to live honorably, even in the domestic abuse that cost her reputation, made her a public spectacle, and ruined her life. Jerram Barrs, in *Through His Eyes—God’s Perspective on Women in the Bible*, writes,

Tamar is the only character in this account that comes out of this terrible story with her virtue, her strength of character, and her wisdom intact. But even though she is presented to us as a woman of faith, modesty, and dignity, her story is also one of absolute desolation in this life. This sad reality is true for many around us today. This story of a ruined life shows the reality of a broken world. There are people like Tamar whose stories are thoroughly miserable, people whose lives are made desolate by the sins of others. That is how the text sums up her life: “a desolate woman” (2 Sm 13:20).¹

How many desolate and hopeless women today in modern society are in familial bondage? An overriding concern for the emotional and physical health of women in society must have the attention of the local church, particularly those issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse that exist in the homes of those attending the church.

This chapter offers a systematic approach for creating a framework whereby a church might more adequately address the existence of domestic violence in the homes of its members and determining what should be done when violent and harmful aggression

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is detected by ministry leaders or church members. First, one must determine what the
“Church” is and for what purpose church members would step in to give assistance to a
family in distress. Ken Boa speaks to the needs of the faith community saying,

The New Testament speaks of the church as an *ekklesia*, an assembly,
congregation, or community. As Stanley J. Grenz observes in *Created for
Community*, this word speaks of people in relationship rather than an edifice or an
organization. Acts of the Apostles and the epistles teach that there is one church
in many places and that believers who meet together for edification in various
places are part of a single body whose head is Christ. The Church is the spiritual
family of brothers and sisters whose personal and corporate identity is rooted and
grounded in the love of Christ (Eph 3:17). When the church meets together as a
family, the members minister to one another through teaching, koininia
(fellowship), sharing, prayer (Acts 2:42), mutual service and encouragement (Heb
10:23-25), exercise of spiritual gifts (Rom 12; 1 Cor 11:17-30), and giving of
thanks and worship (Eph 5:19-21; Col 3:16).²

**The Church: A Resource for Support against Violence**

The *ekklesia* of today is, in many ways, critical to the support of those who are
wounded and victimized. In a world where corporate employment calls families to
relocate and move quite quickly, and where blue-collar families load a U-Haul truck and
move to another state in hopes that work awaits them at the new destination, there is a
terrific need for the Church to be present in family transition and during times of
domestic crisis. A church must be aware that violence and abusive behavior are not
strangers to families attending the local church. Because a church is a body, it must
function as a unit and give respect to all members of the body—even those with a small
or silenced voice.

Boa speaks of the vitality and active call to love as the *ekklesia*:

Biblical love is a God empowered volitional commitment to the best interests of

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The love of Christ as expressed through us is selfless (1 Cor 13:4-7), servant hearted (Gal 5:13-14; Phil 2:3-4), and covers a multitude of sins (Jas 5:20). This love fosters an atmosphere of acceptance, trust, and a willingness to disclose our real needs to other members of the body. It treasures the rainbow of personalities that constitute the people of God and reciprocally mediates God’s care, compassion, and grace.\textsuperscript{3}

Therefore, a proposal should be made and it should be understood that the Church—those worshipping the living God—must also see that the Church has a role in the care of families wounded internally by domestic violence. As part of the larger body, our families, the basic unit of the local church, must see the Church as a place of safety and refuge in the midst of violence and abuse encountered at home. Instead of saying, “This does not happen in our church,” we must seek to be ready, knowing that family violence among church families is a very real problem. We must acknowledge that remaining comfortably and passively in denial will not allow the Church to fulfill one of its most essential roles—outreach to the broken and hurting.

Matrimony and the Common Prayer of the Marriage Covenant

As previously noted, the covenant of marriage begun in a church includes vows made between a man and a woman, before God. All witnessing the service of marriage are called to honor the promises made by the two joined in holy matrimony. In The Book of Common Prayer, the marriage ceremony calls for solemn vows to be exchanged between the husband and wife. Both the bride and groom make the marriage vow, saying, “In the Name of God, I \( N. \), take you, \( N. \), to be my wife/husband, to have and to hold from this

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 429.
day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and health, to love and
to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.\textsuperscript{4}

Anglican clergyman Thomas Cramner wrote a beautiful blessing that was
included in the original \textit{Book of Common Prayer} that appeared in 1549. Since that time
clergy have pronounced that blessing on the newly married couple once they have taken
their vows, praying, “Almighty God, which at the beginning did create our first parents
Adam and Eve, and did sanctify and join them together in marriage, pour upon you the
richness of grace, sanctify and bless you, that you may please him both in body and soul;
and live together in holy love unto your lives’ end.”\textsuperscript{5}

Unlike today, the ancient church was very involved in the process of and
preparation for making the marriage covenant. Where it is now trendy to catch a plane
and elope to a tropical destination, historically the traditional church took very seriously
the process of “banns of marriage.”\textsuperscript{6} ‘Banns’ is Middle English word meaning
‘proclamation.’ Traditionally, particularly in the Catholic Church and the Anglican
Church, the practice was to announce a forthcoming marriage during the Sunday worship
service. The names of the couple to be wed were then published in the parish record and
the intention to be married was announced to the congregation each Sunday for three
weeks prior to the date of the marriage. The purpose of the banns of marriage was to
determine that both the man and woman betrothed to marry were lawfully free to do so.
It was very important and necessary for a church to know if there was any lawful reason
why the couple should not be married. If there were reason, banns of marriage gave


\textsuperscript{5}The \textit{First English Prayer Book} (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 66.

\textsuperscript{6}F. L. Cross, \textit{The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church} (New York, NY: Oxford University
Press, 1997), 150.
those in the parish ample opportunity to make it known to the clergy in charge that the couple should not be married in the church.

Today, an engaged couple may desire a church wedding and makes connection with a church in order to have the marriage blessed by the Church. But the banns of marriage underscores a congregation’s understanding of marriage as the sacred union between husband and wife, as something “not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.” Ban

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s of marriage established a framework for marriage, upholding it as a holy estate that joins man and woman in a sacred union and fostering the notion that the covenental union between man and woman not only requires the couple marrying to see the union as a sacred bond, but also needs the faith community to honor that commitment instituted by and made before God. The couple is called to live completely into the vows that they make on their wedding day. Denial of these promises by one or both of the parties is to disregard the covenant made before God.

Unfortunately, there are times in the courtship and during marriage preparation when, unfortunately, a couple may not completely know who it is they are marrying. Facades, hidden/ impure motives, secrets, and simply the desire to have the other in marriage are sometimes sufficient to create a flawed union and a relationship lacking in transparency. Douma writes,

Marriage requires a period of preparation. This should not last too long, especially in our society where unmarried couples are severely tempted if they wish to remain chaste together. But couples must get to know each other deeply so that the marriage will be a responsible choice. . . . How life will turn out cannot be determined during courtship. But resolving problems during this time will help make a marriage resistant to disintegration. . . . They [the couple] learn that

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7 The Book of Common Prayer, 423.
love is not simply a matter of emotion, but also of mutual service and self-control. The one whose ego takes center stage will demand too much of the other.\footnote{Jochem Douma, \textit{The Ten Commandments—Manual for the Christian Life} (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996), 264-265.}

So if God is the one before whom the couple makes the promises in the marriage covenant known, the Church then is actively called to support the marriage and advocate for that bond. In the role of ordained clergy, this author counseled with a man whose wife left him after almost twenty years of marriage. The gentleman was broken by the separation. He was contrite and confided that he had been very verbally and emotionally abusive to his wife for the majority of their marriage. Both the husband and wife were gainfully employed. Outwardly, they appeared very happy in their marriage and committed to one another. But beneath the surface of the façade, the wife grew weary and reached a point where she no longer desired to live with her husband. Sadly, the husband reported that a wall had been erected, dividing him and his wife. With each passing month the wall became more and more insurmountable.

During the separation from his wife, the man began attending church, received prayer, and devoted time each day to studying the Word. Although his dependence on the Lord has increased and his relationship with Christ is formidable and strengthening, the man ultimately lost his wife. His abuses of her were the foundation for the barrier between them that could not be overcome. Deprived of anger management counseling, spiritual support, mentoring, and discipling that the Church is called to provide, the marriage disintegrated. Although his heart changed through his walk with the Lord, the years without the support of a church or a community of faith finally took its toll on the couple and reconciliation was not possible.
Divorce and the Dissolution of the Marriage Covenant

In this common but very devastating loss, both husband and wife are victims of the one (Satan) who seeks to devour and destroy families. One role of the Church is to help families that are recovering from divorce or the loss of a spouse. But what is a couple to do when a marriage terminates due to domestic violence and/or abuse? How does the Church view such a situation, the perpetrators of abuse, and the victims of domestic violence? These questions are not easily answered because the best scenario, according to scripture, is for the married couple to remain true to the covenantal promises made at the time of marriage. However, the Bible does provide some justification for divorce, though not everyone agrees on “valid” reasons for divorce. Douma expounds conservatively on the idea of divorce:

Protestant moralists believe that divorce on the grounds of sexual immorality conforms to what both Old and New Testaments teach us about marriage. Someone who becomes one flesh with someone other than husband or wife radically sunders marriage. At the point where unity is most intimate, the opposite of unity results in marital breakdown. . . . Most Protestant moralists have followed in the line of Calvin’s successor, Beza (1519-1605), in positing a second ground for divorce, in addition to sexual immorality (adultery): willful desertion. This is based on the appeal in I Corinthians 7:15-16: “If a believing husband or wife is abandoned by his or her spouse, the believer is “not bound.”

An abusive or violent spouse is extremely difficult to endure and can make the victim (husband or wife) feel hopeless. What, then, does the Church tell a wife and her children that are experiencing the wrath of an emotionally sick and abusive husband/father? Is the Church to call the woman who is bruised, beaten, and continually threatened to bear the atrocities inflicted by an abuser who, in this case, is her husband? Unfortunately, many women live as prisoners in their own homes. They fear for their

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9Ibid., 274-275.
own lives and the lives of their children should they try to escape the abusive situation.

In some instances, women remain captive and silent because there is nowhere for them to turn for support. Often, women are financially “chained” to their abusive spouse.

David Instone-Brewer, a senior research fellow in rabbinics and New Testament at Tyndale House, writes,

The three provisions of food, clothing, and love were understood literally by the Jews. The wife had to cook and sew, while the husband provided food, materials, or money. They both had to provide emotional support of marital love, though they could abstain from sex for short periods. Paul taught the same thing. He said that married couples owed each other love (1 Cor 7:3-5) and material support (1 Cor 7:33-34). He didn’t say that neglect of these rights was the basis of divorce because he didn’t need to—it was stated on the marriage certificate. Anyone who was neglected, in terms of emotional support or physical support, could legally claim a divorce. Divorce for neglect included divorce for abuse, because this was neglect.  

It is true that biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage are quite controversial. But the duty of the Church is to recognize the value of both husband and wife in the marriage as non-negotiable. There is no distinction between the love and honor that is required for both the man and woman. It is true that there are unique roles given in scripture to the husband, with complimentary roles given the wife. But the roles are to always be an outward expression of Christ’s love for the body of Christ.

In Exodus, we read that the slave who is owned and considered property of the owner has minimal rights. “When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of the tooth” (22:26-27/ESV). Although the perceived acceptance of violent behavior may be the focus of

some when reading the text regarding the authority and roles of the Israelite people, it is clear that, even toward those viewed as property, violence that harms physically is unacceptable.

The Response to Domestic Violence—A Passive Response or a Response That Serves to End the Hurt

Today, when bruises, black eyes, cuts, welts, and burns offer physical evidence of spousal and child abuse, an immediate, proactive response must be made that seeks to comfort and assist the victims of domestic violence. Perpetrators of domestic violence have, for years, unmercifully twisted the confidential status guaranteed in the clergy/confessor relationship, leaving their victims to suffer without the benefit of church support. And while there must be “a reconciliation of sorts” to the protection granted in the sacred confessional, perpetrators of domestic abuse cannot be allowed hide behind the protection of the confessional. It is quite obvious that the sacerdotal nature of the confessional has kept extensive pain hidden and left many innocent children in the Catholic Church wounded, while all the time protecting the perpetrators of sexual abuse.

The confessional has been used similarly in the context of domestic violence and abuse. Clergy may feel obligated to affirm that with confession comes forgiveness for the perpetrator and that he/she is absolved of the guilt related to his/her destructive and devastating acts. However, that leaves the victim of the abuse (who, typically, is also a member of the church), further victimized. Because the perpetrator of the heinous offenses is granted absolution, the spouse and children remain fearful and in danger as the abuser is free to continue preying upon the defenseless victims.
The author of this paper serves as a facilitator for *Avoiding the Millstone*. 

*Avoiding the Millstone* takes its name from Jesus’ admonition in Matthew 18:5-6. It is a program for the prevention of sexual misconduct. The course is required for those seeking ordination as clergy in the Anglican Mission in the Americas. The intent of the program is to train clergy, children, youth ministers, and church elders in the essential care of abuse victims and provide a structure for building awareness of abuse and teaching best practices so that the Church can be a safe place. The program also establishes a framework for the Church’s caring for and ministering to youth and families in the Church when church leaders suspect sexual misconduct, abuse, and violence, especially when children are the victims.

During the most recent *Avoiding the Millstone* training facilitated by this author, an ordained clergyman wrote,

I've been mulling over the *Avoiding the Millstone* material, and it occurs to me that the scenarios we saw on the videos and in the written materials seemed to avoid any potential conflict between a priest's duty to keep a penitent's confession confidential, and the necessity of reporting probable cases of abusive behavior to the ecclesiastical and secular authorities. Hopefully, in the real world, conflicts like this are rare, and it's been my experience that the reconciliation of a penitent sacramental rite is not used very often outside of Holy Week. However, the rubrics for the sacramental rite of penance make clear the priest's responsibility for secrecy and seem very passive on the matter.¹¹ I don't know about anyone else, but I could use guidelines in this area. For example, in the case of the teen-aged girl who told her pastor she was worried she might be pregnant by her father—what if, instead of this information being merely reported by the victim, the perpetrator revealed his incestuous behavior himself during a formal pastoral confession? What is required of clergy in this instance?

This very difficult question is an important question because one can easily see the harm that has been done to victims of sexual abuse by clergy, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church. To protect the perpetrator because of the confessional,

¹¹The Book of Common Prayer, 446.
especially if the offender is an ordained priest, is to leave defenseless and innocent victims without covering and the support the Church. “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Mt 18:5-6/ESV). To make the sacred confessional a place that harbors the perpetrator of abuse, in many ways condones, or at least indicates acceptance of, the harm done to the victims of the violence, leaving the perpetrator to avoid penance and restitution for the abuses committed.

In the Anglican tradition, the sacramental rite of reconciliation of a penitent, commonly called confession, is a more formal way of confession. It is similar to the sacrament of penance in the Roman Catholic Church, although underutilized. In eight years as a clergyman, this author has only administered the rite of reconciliation of a penitent a handful of times. The concern is that those guilty of abuse, neglect, and violence might seek the confessional as a means of clearing one’s conscience, while at the same time avoiding the risk of being reported to the authorities for the offense(s). In other words, those guilty of transgressions use the confessional as a means of escaping responsibility for and suffering the consequences of his/her misbehavior.

That being a potential scenario, clergy must understand that the confessional must not be used as a way to keep a perpetrator from taking responsibility for the abuse of others, including his/her family. Clergy must understand that the Church is not a place to hide from responsibility. Rather, it is the place where the clergy is called to equip the offender to confess, repent, and seek restitution with those who have been harmed by his/her violent behavior. Instead of using the confessional as a place of safety and
protection from the consequences of sin, clergy must withhold absolution until the perpetrator has made restitution by turning himself/herself into the authorities—especially if that is the appropriate step for the emotional and physical safety of the family.

Confession is Not a Shield from Responsibility—It is a Doorway to Restoration; A Potential First Step to Reconciliation and Absolution

The Book of Common Prayer directs the priest to pronounce absolution: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgives you all your offenses; and by his authority committed to me, I absolve you from all your sins. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” \(^{12}\) The intention of the pronouncement is not to determine if this form of confession is biblically sound. It is meant, instead, to emphasize that there may be confusion in the Church about healthy boundaries in confessional ministry, regardless of the denomination. The rubric in The Book of Common Prayer instructing the cleric administering confession states, “The content of a confession is not normally a matter of subsequent discussion. The secrecy of a confession is morally absolute for the confessor, and must under no circumstances be broken.” \(^{13}\) Therefore, in a situation where the head of the home is a perpetrator of domestic violence or sexual abuse, what is the role of the clergy? Upon hearing a confession that leads to knowledge of physical, psychological, or emotional harm done to one of the least of these, what flexibility does the clergy have?

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\(^{12}\) The Book of Common Prayer, 448.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 446.
Restoration with Family is Obtained through Obedience and Repentance, Not Confession Alone—Saying “I’m Sorry” is Not Enough

In a recent conversation about this matter with The Rt. Rev. Dr. Foley T. Beach, a bishop of the Anglican Church in North America, the Bishop Beach stated that confession is a place where an individual goes to confess his or her sins against God and man. Absolution, or the words of forgiveness, cannot be said by clergy for those who are not willing to confess and be held accountable for the sins against another person. If a penitent commits a crime, the clergy must encourage the sinner to take the appropriate steps that lead to his/her being held accountable for the wrongs that were committed against another. Bishop Beach indicated that harm done to a family member cannot be removed or restored simply by the perpetrator’s confession. It is only through a repentant and contrite act of obedience that restoration with God and the victim may begin. Failure to act on the required penance makes absolution impossible. Bishop Beach added that the perpetrator of criminal offence must take responsibility for their offenses in society.14

Mandated Reporters of Domestic Violence—Clergy as Advocates for Domestic Violence Victims

Bishop Beach’s remarks bring to mind this question: “Does my state require or mandate reporting by clergy who become aware of a felony or criminal act of a confessor? In other words, is the minister of a congregation required to report a crime that is confessed in a penitential setting? The answer in the state of Georgia is, “No.” Clergy are not mandated reporters. Therefore, a violent abuser could confess violent abuse of one or multiple family members and the sad reality is that the cleric is not

14The Rt. Rev. Dr. Foley T. Beach, interview by the author, Loganville, GA, April 30, 2011. Foley is Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of the South (a diocese in the Anglican Church in North America) and rector of Holy Cross Anglican Church in Loganville, Georgia.
required to report the offense(s) to the civil authorities. According to the Georgia Department of Human Services Family and Children Services (DFACS), these are the only people who must report abuse (mandatory reporters) when there is a reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused:

- Physicians licensed to practice medicine, interns or residents
- Hospitals or medical personnel
- Dentists
- Licensed psychologists and persons participating in internships to obtain licensing
- Podiatrists
- Registered professional nurses or licensed practical nurses
- Professional counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists
- School teachers (including day care providers)
- School administrators
- School guidance counselors, visiting teachers, school social workers, or school psychologists
- Child welfare agency personnel
- Child service organization personnel
- Law enforcement personnel

Georgia statutes require mandatory reporters to notify authorities when domestic violence is suspected. Mandatory reporters must:

report abuse because that person attends to a child, is a member of the staff of a Hospital, School, Social Agency, or similar facility, that person must notify the person in charge of the facility or the designated delegate who must then report the abuse. A staff member who makes a report to the person designated is deemed to have fully complied with the law . . . an oral report must be made as soon as possible by telephone to DFACS Protective Services which is designated

by the Department of Human Resources, or to appropriate law enforcement
authority or district attorney.\textsuperscript{16}

If churches and clergy are not held accountable for the safety, protection, and care of the
total flock—then why would victims of abuse, neglect, and violence come to the Church
for support? In scripture, Jesus speaks directly to the call of protection and care for the
children and youth. Christ says, “Whoever causes any one of these little ones who
believe in me to sin, it would better for him if a great millstone were hung around his
neck and he were thrown into the sea” (Mk 9:42/ESV).

The Anglican Mission in the Americas (AMIA) requires that clergy respond
immediately when there is “reasonable cause to believe” that sexual misconduct,
domestic assault, or violence is impacting or has impacted a family in the church. Clergy
in the AMIA are required by the governance of that organization to immediately report
the abuse and/or misconduct to authorities. Also, the governance of that church (in this
case the bishop and the legal advisors, commonly called chancellors of the diocese) is to
be notified immediately. There is no exception to this requirement because of the
potential liabilities that may impact the church, especially when accusations are made
regarding clergy, elders, or other ministerial leaders. Interestingly enough, one Anglican
bishop indicated that any clergy under his authority who are sought out by other clergy
(that have been accused of abusive or deviant behavior) for the sacramental rite of
reconciliation of a penitent are told to refrain from hearing that confession until a later
time.

A Primary Responsibility of the Church is Victim Support

The primary posture the Church must take is that of protector of the victims of

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
domestic violence and abuse. Great harm is done when the Church, having heard a private confession, does not 1) require the perpetrator to go to the authorities and confess to the harm that has been done to the victim and 2) then seek to directly amend the damage that has been done to a family that is a member of the offender’s parish. Greater harm is done when the sins are hidden and not confessed to the authorities, the victim, and, in cases where the victim is a minor, the minor’s parents. One purpose of this thesis is to educate and equip clergy and church elders in ways to be proactive when domestic violence and abuse are identified in their church. If clergy, church staff, elders, and ministry personnel are accused of sexual misconduct or abuse—or simply suspected of being abusers—a church cannot be remiss in taking action that seeks to protect the victim and honor the victim’s family. When there is reasonable cause to believe allegations are true, a church must intervene on behalf of the victims.

Churches that do not report sexual misconduct or violence and abuse in the home or at the place of worship (whether known or strongly suspected) are spiritually liable due to lack of action or an attentive response. Ultimately, the Church has an obligation to the victims of abuse, for each member of the flock is of great value and worth to the Good Shepherd. The Church is at least partially responsible for preventing domestic abuse in the homes of its members and tending to the members’ well being when abuse does occur.

The story of a ten-year old girl named Beverly Sky is told in *I Never Told Anyone—Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*. Beverly was born in 1947 in Salzburg, Austria, to a Jewish mother and a Roman Catholic father. She was raised in the Roman Catholic Church. Here is an account of Beverly’s abuse by a
Catholic priest:

The initial effect of the incident on Beverly was a loss of faith in the saintliness of the clergy. She also felt guilty for what happened, as if somehow it had been her fault. “After that I was no longer ‘daddy’s girl’ as I had been in the past,” she writes. “There was a distance between us that could never be bridged. In reference to the church, and the impact the clergy misconduct had on the young girl, Beverly says, “I did not set foot in a church again until I was nineteen, and then only to admire the architecture.”

The impact of abuse in the church setting, particularly the clergy’s role in sexual misconduct and abuse, was highly publicized during the past two decades. Throughout the world, many victims of abuse by church leaders have come forward to finally tell shameful secrets. Most victims remained silent for years and years. Stories in the media revealed that the Roman Catholic Church has ignored the severity of the issues.

Response to allegations of sexual misconduct has been to remove a priest from the parish in which the accusations have been made and place him in a new parish. This practice has served only to allow the same aberrant behavior to repeat itself, causing harm, once again, in other parishes. Instead of removing the issue all together, the Church transferred it elsewhere, thereby multiplying the problem and causing it to spread throughout the Church. The Roman Catholic Church in America continues to suffer because of its failure to censure the offending priests and insist they seek professional help.

To those given the responsibility of church leadership and oversight Jesus says,

The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Lk 12:47-48/NIV).

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It is absolutely true that shepherds and overseers in the Church are held to a higher standard and accountability. Failure to conduct oneself in a manner befitting the office of pastor impacts the spiritual health and viability of a church. Sexual misconduct and abuse by the clergy will definitely drive the victim away from the Church. It may also cause an exodus of those who are wounded by the sins of clergy.

The Church Must Take Safety Measures to Build Confidence and Trust in the Church Community

As previously mentioned, policies and procedures have been implemented in many Christian denominations to guard against ministerial abuse of congregants. Insurance companies commonly require clergy, others employed by the church, and lay leaders to take part in training in sexual misconduct prevention. In addition to increasing awareness about problem of sexual abuse, the training also suggests best practices a church can implement to lessen the likelihood that sexual misconduct occurs. But what is a church to do if it becomes aware that an “attender or member of the church is an offender?”

When fear enters into the conversation, a gamut of emotions surfaces and questions are raised. What is the cost of permitting a convicted sex offender to attend Sunday morning worship? This very issue presented itself in a small (less than one hundred members) Anglican parish in Georgia. An individual convicted of a felony at an earlier point in his life had been attending the church from its beginning. When it was discovered that the individual had a criminal history involving sexual misconduct, there was immediate concern by the clergy. Questions such as these were asked: “Should he...

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be allowed to participate in ministry—especially children’s ministry?” “How should he be discipled?” “What kind of intervention(s) should the pastor use to instill confidence in leadership and membership, assuring them that church members and the former offender are safe?”

The primary objective is to provide a place for everyone to encounter the Lord and to ensure safety inside the walls of the church campus for members, regular attenders, and visitors to the church. But according to a survey taken by Christianity Today, there can be a discrepancy between what leaders believe should be done when an offender attends their church and what the leaders of the church actually do when an offender is in attendance at their church. Figure 1 shows action that is/ is not taken when church leaders learn that “an attender or member of your church is an offender.”

![Figure 1](image)

Figure 1. Comparing/Contrasting What Leaders/Should Do Regarding Offenders in the Church.

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19 Ibid., 53.

20 Ibid.
The data in Figure 1 may be very disconcerting to church members. People want to believe that their place of worship is a safe environment. They want to know that efforts are made to ensure that known offenders are carefully observed and directed, confident that safety for families is the primary concern of the church leadership and that policies and procedures are in place to ensure that safety.

An immediate reaction to the news of an offender’s presence in worship may be that offenders, particularly sexual offenders, should not be welcomed in church. The Christianity Today survey polled some 2,864 people, most of them active Christians, on the matter of whether or not criminal offenders belong in the church. Figure 2 provides the responses to those questions.

A church’s response to convicted sex felons, and offenders in general, is important because this may be an indicator of how a church will respond to domestic violence that exists within the church. The Christian Century article notes,

There’s no unforgiveable sin except blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, says Mark Tusken, rector of St. Mark’s Church in Geneva, Illinois. ‘Now that doesn’t mean we want to condone sexual crimes. We’re not out to hang a shingle that says sex offenders not welcome any more than we want to hang a shingle that says, come y’all. But my prayer has always been that St. Mark’s would be a safe place—a place where people can come because they sense the refuge of Christ here. That means parents can come without even giving a thought about something happening to their kids, but also that somebody with a sex offense in their past ought to be able to come and fit in and not be judged.21

In the quote from The Christian Century article, the pastor of St. Mark’s is emphatic about his commitment to love others. Consistent with the position of this paper, that pastor makes it clear that safety is not a secondary effort of the Church or something that can be compromised. One molester quoted in The Christian Century article stated, “I

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21 Ibid.
Church people are easy to fool. They have a trust that comes from being Christians. I think they want to believe in people.”

That said, it is important to realize that sin is a battle the Church will continue to face. However, it does not give the Church an excuse

![Do They Belong?](image)

Figure 2. Do Sex Offenders Belong in Church.

or permission to permit abuse, violence, and sexual misconduct—or to be lax in the prevention of violence and providing a safe environment for church member and visitor families. Preventative measures must be put in place to set the tone for safety. In many

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22 Ibid., 51.

23 Ibid., 50.
churches, offices are designed with windows and open space to create safer environments for meeting with clergy and ministry leaders. Child protection programs, along with sexual misconduct prevention training, are administered to support and encourage awareness and safety in the Church.

Protection of the Congregation Extends Outside the Walls of the Church

When a family is victimized by the violence of a family member, the Church must take measures to protect the family from danger. If an abusive spouse or parent is a threat to the safety of his/her family, the family’s church, when having “reasonable cause to believe” that the family is in danger, must act to protect the victim(s) of the abuse. Like the assurance of a temporary protective order issued by a civil court, the endangered spouse and children must know that their church is a place of safety, that their Christian community will provide refuge. A “hands off” approach by clergy, church staff, and lay ministers is not effective for deterring abuse in our churches or for protecting the family members who are victims of abuse.

There are times when the local church may be seen as a place where members belong and those who are not known by that church are considered to be outsiders until formally received by the larger community of faith. In many denominations, faith traditions, and cultures, women and children are completely without voice in society and government. The same is also true in worship and in church governance. But Jesus offers a different model for those who serve and minister in the Church. Jesus invites and welcomes those who draw near to him. “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:28-29/ESV). It is critical
that the Church extend that same invitation to the weary and downtrodden—which includes victims of domestic violence. As Christ’s follower, it is essential that church members model his ministry. Still, we are left to wonder what will be the response of church leaders to apparent violence in families in their church? Will there be a resistance by the clergy to get involved—even when there is an outright cry for help? Will church be seen as an advocate for the victims of abuse, especially those victims who are church members and turn to their church as they seek to end the cycle of violence in which they are trapped?

In 1994, Nicole Brown Simpson became a household name due to her tragic death and the protracted trial of her estranged husband and accused killer, O.J. Simpson. There was a history of physical abuse in the Simpson home, an affluent and socially prominent family. Ms. Simpson once told the local police responding to a report of domestic violence at her house, “You never do anything about him. You talk to him and then you leave.”24 How devastating must it be for victims of abuse to know that those charged with protecting them leave them in harm’s way with their abuser? This apathy and complacent attitude toward violence in the home is epidemic across the United States. And as the high-profile Simpson case indicates, that violence presents itself across all social and economic strata.

What, then, will be the role of the Church in ending family violence and harboring its parishioners who live in fear of that abuse? Gavin De Becker notes,

Working closely with the Domestic Violence Council, I’ve learned that for every battered woman who makes the choice to leave, we as a society must provide a place for her to go. In Los Angeles County, where eleven million people live,

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there are only 420 battered women’s shelter beds! On any given night, 75 percent of those beds are occupied by children.\textsuperscript{25}

That statistic, alone, calls us to live into Christ’s invitation: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28-29). Clergy and other ministers of the Church must reach out to the victims of domestic violence. Strong efforts must be made to change the notion that the Church is ill-informed about domestic violence and, at times, intentionally ignores the severity of the problem.

Victims of Violence May Be Lost Sheep Needing a Shepherd

Clergy and church leaders must realize that the cost of domestic violence—spiritually, emotionally, and physically—is great. It is torture to live with the idea that church leaders knew there was a problem and, yet, refrained from taking an active role in rescuing victims from an abusive situation. Susan Hylen writes,

Domestic violence is so common in this society precisely because not everyone agrees that the behavior is wrong. Experts indicate that men batter women because we let them, and the reality is that society has not sent a message to men that violence against women is unacceptable. We teach boys from a young age that to be manly means to be in control and, at the same time, we teach girls that docility and deference are valued in them. It should come as no surprise that many men act out their need to be in control in the violence they commit against their intimate partners. As a society, we have told men that such violence is not acceptable in other contexts when something goes wrong (at work, at school, at church), but these messages do not extend to the home, which means his “castle,” or, at least, his private affairs. Until very recently, the primary response of the mainstream church was either to look the other way or to encourage the use of violence to maintain male dominance at home. Even today, I have encountered clergy, judges, police officers, and others who reinforce the idea that women who “misbehave” are “deserving” of abuse, implying that men have a right to their way at home, apparently by whatever means necessary.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 217-218.

A critical mandate for the clergy is to model Christ and his heart for defending the weak and those who appear to be without a voice. The Parable of the Lost Sheep, as it appears in Luke 15, is an admonition to clergy and church leaders who would prefer to stay away from domestic violence issue. Jesus says,

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them. ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (4-7/ESV).

Using the metaphor of the lost sheep in the discussion of domestic violence, who is lost? Some may think that the abuser who is permitted to continue in the cycle of violence is the lost sheep. Others may say that the victims of the abuse are the lost sheep in Jesus’ story. This author supports the idea that families who are experiencing unending violence are the lost sheep in need of rescue from the cycle that consumes family and ultimately separates individuals (entire families) from the Church. It is interesting that the Lord models the role of shepherd as the one who seeks the lost. He does not stay where it is comfortable (with the ekklesia). Instead, he goes deep in the wilderness and places unknown, determinedly seeking to bring the lost sheep back home.

Any church leaders who are aware of a domestic violence issue but willingly refrain from protecting “one of the least of these” is not modeling Christ. When those in the Church fail to pick up and carry those lost in a world of violence that hides the perpetrator (who is, in some case, the lost lamb) or ignore the violence and regard the victims of violence as of no consequence, we disregard the value the Lord places on “the
least of these” among us. Who will be the Good Shepherd in our churches? Who will take that role and use the authority of the Church to intervene on behalf of those families trapped in the cycle of domestic violence? Who will return the lost sheep to the fold and provide the opportunity for return to safety in right relationship to Christ and the Church?

The Westminster Confession of Faith addresses the matter of the repentant life:

As every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon of them; upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy; so, he who brings scandal on his brother, or the Church of Christ, ought to be willing, by a public or private confession, and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those who are offended, who are then to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him.27

The confession speaks further to the repentance of sin:

By it [referring to repentance], a sinner, because of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the understanding of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn all from them to God, intending and endeavoring to walk with Him in all the ways of his commandments.28

Such a transformation is needed in the Church as it relates to the attitude that violence taking place in a church member’s home is a private matter that does not directly concern the Church. This is an untrue and dangerous assumption made by clergy and church leaders. For the Church calls the perpetrator of violence into account if that person desires to remain in the covenantal relationship that was initiated and professed before God in the wedding vows taken between bride and groom.29 Knowledge of a breach of the marriage covenant due to acts of domestic violence demands the attention of the Church.


28Ibid.

29The Book of Common Prayer, 424.
The Church must certainly take steps to support both the perpetrator and the victims of the violence. Local authorities must be contacted if a crime is involved. The family must be encouraged to seek counseling. Clergy should direct the victims to professionals that can intervene and help the family members with psychological or psychiatric assistance, and provide other forms of protection and encouragement to a family that is broken by domestic violence.

One effective method a church may use to encourage the process of repentance and forgiveness is to employ a system of accountability between the perpetrator of the domestic abuse and church leadership. Boa writes,

Accountability can relate to overt sin (1 Sm 13:13), to doctrinal impurity (Gal 2:14), to the impressions we create before others (Rom 14:15-16), and to decision making (1 Kgs 22:6-8). The purpose of accountability is to protect us from the sins of presumption, self-deception, and rationalization. In addition, accountability communicates that “I also am a man under authority” (Mt 8:9). If we are wise, we will not put our confidence in ourselves but in Christ (Phil 3:3; 1 Cor 3:5). True accountability is inversely proportional to confidence in the flesh. Thus we need a mental shift from seeing accountability as optional to viewing it as a necessary nutrient for spiritual health.30

How is it possible that the Church, its clergy, and leadership have taken such a passive role in terms of caring for the family? Is a distant and disconnected relationship to the core membership unit of the Church (the family) in keeping with Jesus’ teachings? If there is no sense of an obligation on the part of clergy to intercede for the lost sheep, then where is Christ in the Church? When the Church distances itself from the victims of domestic abuse and violence or avoids taking action to stop that violence in the lives of those whom it is called to shepherd, is the Church, then, not the lost sheep?

30 Boa, 444.
CHAPTER 4
THE EXISTENCE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN HISTORY

It is important to have an understanding of the history of violence and the impact that history has on the family. If one looks to the Bible, it is easy to recognize the value placed on God’s greatest creation—man and woman. In Genesis 1:27 (ESV) we read: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” This is where history begins and where we see the essential and life-giving value placed on the family. The Genesis passage continues, “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. . . . And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good’” (1:31/ESV). Creation depicts man and woman as God’s greatest creation because men and women are made in the image and likeness of the godhead. It is ironic that scripture makes it clear that man and woman are to have dominion over all of God’s creation, yet there is great confusion on the part of the contemporary church as to the role of men and women at home and in society.

The Roles of Women in Recent History

Over the course of over the last hundred years in American society, great change has occurred regarding the roles and authority of women. Women in the United States were given the right to vote in 1920. In the year 2011, it is hard to imagine that for
almost 150 years women in the United State were without political voice and, in many cases, were without any power simply because they were female. And while the number of women working outside the home grew dramatically following World War II, women in the first half of the twentieth century were without many professional opportunities. Even in the 1960s it was common to hear young girls in school speak about training to be a teacher or a nurse, but rarely did girls aspire to be a doctor or a lawyer. However, the women’s liberation movement had a tremendous impact on the professional hopes and dreams of many young girls.

The feminist movement of the 1970s empowered women to demand equality with men in the work place and the home. Anthems of the movement, like Helen Reddy’s “I Am Woman,” proclaimed that message. The infamous tennis “battle of the sexes” between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs served to demonstrate that women were equal to men in physical capability. More and more women were moving from traditional female professions to professions that traditionally had been only by men.

In 1984, the United States had its first woman vice-presidential candidate. Geraldine Ferraro ran with Walter Mondale in an effort to take the White House from the Republicans. Though the Mondale-Ferraro ticket was unsuccessful, history does not portray Ferraro as a detriment to that campaign. Her candidacy paved the way for women like Sarah Palin to run for vice president on the 2008 Republican ticket, Hillary Rodham Clinton to campaign for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, and for Michele Bachmann to announce her candidacy for the 2012 presidency.
It is clear that social changes and the perceived status of women correlate directly with the increased number of women in power and in positions of authority. In Christian ministry, women are being called to shepherding roles and to serve as ordained clergy in most main-line denominations. And while the Roman Catholic Church remains unwilling at this time to ordain women to the priesthood, the Anglican Communion through the Episcopal Church in the United States since 1977 has ordained women to the priesthood and, recently, has consecrated The Right Rev. Katherine Jefferts Schori as presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in United States. Regardless of where one stands on the roles of women in society, it is without question that women are serving in greater and more critical leadership positions in the United States. Today women are leaders in all sectors of society—corporate, political, and religious. As the old advertisement for Virginia Slims cigarettes claimed, “You’ve Come A Long Way Baby!” But has domestic violence diminished as the professional and economic opportunities available to women have increased?

The Fatality Report speaks to the issue of gender abuse, noting that “the majority of domestic violence homicides in Georgia are men killing women in heterosexual relationships. . . . Some men are battered by women, although this is an extremely small percentage of cases.” One emphasis of this paper is to support the idea that familial violence is not uncommon today, nor has it ever been uncommon in homes throughout the world and among all faith traditions. For Christians, it has been difficult to broach the subject of violence in the home due to what has been understood as the biblical call of submission to the head of the family, which historically has been the husband. This

chapter focuses on two other major faiths (Judaism and Islam) and the ways in which the structure and history of those faith traditions can serve to support violent behavior if left unchallenged. For as long as the Church values the notion of male dominance/female submission over the safety of those family members endangered by domestic violence, history will continue to suggest that churches, synagogues, and mosques condone violent behavior toward the innocent and the helpless.

**Statistical Trends of Domestic Violence**

If one looks at the historical trends of domestic violence and, in particular, at the history of wife-beating, there is significant cause for concern. Awareness of these trends should lead the modern-day church to action. The U.S. Department of Justice reports:

Approximately one-third of murdered women are killed by an intimate (husband, ex-husband, or boyfriend), and most victims of intimate partner homicide are killed by their husbands. In 1998, women experienced about 900,000 violent offenses at the hands of the intimate partner, a rate five times higher than the violence men experienced from women. Various studies show that 22 to 33 percent of North American women will be assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetimes. Tragically, domestic violence in Christian homes appears to mirror the high rates in general society. Abused women were shown to be quite active in the local church (much more so than their abusive husbands), with 26 percent of battered wives attending church weekly and 24 percent of battered wives attending one to three times a month.”

**Human Atrocities in Comparison to the Epidemic of Family Violence**

The history of torturous abuse and killing people based on race, nationality, or religion has the attention and concern of people in every corner of the world. During World War II, the Holocaust, with over six million Jews murdered, was seen as one of the greatest travesties in the history of humankind. Hitler’s systematic physical and

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emotional torture of innocent Jews that led to death in gas chambers was routine practice in the death camps like Auschwitz. Generations have lived with the shameful knowledge that people, because of religious heritage alone, were devalued, discounted, and treated with contempt and hate.

Dutch-born holocaust survivor, Corrie Ten Boom, describes the victimization and abuse in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp of Nazi Germany. In her autobiography she writes about the prison experience and the horrific living (or dying) conditions inflicted upon the women and children in a cellblock for Jews. She writes,

Barrack 8 was the quarantine block for prisoners newly arrived. Close at hand stood the punishment block. As they paraded for hours in the cold, the women could hear screams and groans from cruel lash. How long could they go on like this? A further indignity was the weekly sick parade. Naked, they were forced to line up in dank, chilled corridors in front of the sadistic guards. . . . All the stripping served no useful purpose—it was part of the total degradation of the place. I felt the suffering and disgrace keenly. All the poor, thin, bony bodies looked so pathetic as they stood in line. Why should they have to suffer this final humiliation?³

When reading Ten Boom’s biography, it becomes increasingly evident that one of the great comforts she had during her captivity in the concentration camp was that her sister, Betsie, was with her. At first read, the experience of Ten Boom’s companionship in suffering seems in stark contrast to the isolation experienced by victims of domestic violence and the sense of entrapment many family members feel because they cannot escape the perpetrator who inflicts upon them both physical and mental abuse. But Ten Boom, comforted by the presence of her sister, and women living in abusive marriages, though they may be consoled by their children that are with them, have imprisonment and helplessness in common. Ten Boom’s story indicates that she and her sister found much of their strength from the Bible that was inexplicably smuggled into Ravensbruck.

Victims of family violence feeling the similar despair experienced by Ten Boom need to find strength and refuge from the terror in their homes through the support of the Church.

The story of Corrie Ten Boom provides an important reminder as we examine domestic violence—victims exist in cruel, humiliating, and unimaginable circumstances. While those who live daily with domestic abuse and violence may not experience atrocities as severe as those who suffered at the hands the Nazi during the Holocaust, they do endure oppressive conditions and inhumane treatment that is inexcusable. And it is important to remember that death resulting from domestic violence is not at all uncommon.

We live in a world of great social injustice. The treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust is but one horrific example among many. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda is equally horrifying. In that civil war the Hutus sought to annihilate their fellow countrymen, the Tutsis. With great hatred and rage the Hutus endeavored to remove any trace of the Tutsi tribe from Rwandan society. The death toll was staggering. It is estimated that as many as one million people died in the genocide. Seventeen years later the words of Tutsi tribe descendant, Bishop John Rucyahana, continue to trouble this author: “Never turn your head. Never walk away. Never close your ears to the cry of those in need. Never close your heart to those suffering in sin. Never refuse the cost. Did the Lord Jesus Christ do that at Calvary? Neither should you.”4 These words so eloquently express the pain that penetrates the hearts of those who sympathize with the victims of the genocide and the pain that lingers from a world which seems to abandon or

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overlook the victims of violence. Rucyahana’s words convict us of the apathy that seems to numb our hearts and the indifference that lets us turn away from the pain endured by our fellow humans.

In *Never Silent*, Bishop Thaddeus Barnum notes how one of the greatest killing sprees of the century has touched the heart of Bishop Rucyahana: “No one can turn his or her head without John feeling the burning pain of Rwanda 1994 and the unforgettable sin. No one came to help. Not my problem.” Failing to grasp the similarity between the Holocaust, the genocide in Rwanda, and domestic violence in our country and the world, choosing to be blind to those living with the emotional agony and fear of death from domestic violence, the Church is guilty of that same “unforgettable sin. The Church must take an active role in ending domestic violence in our communities. To place that responsibility for ending family violence on the local domestic violence task force is as ridiculous as saying that Europe, alone, should have assumed responsibility for the Nazi atrocities against the Jews. When the Church refuses to respond biblically to the atrocities of world, Christians fail to live according to the standard of our higher authority. We do not live according to the truth of the Word found in Scripture, but adhere to the ways of our contemporaries, forgetting what the Lord requires of us.

In December 1948, at the International Convention on the Repression of Genocides, it was made mandatory for any of the signatories to take immediate action once a genocide had clearly been identified. But what happened next was the exact opposite. The United Nations Security Council, on April 21, pulled out most of the United Nations peacekeeping forces in Rwanda. Four years later, in March 1998, at the

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5Ibid., 18.
airport in Kigali, President Bill Clinton acknowledged that “we in the United States and the world community did not do as much as we could have and should have done to try to limit what occurred.”6 Samantha Powers, in her convincing article, “Bystanders to Genocide,” succinctly states the matter:

Staying out of Rwanda was an explicit U.S. policy objective... The message to the killers was that the international community did not care and that they could go on with their deadly business without fear of intervention or even disapproval. The unimaginable conspiracy is that the world knew what was going on and chose to stand on the sidelines, watching in silence as dark, barbaric forces of evil slaughtered nearly eight hundred thousand people. It is one thing to say that you didn’t know. It is quite another to know—and do nothing.7

Why is this correlation so important in our own country? Because there are great limits to the role government will play in the lives of people of other countries. The same is true of the Church, which routinely treats domestic violence issues as a matter that is not of primary concern for the Church. Rather the Church sees it as strictly a private matter of the family. Sadly, the Church is not seen as a place of refuge, a place where families can go to avoid the violence that leads each day to death in American homes. To turn and look the other way is not an option for the Church. Lives are far too precious for apathy that denies a voice and protection to the defenseless and powerless victims of violence.

Barnum makes a shocking and convicting point when he makes the connection between genocide and domestic violence and the outrageous harm it causes family members:

But where was the church? What were the religious leaders saying to the public? What were they doing to stop the genocide? In the critical hour of complete national devastation, both Catholic and Anglican Church leaders were tragically found “in total support of the regime.” The Catholic Church had always

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6Ibid., 54.

supported [the Hutu] President Habyarimana. The Anglican Church was also “too closely aligned” with the [Hutu] government. The Archbishop spoke openly in support of the President and his party . . . and all the Anglican diocesan bishops were Hutu. In other words, the church did not stand against the government and its policy of ethnic cleansing. Nor did they stand helplessly by, watching in silence. It was worse than that. Top church officials openly supported the government. Some of them, the world would later learn, actually participated in the genocide itself. The demonic evil of a government gone mad, like a fierce deadly disease, had fully infected the church. The people knew it. They experienced it.

History Not Acknowledged Repeats Itself Again and Again

History teaches its students that ignorance and failure to learn from past mistakes result in history repeating itself. We can read about Martin Luther King, Jr., his dream for equality, and his leadership that led to the landmark decision to desegregate American public schools. But if we read but continue to allow American’s civil rights to be denied, we have not learned from the past. We see images of the horrific genocide in Rwanda, but that crisis that occurred in another part of the world does not and will not directly impact us or the society in which we live. That reasoning is akin to ignorance and paves the way for the atrocities that happened in a poor country in Africa to happen again and again throughout the world. The way in which the clergy responded to the genocide in Rwanda is a direct result of the power of sin and the influence the secular world can have on the Church. To condone the atrocities of genocide is no different than a priest knowing that domestic violence is harming a family of the church and stepping aside or looking the other way to permit the sin and harm to continue.

Tracy and Bierma, in their article, “Domestic Violence in the Church and Redemptive Suffering in 1 Peter,” offer a refreshing perspective. They support the notion

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8Barnum, 55.
that Scripture does not sanctify avoidable suffering. They state that:

The point here for abused wives is not that they must accept their abuse with passive silence, but that they must follow Christ’s example of responding to abuse in a godly manner. An additional aspect of Christ’s example needs to be noted. Christ’s suffering was redemptive because it was unavoidable. Peter strongly infers the necessity of Christ’s suffering by stating that Christ bore our sins in his body (1 Pt 2:24). This language, drawn from Isaiah 53:5 and 12, pictures the suffering servant as the sacrificial sin bearer. Thus, Christ accepted abuse with godly resignation because it was the only way he could secure human salvation. . . . If there had been a way to save humans other than the abuse of the cross, he would surely have taken it (Lk 22:42).9

The Tracy and Bierma article is particularly helpful because it calls the reader and the Church to not passively promote abuse or encourage the victims to withstand violence in the home.

Why is it that the clergy response to domestic violence in the families of their churches is weak? More to the point, why is it that victims of domestic abuse refrain from immediately turning to clergy for support when facing violence in their homes? The response (or lack thereof) of clergy to domestic violence may not be as concerning as the limited number of victims that seek out assistance from the leaders of faith-based institutions. The call for clergy to respond as advocates for those who are hurting is critical to the health and future of the Church. Luke 12:48 states, “Everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom he entrusted much, they will demand the more” (ESV). Failure of the Church and church leaders to heed that scriptural admonishment has eroded trust in clergy. Parishioners may be reluctant to turn to clergy in times of crisis because of the unending incidents of clergy misconduct that have colored the reputation and credibility of the Church.

9 Tracy and Bierma, 294.
One may wonder what clergy misconduct has to do with the domestic violence issue that plagues our churches? Why is it that the perception of clergy and their psychological health and wellness impact the broader church? Christine Scheller, in an article on Christian ethics, quotes Yale theologian, Miroslav Volf, who notes that “condemnation is not the heart of forgiveness. It’s the indispensible presupposition of it.”\(^{10}\) Scheller adds that “forgiveness that does not take seriously the offense against an injured party is fraudulent and cheap. . . . Clergymen who violate church teaching (or the law) should be defrocked. Our laws rightly prohibit murder, not anger, even though Jesus said the source of both is the human heart.”\(^{11}\)

Clergy must be held to a higher account, always seeking to follow Christ and, on many occasions when it is less than practical, seeking the one lost sheep in opposition to the cry and favor sought by the ninety-nine. Reinhold Niebuhr calls for clergy to make the right step for the members of the Church:

> There is no deeper pathos in the spiritual life of man than the cruelty of the righteous people. If any one idea dominates the teaching of Jesus, it is the opposition to the self-righteousness of the righteous. The parable spoken unto “certain which trusted in themselves that they are righteous, and despised others” made the most morally disciplined group of the day, the Pharisees, the object of his criticism.”\(^{12}\)

Society and the scandals of sexual misconduct are some of the greatest inhibitors for victims of domestic violence and abuse turning to the Church for assistance. Church is seen as a detriment for victims seeking a place for help and protection from the violence that plagues their lives. This is a primary dysfunction of the Church. In recent


\(^{11}\) Ibid.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 43.
conversations about the role of the Church and its leaders in the detection and prevention of domestic violence, the following response was among the most surprising: “I would never have thought of going to church for help.” What a very sad commentary on the Church that is charged with the care of God’s good creation, particularly the care of the family which is typically begun in the Church on a couple’s wedding day. In short, the clergy and elders of a church are not seen as viable resources for assistance and support when violence is threatening the home. It is also possible that the Church perceives (and always has perceived) domestic violence in its member families as the exception rather than the rule. The attitude of “this doesn’t happen in my church” can be so very comforting but so truly deceptive. Grant Martin writes,

> Love, affection, understanding, kindness and consideration are qualities usually associated with marriage . . . yet it is becoming increasingly clear that individuals do use violence within their intimate relationships. In addition, the number of families and couples affected by violence is far more extensive than we ever imagined . . . it is estimated that almost two to three million spouses have experienced abuse at the hands of a mate. It is estimated that at least one-sixth of all American couples experience at least one violent incident each year.\(^{13}\)

In an attempt to determine if the Church persists in ignoring the problem of familial violence and abuse, conservative protestant pastors were asked to complete a questionnaire on domestic violence. Two thousand surveys regarding violence in the home were distributed and a very low percentage of the surveys (just 7 percent) were returned. The surveys returned indicate the following:

Seventy percent of the pastors indicated wife abuse occurs “sometimes” to “often” in Christian marriages. Eighty-four percent of the pastors had counseled at least one battered wife. Thirty-five percent of those who reported seeing abused wives had counseled six or more victims of battering. Wife abuse is more prevalent in

\(^{13}\) Martin, 20.
Christian homes than most people believe, but, as one minister observed, “Guilt within the church keeps it repressed.”

Martin provides a more recent, accurate perspective on the prevalence of abuse and violence among families in the Church. He grabs the attention of the Church and clergy when he says,

The statistics suggesting nearly six million wives will be abused by their husbands in any one year probably does not represent an increase in domestic violence, but rather a more accurate picture of what has been happening all along. For centuries, wife beating has been accepted as a natural, although unfortunate, consequence of women’s status as her husband’s property. . . . Throughout much of history, male violence toward women and children has been socially, legally, and religiously endorsed. For countless generations the man was not just the head of the household, he was the household.

As history stands, the call of leadership in the home may also lead to the abuse of authority and power by those who are ignorant of truths revealed in the Bible. It is easy to see how neglect and violence can be misconstrued as rights instead of being the worst possible choices made by the head of the house. As we read in Genesis, it is with delight that Adam received and gave thanks for the creation of the woman. He said, “This at last is ‘bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man” (2:18, 23/ESV). The idea here is that Eve was God’s completion to Adam. That is key to understanding the priority given to care for one another and the respect between two who have become one flesh by virtue of wedding vows.

It is easy to assume that the Apostle Paul was not a stranger to the domestic issues of his time. He spoke directly to husbands and wives in his letter to the Ephesians, reminding them that “husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who

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14 Ibid., 21.
15 Ibid., 22.
loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body” (5:28-30/ESV).

The intention of this paper is not to argue or support the role of women in church or society. However, it is safe to say that Paul had much to say on the matter of domestic relationships. He knew the importance of order in the family was directly related to healthy relationship in the Christian church and society. As Martin notes,

Although Christ came to teach total equality, the Jewish tradition was blatantly biased as can be seen from a line in the prayer of a Jewish man spoken daily: “I thank God that He did not make me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.” This makes Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28 so very relevant to the culture in which he lived: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Historically, society has been clear about the role of women. But scripture is also clear about the value and importance of women as part of God’s great work in and plan for creation. When the biblical text speaks about submission it does not make exception or issue caveats that make way for division in the marriage. Paul writes, “Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands” (Eph 5:24/ESV). In present-day society where there is such an emphasis on freedom and equal rights, this passage provides a drastic point of contention for those who challenge the validity of the scripture and do not see the Bible as the inspired word of God.

Biblical headship requires that the husband lead by the Word. Scripture says, “As the Church submits to Christ . . .” (Eph 5:24). Therefore, one must remember that Christ submitted to the Father and was obedient to the will and plan of the Lord. This leads us
to understand the dimensions of submission between husband and wife is never without the presence or example of love found in Jesus Christ.

A Comparison of Marital Submission and the Husband’s Authority in the Islam Faith

Faith traditions other than Christianity do accept violence as a characteristic of living together. The concept of submission found in the New Testament would not be strongly supported in orthodox Islam. One does not have to look far to find evidence that many cultures see women in a very different light than that described by Paul in Galatians 3:28, and to see the power and control that has women bound to their fathers and husbands in lives of submission. The Quran speaks directly about women and their role in family (Sura 4:34).¹⁷ There is a significant contrast between the submission described in the Bible and the required obedience of women in certain Islamic sects.

The Christian approach to submission longs for unity and the drawing of man and woman together as was modeled in creation. The text cited from the Quran emphasizes the rule of man and, by inference, condones violence. Although the practice or promotion of domestic violence may not be the absolute approach for Muslims, the Quran does permit physical correction when a woman does not submit to her husband. Generally in the Quran, it appears that women are referred to as possessions or are readily depicted as property. Not only are women without significant voice, they also lack essential value in the marital relationship. Shorrosh writes,

When the leading Muslim men complained to Ali [who was the first cousin of the Prophet Mohammad] of the licentious practices of his son, Hasan, he told them the remedy lay in their own hands: they could refuse Hasan their daughters

altogether. At that time, Hasan had married and divorced seventy times. One is bound to ask, if Mohammad brought us a greater and or perfect revelation, then why do we seem to regress instead of progress with the moral standards of the Quran? Jesus Christ enunciated, “He who made them at the beginning made them male and female” (Mt 19:4). If God wanted man to have four wives, He would have made more than one Eve for Adam! A Muslim husband may cast his wife adrift without giving a single reason or even notice. The husband possesses absolute, immediate, and unquestioned power of divorce. No privilege of a corresponding nature is reserved for the wife.\(^{18}\)

Basic rights of women have changed in the last century, but the most common thread running through the causes of domestic violence is an inability to accord women (and for some women to receive) the status of basic personhood. If a woman is treated as a possession, her perceived worth as a person and in the marriage contract is devalued. If females are devalued and their worth depreciated in a relationship relative to that of the male, why would we think that the power and control of the male authority figure is naturally limited? John Ankerberg and Emir Caner in their book, *The Truth About Islam and Women*, describe the uncontrolled limits of abuse, even at the origin of Islam, noting that “Muhammad entered a time of polygamy and sensuality. He married nearly a dozen women, far greater than the maximum allowed by the Quran.”\(^{19}\) Ankerberg and Caner maintain that Muhammad cared very little about beatings of women by other men and that he ignored abused women whom he considered unchaste or untrustworthy. This is documented in the Quran: “Your wives are as a tilth [field] unto you; so approach your

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tilth when and how you will” (Sura 2:223). “The imagery portrayed in the verse is an unashamed picture of why, when, and how a Muslim husband is allowed to approach his wife.”

Physical Punishment or Retribution Condoned Over Time

We concern ourselves with the history of domestic violence and the teachings about gender roles in various faith traditions in order to understand the approach a church, mosque, or synagogue will take when domestic violence is identified and is a threat to member families. Martin notes:

Although the roles of women have changed dramatically throughout history the use of physical punishment was sanctioned by secular institutions during the Middle Ages. One thirteenth-century French law code stated that, “In a number of cases men may be excused for the injuries they inflict on their wives, nor should the law intervene. Provided he neither kills nor maims her, it is legal for a man to beat his wife if she wrongs him. . . . Here is an excerpt from one of the “marriage enrichment” manuals of that time: “The female is an empty thing, easily swayed: she runs great risks when she is away from her husband. Therefore, keep females in the house, keep them as close to you as you can, and come home often to keep an eye on your affairs and to keep them in fear and trembling.”

To debate the role of husbands and wives in the marriage is not the purpose of this paper. However, there has been a deliberate effort to demonstrate that domestic violence is present in the homes of those who attend church and other places of worship. It is, therefore, essential that the Church and all faith-based institutions should seek to support families and help with the cessation of violence in the home. Martin writes,

For a long time an attitude of permissiveness toward striking women was a part of the American tradition. For many years the battering of women was assumed and accepted as a male’s right in American society. There were some exceptions,

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20 Ali.
21 Shorrosh, 310.
22 Martin, 23.
however. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony as early as 1655, men who beat their wives were fined a maximum of ten pounds and/or given corporal punishment. By the 1870s states such as Massachusetts and Alabama began to reject the legal justification for wife beating. In Maryland, by 1882, a wife beater could receive forty lashes and one year in prison. In Delaware wife beating was punishable with five to thirty lashes at the whipping post. And in New Mexico the crime carried a fine of $225 to $1000, or one to five years in prison. By 1910 only eleven states still did not permit divorce by reason of cruelty by one spouse to the other. This brief review of history serves to highlight the centuries of social, political, and religious tradition that has perpetuated the existence of violence toward women.  

How disheartening is it that religious institutions have supported (and in many instances continue to support) violence in the home by virtue of the fact that the Church, in general, tends to look away from instances of domestic abuse among its member families? The mandate for the Church is to protect the sacred covenant made before God on the wedding day. But the Church fails in that directive when it overlooks the life of slavery and bondage those victims of family violence endure, and when it maintains the norms of long ago that serve to destroy the heart and soul of those caught in the cycle of domestic abuse. The Church’s failure to intervene on behalf of these victims may also lead the victims of abuse to believe the Lord wants for them this horrific and continual suffering at the hands of their abusers. Martin speaks to the Church and to history:

The Renaissance and Reformation brought significant social, political, and religious change. But there was still a consistent perspective on the proper role for a woman. The Elizabethan wife was a curious mixture of slave and companion, a necessary evil, and a valued lieutenant. According to custom, a wife’s primary duty was to be subject to her husband. She was always to acknowledge herself as the inferior being, and be ready at the beck and call of her spouse.

There seems to be an effort throughout history to condone and permit violence by the husband. This is not the case in every faith tradition. But how often does the statement,

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23 Ibid., 25-26.

24 Ibid., 24.
“The wife is to submit in everything!” (Eph 5:24/NIV) comes quickly to the lips as scriptural justification for abuse?

Husbands are Called to Love Their Wives as Christ Loved the Church

The question the Church must ask itself is: Are we, the Church, being or acting as faithful stewards of the Word when violence is permitted among a family in the local church? So that the Church may turn a blind eye to domestic violence in families in its fold, is it permissible to lean on “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands” (Eph 5:22-24/ESV). For while that scripture instructs us on God’s created form and expressed plan for headship in the family structure, we must read scripture in context. That instruction continues in the next verse of the Ephesians passage: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she may be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:25/ESV). If the Church understands the role of the family and the relationship of husband and wife in direct correlation to Christ and his bride, then there should never be the problem of violence in the Christian marriage—even. And when there is domestic abuse, there should never be any question as to how the Church is to respond to such sinful behavior—never.

God’s plan for the family and the relationship of husband and wife, today, is being challenged. As a result, the strength of the family is withering, primarily due to the
diminished (if not vanishing) role of the husband and father. Husbands are called by the Bible to lead and give oversight to the family. Confusion should cease about roles and relationships within the Christian family. Those who trust in the words of scripture will easily see the comparison made between husbands and wives, and Christ and his bride. Clergy and church leaders must support the individual families of their churches, following Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians. Family health—emotional, physical and spiritual—matter to God. Scripture tells us so and provides direction for family care. Therefore, starting in the home, the Church is called to model the love of Christ.
CHAPTER 5
BUILDING SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
AND EQUIPPING CLERGY WITH NECESSARY RESOURCES
TO RESPOND EFFECTIVELY

Are places of Christian worship prepared to lead as advocates for families and take a stance against domestic violence? They must if the Church is to ensure victims of domestic violence have voices that are heard and that the Church is not seen as condoning domestic violence. As noted at the beginning of this paper, the Church must be the place where victims of domestic abuse can turn for emotional, spiritual, and physical support when they find themselves in difficult and dangerous circumstances. This means that the Church must be proactive in the matter of domestic violence, seeking to do its part to end the abuse and always advocating for its church family members that are victims of such abuse.

The story of a family impacted by domestic violence should greatly concern a church and call that church to immediate action on behalf of the victimized family. Denying domestic abuse exists, failing to acknowledge that it is actually a problem and/or avoiding taking steps to confront instances of abuse are destructive for all concerned—perpetrator, victim(s), and the Church. When the Church fails to be a support mechanism for a family victimized by domestic violence and abuse, it is as if the family is on a small boat that has a severe leak. The leak becomes apparent to those on board because the boat is taking on water. Those who pass by on other boats or who are in
close proximity to the family boat know there is a problem by virtue of the fact that the family members on board the damaged vessel are showing signs of panic. Too, it appears that not everyone on board the troubled boat has a life preserver. Obviously, action is required on the part of those who are aware of the distress to assist those in the sinking boat. However, the Church too often sails on by those families sinking in the desperation of domestic violence, ignoring the visible signs that say “SOS.” With increasing evidence of domestic violence and abuse among families in the Church and with the tragic news that fatalities from domestic violence are on the rise, there is a critical need to prepare clergy, church elders, and other ministry leaders to help families victimized by domestic abuse. For those in dire need of help and who feel helpless in their sinking boat caught in a violent storm of an abuser’s unceasing rage, the Church must be a beacon of hope.

For those who, at this point, may still question the severity of domestic violence in families affiliated with faith-based institutions, Table 2 provides disturbing and rather grim statistics that result as the Church continues to minimize the impact of domestic abuse on the faith community. Of those “agencies and services involved with victims or perpetrators in the five years prior to the fatalities of 2004-2009, it is astonishing that 30 percent of the fatalities recorded by the state of Georgia were individuals who were connected with a ‘religious community, church, temple, or mosque.’”¹ Even more alarming is the idea that of those fatalities in Georgia, 18 percent of the perpetrators were also connected to a place of worship.²

² Ibid.
Statistics Showing the Presence of Deadly Violence in Families Connected to a Place of Worship

It is important to study the data in Table 2 because it shows the victims of domestic violence had substantially more contact with their faith-based institution than with all other social services, health care, or family violence agencies. Although many victims of domestic violence do not seek assistance from a church, temple, or mosque, it is necessary to understand that faith and seeking the support of God is still important for people in times of despair—even when domestic violence occurs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency/Service/Program</th>
<th>Key Contacts</th>
<th>Victims Numbers</th>
<th>Victims %</th>
<th>Perpetrators Numbers</th>
<th>Perpetrators Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice System</td>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice System</td>
<td>County Prosecutor</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice System</td>
<td>Superior Court</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice System</td>
<td>Magistrate Court</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Agency</td>
<td>Religious Community, Church, Temple, Mosque</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Interfaces for Victims and Perpetrators of Domestic Violence.3

Table 2 indicates that the agency most regularly contacted or engaged by victims of domestic violence is an agency connected with the religious community. This should be an incentive for clergy and church leaders who may have the desire to help victims and perpetrators of domestic violence to get the support and help needed. And though the prevailing thought in the religious community may be that domestic violence is non-existent, there is reason to believe that the problem is not far from the front door of the Church.

3Ibid., 29.
In fact, the *Fatality Review* has clearly shown that victims and perpetrators of domestic violence sit in church pews, and that the church can certainly be a strong advocate for abuse victims and their families. The review provides a list of practices a congregation or clergy may use to advance safety for congregants and the greater religious community. Some of those practices are

- Get to know your community’s domestic violence resource and create a resource referral network.
- Stock your library with culturally/religiously specific domestic violence information.
- Get to know your community’s domestic violence resources and create a resource referral network. Refer, refer, refer.
- Let members of your congregation know that domestic violence is an issue in your community through sermons, news articles, programming etc.
- Let your congregation know that this [the church] is a safe place to discuss domestic violence issues.
- Include domestic violence resources in pre-marital counseling.
- Present age-appropriate anti-bullying information to children.
- Present information and resources on healthy relationships to teens.
- Partner with Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence to conduct a used cell phone drive to support survivors of abuse.
- Contact the Georgia Commission on Family Violence (404-657-3412) or the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (404-209-0280) for training, ideas, and resources.

There are many other steps churches may take to support the families of domestic violence. The two best means of support for victimized families are providing contact information for persons specializing in legal aid to those victimized by family violence and identifying financial/medical assistance for families that must leave their homes to seek safe living conditions away from an abusive spouse. It is important that clergy and church leaders remember that having all the answers (or any answers) about domestic abuse is not required in order to help a family. To the contrary, simply knowing the local

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4 Ibid., 23. This list is adapted from information provided by Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence, Boston, MA. The telephone number for the organization is 617-654-1820. More information about the organization is available at its website: [www.interfaithpartners.org](http://www.interfaithpartners.org).
A common misconception is that domestic violence is a minimal or a one-time occurrence for most families that experience abuse. The reality is that domestic violence is an offense that recurs, more often than not, again, and again, and again. Because domestic violence is cyclical in nature and not typically a one-time offense, faith-based institutions must recognize that any occurrence of domestic violence is a serious matter, the implication being that the abuse will occur again and that there is potential for the violence to escalate in the course of the cycle. Tracy and Bierma report:

In 1998, women experienced about 900,000 violent offenses at the hands of an intimate partner, a rate five times higher than the violence men experience from women. Various studies show that 22 to 33 percent of North American women will be assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetimes. Tragically, domestic violence in Christian homes appears to mirror the high rates of the general society. For example, Lee Bowker’s survey of one thousand battered women from all sections of the United States revealed that most of the battered women and their husbands were part of “mainstream American religious bodies,” and denominational preference did not significantly differ between the violent and the nonviolent families. Abused women were shown to be quite active in the local church (much more than the abusive husbands), with 26 percent of battered wives attending church weekly and 24 percent of battered wives one to three times a month.”

Once again, as the data indicate, violence is present in Christian homes.

Therefore, it is highly likely that domestic violence is present in the local church (or will be at one point or another). The call, then, is for churches to be adequately prepared to

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assist families experiencing domestic abuse. Awareness and preparedness are essential if the Church is to be recognized as a strong advocate for safe and non-violent homes.

**The Cycle of Violence**

What will be the result if the Church ignores the presence of violence in the home and fails to intervene on behalf of abuse victims? In most instances, the violence will continue. Therefore, it is critical that clergy and church leaders understand the cycle of violence—or the “phases in marital violence.”

Lenore Walker describes this violence as a three-phase cycle of violence. As Figure 3 suggests, “there are three distinct, recurring battering phases: 1) the tension-building phase, 2) the explosion or acute violent episode, and 3) the loving contrition or remorse phase.”

![Figure 3. Domestic Assault Cycle of Violence.](image)

These three stages find the victims on a proverbial roller coaster ride that carries them quickly, again and again, through the stress, pain, and terror of home violence.

The initial hope and prayer (especially in the beginning) of the domestic abuse victim is that violence will end and the most recent violent episode will be the last. This is especially true as the violence intensifies or escalates, and the frequency of the

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7Ibid.
violence increases. The hope is that this time will be the last time, that the promises made by the perpetrator in the third phase will be longstanding or permanent. Promises are made by the perpetrator that the violence will stop. Unfortunately, the promises usually are not kept.

The domestic violence task force for Douglas County, Georgia, has a domestic violence crisis line that that is monitored twenty-four hours a day. Those manning the crisis line are advocates for victims of domestic violence in Douglas County. The advocates commonly hear those reporting an act of domestic abuse say, “I am not going to press charges.” Safety of the victim is the first concern of those answering the domestic violence crisis line. Victims are encouraged to legally file for a temporary protective order that will require physical separation from and maintain distance between the alleged perpetrator and the victims of the abuse. Because there is a very real risk for continued victimization, it is a matter of great concern when violence victims quickly forgive the offenses and return to the perpetrator. In many cases, the violence becomes more intense and can result in fatalities.

Of the three phases of marital violence, the most difficult phase is the deceptive phase. In that phase the sentiment typically expressed by the perpetrator is extreme remorse and a promise is made that the violent behavior will never happen again. Martin writes,

The tension has been dissipated, at least until it happens again. The abusive spouse may apologize profusely, try to help his wife, show kindness and remorse, and shower her with gifts and promises that it will never happen again. This behavior often comes out of a genuine sense of guilt over the harm inflicted, as well as fear of losing his spouse. The husband, at this point, may really believe he will never allow himself to be violent again. The wife wants very much to believe her husband, and for a time may renew her hope in his ability to change. The remorse phase provides the reinforcement for remaining in the relationship. . . . If
the police, family, pastor, or mental health worker makes contact with the family during the early part of Phase Three [Remorse Phase], they will likely meet with resistance. While the couple is sharing their mutual feelings of closeness and protectiveness, they tend to believe everything is okay. The problem has been solved and the violence will not occur again. This ray-of-hope phenomenon and the belief that “love is enough” contribute to a couple believing it doesn’t need any outside help.\textsuperscript{8}

The sad commentary is that the victim is deceived and the promises made by the perpetrator will be broken. The cycle of violence will continue, even though the perpetrator may persuade the victim(s) that violence has ended and it will not happen again. Statistics indicate otherwise. Thus, it is critical that clergy not only understand the cycle of domestic violence, but also recognize that the level of violence diminishes during the remorse stage. During that phase, women and children, who most commonly are the victims of domestic violence, will typically experience a reprieve from violence and hope for better days ahead. Victims seek to do anything and everything to maintain the peace. They avoid any conversation or behavior that will set off the perpetrator and cause a violent episode.

For many families of domestic violence there is a season of remorse and this is the only portion of the cycle that brings any peace. Martin characterized the peace experienced as follows:

The wife may attempt to placate her husband, trying to please him, calm him down, and avoid further confrontations. The wife, at this point, tries not to respond to his hostile actions. She will tend to use some type of anger-reduction techniques that often work for a little while to keep the essence of peace in the home. This temporary reduction of hostility reinforces her belief that she can control her husband or prevent things from getting worse.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{8}Ibid., 45-46.

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., 43.
Those who have not experienced domestic violence or abuse in the home may not understand this very passive response to continued violence. Why would a woman continue to subject herself and her children to violence and the fear of danger? In many instances, it is simply a matter of economics and limited resources. The victim has nowhere to go for refuge—no family or friends to whom they can turn, no money for a stay in a motel, no transportation to a shelter. The victim’s lack of self esteem can also keep a victim trapped in an abusive situation. Whatever the reason for continuing to subject oneself and one’s children to violence, it often seems to the victim of abuse that there is no way out. There is a sense of complete and utter hopelessness, with no plausible place to turn for help.

Clergy and church leaders must seek to preserve a marriage and protect the family. But this is not accomplished by allowing the abusive and violent behavior that cycles in the life of the family to continue. Children raised in the vicious cycle of family violence often repeat what they lived as a child, for there is much credence to the adage, “Children learn what they live.” How important, then, is it for the Church to recognize that violence is not only a detriment to the family currently experiencing violence, but that the violence also impacts the generations to follow. For those who grow up in homes where domestic violence occurs may assume such violence to be normal family dynamics—and the normal way of life.

Powlison, Tripp, and Welch, authors of Domestic Abuse, How to Help, note,

Couples who publicly sit at peace in church pews can nevertheless be at war. They attack each other, defend ground, attempt manipulative guerilla tactics, and declare occasional truces. When war has been declared, there is sin on both sides; but when violence is involved, typically a strong male oppresses a female. With
God’s grace, these afflicted women will begin to look to the church for help. When they do, what are some basic biblical guidelines for your ministry to such women—and their husbands?\textsuperscript{10}

Acknowledging that apparent instances of abuse likely indicate a very real problem of on-going family violence is the first step for the Church in advocating for its members that are victims of domestic abuse. Powlison, Tripp, and Welch suggest that clergy and all ministers in a church must “begin by listening to the cries of the oppressed.”\textsuperscript{11} The Church cannot turn a deaf ear to the cries of the victims. In fact, the victim must be heard. Why? Because according to Powlison, Tripp, and Welch,

> Our Lord encourages the cries of the oppressed. The many psalms that call out for God’s protection indicates that we serve a loving Lord who never gets tired of listening to—and acting on—the cries of the needy. God is the One who, in unfailing love, comes close to his suffering people. . . . Listening is also important because many victims of violence are reluctant to speak openly. They may fear that openness will lead to retaliation by the abuser.\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 2.
CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 6

The bottom line is that domestic violence, in many ways, is a sin that remains hidden in the Church and is avoided by clergy and church leaders. Because of ignorance and avoidance, the Church minimizes the costs associated with the long-term effects of domestic violence that goes unrecognized and unaddressed. As mentioned earlier, Matthew 18 does not suggest that sin should continue or that victims of abuse must submit to physical and emotional suffering. Powlison, Tripp, and Welch contend that “the husband must be made to understand that the Church’s leadership takes domestic violence seriously, and that they will act to protect his wife even as they seek to minister to him and hold him accountable.”¹

Titus speaks to the roles of men and women. In Titus we read, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2:11-13/ESV). This is a call for the Church to end violence in the home. Each has been given the directive to love others as Christ loves them. Therefore, violence toward family members should never be permitted and must not be regarded by the Church as an insignificant sin. Domestic violence, if not addressed, will most likely

never be curtailed. The damage done will impact families generation after generation.
The Church must understand that the voices of clergy and church leaders matter in the lives of domestic violence victims and the perpetrators of that violence.

On the night of his arrest by the temple guard, Jesus asked the disciples to remain alert, attentive, and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus calls the Church to do the same for its members. To remain passive, denying the torture that many families face, and separating itself from the problem of family violence, the Church fails to follow Jesus’ directive. The Church must not “sleep” as church families struggle with domestic abuse—or become comfortable avoiding that struggle. It must rise up to directly confront and battle against the problem of family violence—a problem that can be overcome through the power of the Lord and with the help of the ministries the Church provides. Otherwise, domestic violence will continue to destroy families for generations to come.

As a body, the Church—clergy and members—must stand up for victims of domestic violence. Let those called to care for his sheep not sleep when they know there are victims of domestic abuse and families trapped in the cycle of family violence. By the power of our Lord, Jesus Christ, let the Church build up healthy and strong families, training fathers, mothers, and children to know the truth scripture teaches about families and care for one another. Through the actions of clergy and ministry leaders, let the Church be perceived as a place where the broken can come for help. Finally, by the equipping of the Church through God’s hand, may every family be drawn to the Church and may the power of domestic violence cease so that all may know the hope found in Jesus Christ—who is the atonement for all sin and the savior of a lost world.
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