

ACC POSITIONAL STATEMENT

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

This statement is an internal document and reflects the position of the ACC. Undoubtedly there will be instances that will arise where you need to consider how to practically apply the below statement. In such instances we would encourage you to seek formal advice, specific to the situation you are considering.

In addition to this Positional Statement, ACC has also issued 'Responding to Domestic and Family Abuse: Procedures and Good Practice Guidelines'

Australian Christian Churches opposes all forms of family and domestic violence and recognises the need for victims of domestic violence to be believed and supported.

DEFINITIONS:

For the purposes of this Position Statement and Procedures & Guidelines:

Domestic abuse is defined as abusive or intimidating behaviour inflicted by an adult against a current or former spouse or partner.

Family abuse is a broader term referring to abusive or intimidating behaviour between family members as well as between intimate partners. It is not limited to physical violence. Domestic and family abuse include, but are not limited to, emotional, verbal, social, economic, psychological, financial, spiritual, physical and/or sexual abuse neglect and stalking. Such behaviour often seeks to control, humiliate, dominate or instill fear in the victim. (Refer to Appendix 1)

Throughout the Procedures and Good Practice Guidelines, the term 'family abuse' is used and has the meaning 'domestic abuse and/or family abuse'. We have also chosen to refer to victims of domestic or family abuse but acknowledge many victims go on to become survivors.

OVERVIEW

Christianity views human relationships as an expression of the relational nature of God the creator. The triune God exists in eternal and loving communion as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Human beings are created in the image of God to be relational and to live in mutual personal relationships of love. Human relationships should ideally be loving and harmonious, reflecting the divine communion within the Godhead. In particular, marriage and family relationships should be an expression of loving communion as both partners commit themselves to caring for one another and to nurturing children and dependents.

The Christian ideal of marriage and family as an expression of caring and nurturing human relationships, stands in stark contrast to the family violence that is characteristic of many relationships. Family violence occurs when a partner or family member uses a systematic pattern of creating fear in order to exercise power and control over another person. This repetitive cycle of exerting forceful control leaves a victim feeling vulnerable and powerless.

The Christian understanding of humanity created in the image of God to exist in loving and harmonious community, provides an important basis for perspectives and practices that uphold the right of every person to live with dignity, value, respect, and physical safety. It inspires Christians to assist individuals and families who are caught up in a cycle of violence by providing practical support to victims and their families.

We uphold Scripture and its abhorrence of abuse in our words and public statements and we will clearly teach that:

- family abuse is wrong and that the Bible should never be interpreted to justify or excuse any form of abuse. Rather a relationship between a husband and wife is to be characterised by love, care and kindness; and
- the Bible does not condone abuse and should not be interpreted to demand a spouse tolerate or submit to family abuse.

RELEVANT INFORMATION REGARDING CURRENT SOCIAL OPINION

Family violence is a prevalent and significant issue in Australian society. Women are more likely to be victims of family violence, although children and men are also victims.ⁱ

Perpetrators are predominantly men, but do include women and children.ⁱⁱ

Some groups experience a higher risk of family violence. These include: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children; women and children with disabilities; women born overseas; women living in regional, rural and remote communities; women and children seeking asylum; elderly women and men; and people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex. Family violence arises from a value system where the perpetrator thinks he or she has the right to treat another person with controlling behaviours. Anger, alcohol, and drugs can all provide triggers for family violence but are no excuse for such behaviour.

Family violence can involve various manifestations of power and controlling behaviour. These include verbal and emotional abuse, forced sexual acts and rape, systematic social isolation, psychological and physical threats and assaults, economic control, and use of religious and cultural beliefs and practices to reinforce subordination.

Family violence is a focus of significant community concern, and government and non-government efforts are directed towards its control and elimination. Healthy and respectful family relationships are understood to be a foundational component of community and society.

THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

1. The Use and Misuse of Scripture with Regard to Family Abuseⁱⁱⁱ

Some people use Bible verses as an excuse to abuse their wife, husband, or children. This is always wrong. Others think that the Bible tells them to put up with abuse. This is also wrong. Here are some important Bible verses that are sometimes used in this way. For each verse, there are wrong meanings and correct meanings. There are many more things to say about these verses, but these are the most important points for family abuse.

Please note that ACC Positional Statements are for the internal use of ACC churches and ministries. Additional statements for general public and media will be produced and be available from the ACC National Office. 26/08/2020

Key Words and their Meanings

Helper

Bible verses: Genesis 2:18, 21

¹⁸ The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." ... ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man was sleeping, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs. He closed up the opening that was in his side.

Wrong meaning: The woman is below the man.	
	A "helper" is a servant. God made the woman to be the servant of the man. The woman is less important than the man.
Correct meaning: The woman and the man are equal.	
	<p>The word "helper" does not mean below or less. This word is mostly used in the Bible to describe God. God is Israel's "helper" when he comes to rescue them (e.g. Deuteronomy 33:26; Psalm 22:19; Psalm 121:1-2). The words "just right for him" mean that the woman and the man are a perfect match. Each one needs the other.</p> <p>In Genesis 2:21 God made the woman out of the man's rib. She was not taken from his head, to be over him, or from his foot, to be under him. She came from his side to be his equal partner.</p>

Submit

Bible verses: Ephesians 5:22-23

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands as you submit to the Lord. ²³ The husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. The church is Christ's body. He is its Saviour.

Wrong meaning (verse 22): The wife must always submit to her husband no matter what.	
	A wife must not ask questions or think for herself. She must always do what her husband tells her to do, even if he asks her to sin or submit to abuse. If she does not submit to him, then he is allowed to punish her.
Correct meaning (verse 22): A wife chooses to submit. Her husband must not force, pressure or punish her.	
	The Bible teaches that a wife should freely choose to submit to her husband. It is a gift she gives. A husband must never force or pressure his wife to submit. He must never punish her if she does not submit. If a wife cannot say no, then her submission cannot be free. Sometimes a wife should not submit. She must be free to say no to sin. She should not submit to abuse.

Wrong meaning (verse 23): The husband may do anything he likes.	
	The husband has all the power, because he is the head. He can do what he wants. He can make all the decisions. He can tell his wife what to do, but she can never tell him what to do. For example, he may demand sex whenever he wants, and she has no right to refuse.
Correct meaning (verse 23): The husband's responsibility is to serve his wife.	
	"Christ is the head of the Church." This means that he loved us and sacrificed himself for us. A husband must be the head of his wife in the same way. He must do all he can to love and protect her. He must encourage and care for his wife like his own body (Ephesians 5:28-29). Loving and caring means putting his wife's needs first.

Bible verses: 1Peter 3:1, 5-6

¹ Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands in the same way. Suppose some of them don't believe God's word. Then let them be won to Christ without words by seeing how their wives behave... ⁵ This is how the holy women of the past used to make themselves beautiful. They put their hope in God. And they submitted themselves to their own husbands. ⁶ Sarah was like that. She obeyed Abraham. She called him her master. Do you want to be like her? Then do what is right. And don't give in to fear.

Wrong meaning: Endure abuse to show your husband what Jesus is like.	
	In the same way that Christ endured suffering (1 Peter 2:21-23), and slaves are to endure mistreatment from unjust masters (2:20), a wife should also endure abuse at the hands of her husband. A wife should be like Jesus. If her husband beats her, she should suffer the beating quietly. She should not be afraid. This will show her husband what Jesus is like.
Correct meaning: Respect your husband, even if he is hostile to your faith.	
	1 Peter 3 continues the argument of 1 Peter 2. "In the same way" (3:1) means that Peter is continuing his discussion of respect. Out of respect, slaves should submit to their masters (2:18). Out of respect, wives should submit to their husbands (3:1). Out of respect, husbands should be considerate of their wives (3:7). However, it is important to understand the difference between the examples given in 1 Peter 2 and 1 Peter 3. Peter told slaves to suffer beatings patiently, like Jesus did. But he does not tell wives to suffer beatings. Wives are not slaves. Even the laws of the Romans did not permit wives to be beaten. The hardship the wife must endure in 1 Peter 3 is the hardship of being married to an unbelieving husband, not to an abusive husband. The passage does not teach wives to submit to family abuse.

Sex

Bible verses: 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

³ A husband should satisfy his wife's sexual needs. And a wife should satisfy her husband's sexual needs. ⁴ The wife's body does not belong only to her. It also belongs to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong only to him. It also belongs to his wife. ⁵ You shouldn't stop giving yourselves to each other except when you both agree to do so. And that should be only to give yourselves time to pray for a while. Then you should come together again. In that way, Satan will not tempt you when you can't control yourselves.

Wrong meaning: You must always have sex when your spouse wants to.	
	It is always wrong to say no to your spouse. If you say no to your spouse, they will fall into sexual temptation. This will be your fault.
Correct meaning: Sex is a gift which a husband and a wife freely give to each other.	
	<p>Sex is a gift your spouse gives to you. You do not take it from them. It is their free gift. It is a normal part of married life. It helps to avoid temptation. When you are free to give sex, then you should give sex, unless you both agree to stop for some time, so you can pray (verse 5).</p> <p>But your spouse is not always free to give and receive sex. They may be sick, or in pain, or tired, or sad, or bearing a child, or having sexual problems. The bodies of husbands and wives belong to each other (verse 4). This means you must care for each other's bodies. You should wait until they are ready to give and receive sex. You must not pressure them. A gift that you demand is not a true gift, and a gift you force upon someone is not a true gift. You must be patient and kind with each other.</p>

Forgive

Bible verse: Matthew 6:15

But if you do not forgive the sins of other people, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Wrong meaning: Forget the sin and start again.	
	If you forgive someone, then you must forget what they did. Everything can be the same as it was before. The other person does not need to change their behaviour.
Correct meaning: Forgive others as God has forgiven you.	
	<p>This passage does not say everything that the Bible teaches about forgiveness. The basic point of Matthew 6:15 is that we should forgive as we have been forgiven. If we genuinely repent and turn from our sin, then God forgives us. In the same way, when an abuser genuinely repents and tries to change, we also should forgive them. This may be a difficult and long process. Sometimes we will come back together with a person we have forgiven. Sometimes this will not be possible. Separation may be necessary and may even become permanent.</p> <p>Forgiveness does not mean that we take sin lightly. If an abuser continues to abuse, they must be stopped. You do not need to endure abuse in the name of forgiveness.</p>

Trust

Bible verse: Deuteronomy 19:15

Every matter must be proved by the words of two or three witnesses.

Wrong meaning: Doubt the victim's testimony.	
	When someone says, "I was abused!", you should not believe them. You should only believe them if other people saw the abuse and agree to be witnesses.
Correct meaning: Trust the victim's testimony.	



Moses gave this law for crimes that other people witnessed. When nobody saw a crime, Moses did not expect witnesses. Deuteronomy 22:25-27 shows that we may believe the word of an abused person when there are no witnesses.

2. Theological Basis for the Movement's Position

- The Christian understanding of humanity created in the image of God to exist in loving and harmonious community is derived primarily from the Bible. Australian Christian Churches view the Bible as God's Word to humankind and the normative and authoritative basis for opinions and statements concerning human life and relationships.
- Human beings are created male and female in God's image to live in harmonious relationship with God (Genesis 1:26-27; 3:8), with one another (Genesis 2:25), and with the rest of creation (Genesis 2:15-20). We are created as moral beings with the freedom to choose to live according to God's harmonious vision or to deviate from the divine purpose.
- All human beings, both male and female, are created equal in the image of God, and are precious to him. As such their value and dignity rightly commands our respect and protection and should be upheld by all (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 82:3-4; Matthew 22:37-40).
- Unfortunately, the human choice has been against God and his purposes. The result is that we fail to reflect the image and nature of God who exists in the eternal loving community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The consequences of this failure are that we live in alienation from God (Genesis 3:8-10), from one another (Genesis 3:7), and from God's creation (Genesis 3:14-15, 17-19).
- The Bible describes violence within families and explains it as a manifestation of the alienation which has distorted human relationships. Examples include Cain's murder of his younger brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-16); Joseph's brothers' plot to kill him (Genesis 37:18-23); and the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13:1-22).
- Scripture is opposed to the use of violence (Psalm 11:5; Matthew 26:52).
- God's intent is that we reflect the divine nature by living in harmony as equals and with mutual respect. We are to love God and people (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10). In practice this means that every person is to be valued and nurtured. No one should have their personhood diminished in interaction with others, nor should they be subjected to manipulation and violence.
- The Christian hope is that in Jesus Christ the divine image and community will be restored for humanity (2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 21:3-4).
- Marriage is given by God as a good part of his creation for human wellbeing and should be honoured by all. It is intended as a lifelong union of a man and a woman. Healthy Christian relationships are characterised by servanthood and sacrifice, supremely modeled by Jesus Christ. Within a marriage relationship both husband and wife are to respond to one another by building each other up, which includes mutual love, nurture and respect. Any attempt to justify abusive behaviour by the use of passages in the Bible which speak of headship and submission is intolerable (Mark 10:42-45; Ephesians 5:21-33; Hebrews 13:4).

- The Bible rejects all abuse, whether physical, verbal, or otherwise expressed from one person towards another and always condemns the misuse of power to control or exploit others. Therefore, family abuse is evil. Such sin is deceptive in its power and damaging in its effects (Psalm 7; Galatians 5:19-26; 2 Timothy 3:2-3).
- When family abuse in marriage is reported, then separation of the spouses for the sake of the safety of a victim and any children is an appropriate step to be taken and should never be discouraged (Proverbs 27:12; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11)
- Victims of family abuse should be encouraged to seek help from the Police, from child protection authorities and other relevant family violence services. Church leaders who become aware of situations of family abuse should always ensure they meet their mandatory reporting obligations, and obtain professional advice (Romans 13:1-5).
- When a wife or husband separates for the sake of their safety (or that of their children), such action should not mean the person is deemed to have deserted the marriage or have abandoned their responsibilities as a parent even though they may have physically left the common home. Church leaders should welcome and offer ongoing support to those who have separated for such reasons (Psalm 82:3-4).
- Christians with a genuine desire to be faithful to Scripture hold different views on the question of when divorce is appropriate. However such differences should not impact a Christian's support for a victim of family abuse separating from their spouse for the sake of safety. For a discussion of when divorce might be an appropriate action in the circumstances of family abuse please see the ACC "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Policy". This policy outlines the three instances and supporting scriptures where divorce may be permitted on Biblical grounds:
 - Sexual immorality
 - Abandonment
 - Family abuse
- In the case of family abuse, the ACC Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Policy states: "Divorce is permitted when there has been family abuse that violates the covenant vows of marriage (Exodus 21:10-11; 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; Ephesians 5:28-29)."

Additional Scriptures in relation to family abuse by an ACC Credentialed Minister or Certificate Holder

In addition to the scriptural foundation outlined above, we uphold the Ministerial Code of Conduct for ACC Credentialed Ministers as our Movement's code of conduct for credentialed ministers and certificate holders including the following:

- "Ministers should be above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2). The values of the Gospel of Christ should be obvious to members of the church and wider society";
- "Ministers should be good citizens and obey the laws of the community (Proverbs 24:21, Romans 13:1-3; 1 Peter 2:11-17). The only rare exception may be when a Christian engages in non-violent civil disobedience as an act of protest (Acts 4:18-20)";
- "A Minister must not be abusive in any way towards others (1 Timothy 3:2-5; Titus 1:7)"; and
- "A Minister must not behave in an abusive way towards their family. Family violence can

Please note that ACC Positional Statements are for the internal use of ACC churches and ministries. Additional statements for general public and media will be produced and be available from the ACC National Office. 26/08/2020

involve various manifestations of power and controlling behavior. These include verbal and emotional abuse, forced sexual acts, systematic social isolation, psychological and physical threats and assaults, economic control and suffering, and the use of religious and cultural beliefs and practices to reinforce subordination and control.”

PASTORAL QUESTIONS

Pastors and leaders should be confident in the Christian understanding of humanity created in the divine image to exist in loving and harmonious community. This confidence should enable them to advocate perspectives and practices that uphold the dignity and value of all persons. The Christian Church should clearly and consistently communicate the need to love others and treat them respect. Its leaders should work actively to expose and eliminate attitudes and cultures that permit and excuse family violence.

The personal safety of individuals and families should always be the main priority in dealing with family violence. All disclosures of family violence should be taken seriously and should be reported to the relevant authorities when required by law. Pastors and leaders should be aware of their own limitations when dealing with abusive relationships and should be willing to seek specialist intervention, programs, and services.

All ACC churches should ensure that the ACC Child Protection Policy is implemented and adhered to when responding to reports of child abuse.

Pastors and leaders should be aware of unhelpful responses that could further endanger victims. A complaint should not be ignored because the accused is considered to be a good person, a friend, or liked and respected within the church. Forgiveness should never be suggested as an appropriate response when it is likely to result in a person remaining in an unsafe or oppressive environment. Advice that places blame or responsibility on victims should be avoided.

Pastors and leaders should recognise that the journey of healing and recovery is very long and hard for both victims and perpetrators. Therefore, rehabilitation and healing should be prioritised over reconciliation. Attempted reconciliation without the full process of healing and rehabilitation is likely to result in the continuation of abusive relationships and patterns of behaviour.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

Christianity understands human relationships to be an expression of the relational nature of the triune God. Ideally, all relationships should be loving and harmonious and safe spaces in which every person, including children, find acceptance and significance. We understand that this ideal is not always reflected in marriages and families and that family violence is prevalent in contemporary society. The Christian Church should seek to promote the equality and dignity of all people and the right to live with respect and physical safety.

References:

ⁱ <http://anrows.org.au/publications/fast-facts/violence-against-women-key-statistics>

ⁱⁱ Anthony Morgan and Hannah Chadwick. Key Issues in domestic Violence, Research in Practice no. 7. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, December 2009

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rip/1-10/07.html>
Homicide in Australia: 2010–11 to 2011–12: National Homicide Monitoring Program report
<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/mr/21-40/mr23.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ The Use and Misuse of Scripture with regard to Domestic Abuse Issued by the Anglican Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission, 6 September, 2018. Excerpts used with permission