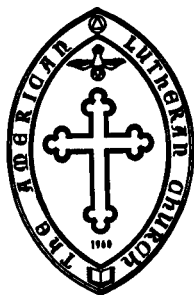


# FAMILIES AND VIOLENCE: THE CHURCH'S ROLE



a statement of  
The American Lutheran Church

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 Family violence encompasses a variety of demeaning and destructive behaviors. It ranges from insults to injury, even death. It is the premise of this statement that **NO ONE DESERVES TO BE ASSAULTED, NOR DOES ANYONE HAVE THE RIGHT TO ABUSE ANOTHER PERSON.** This paper is addressed to all members of congregations of The American Lutheran Church, out of concern for their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. It recognizes the serious problems of physical assault, verbal harassment, sexual abuse, psychological manipulation, spiritual oppression, and other damaging behavior patterns used by some family members against other family members. The paper deplores the fact that some families, intended by God to be life-giving, nurturing, and loving, have become hateful, crippling, even death-dealing for many people. The document notes some of the ways that families suffer and ways that victims try to escape. It suggests reasons for church involvement in intervention, offers some biblical and theological considerations, and proposes ways in which pastors, congregations, and members can help stop the growing epidemic of domestic violence.

## 2. A Word of Promise and Hope

2.1 Victims of family violence live in a world of fear and oppression, a world seemingly without hope. To them, we offer the reassurance that God hears their cry, sees their unjust suffering, and offers an outstretched arm of redemption.<sup>1</sup>

2.2 Examples of God's mercy and care abound in Scripture. One example long recognized by oppressed groups is that of the Exodus (see e.g., Ex. 6:6-7,9). In the Exodus, God's redemption is part of the story of the family of Jacob (Israel), brought into Egypt by God's merciful hand in a life-saving gesture during severe famine. As the years turned into centuries, the lives of the Israelites changed from privileged visitors to captive slaves, helpless under the Pharaoh. The Israelites endured slave labor, cruel treatment, infanticide, and harassment. Therefore, God—who had first brought the Israelites *into* Egypt to nurture them and save their lives—later found it necessary to bring them *out* of Egypt for the same reason: to nurture them and save their lives. Redemption was needed and God called Moses. This move was, however, resisted by both Egyptians and Israelites, since both groups considered it God's will that the Israelites be slaves to Pharaoh. It was, they believed, their proper place in society, established by long-held tradition and decree. The original positive relationship had been forgotten.

2.3 In our country today there is another setting in which redemption is needed. Families, established for the nurturing and loving of persons and for the giving and saving of lives, have become, in some cases, settings in which people are stunted, hated, demeaned, tortured, and killed. It is in their own homes and by members of their own families that people in the United States (especially women and children) run the greatest risk of assault, physical injury, sexual abuse, and murder.<sup>2</sup> Each year in our country millions of spouses, children, elderly parents, people with disabilities, and unborn babies are victims of violence inflicted by family members.<sup>3</sup> It is an epidemic of major proportions.<sup>4</sup>

2.4 Our greatest challenge may be to admit the fact that we *have* a problem. As Richard Hofstadter wrote in *American Violence* (Knopf, 1970), "What is most exceptional about the Americans is not the voluminous record of their violence, but their extraordinary ability, in the face of that record, to persuade themselves that they are among the best behaved and best regulated of peoples."

2.5 On the other hand, there is hope. Never before in recorded history has such widespread attention been given to relieving the enormous suffering of women, children, and some men at the hands of their own family members, usually their "protectors" (husbands, fathers, male relatives, and some female relatives). Beginning about one hundred years ago, men in Britain and the United States have increasingly lost the legal right to beat their wives. In recent decades, the U.S. public has openly acknowledged the reality of battered children, battered wives, abuse of elderly relatives, child sexual abuse, marital rape, and other cruel family behaviors. In some ways, a modern exodus has already begun, an exodus of abused and broken people out of those homes which have become violent and oppressive.

2.6 The basic sinfulness of the human race, which manifested itself in the first human family as brother (Cain) murdered brother (Abel) in Genesis 4:1-11, and still manifests itself violently in families today, is best addressed directly. Rather than keep silent, or treat violence as a man's (parent's) right in the home, the congregation and the community should treat it as the sin it is. Such sin must be confronted, judged, condemned, and treated professionally, causing changed behavior. For the victim, the greatest sin may be the sin of acquiescence to violence, of not claiming the right to safety and self-respect. Such sin needs to be confronted also, with changed behavior as a result of treatment. The beacon of hope today is that these processes are taking place.

### 3. The Situation Today

3.1 Women who are battered, raped, insulted, and assaulted by their husbands and other male acquaintances often bear the brunt of abuse. Children are inherently vulnerable. But all people—young and old, male and female—are subject to abuse. When one member of a family is abused, all are victimized.

3.2 Due to the reticence of family members to report violent acts, and due to the lack of uniform recording practices, accurate statistics on violence between family members are difficult to determine. The following figures are representative, and serve to illustrate the severity of the problem:

- a. One out of four girls will be sexually assaulted before the age of 18, usually by her own father, uncles, brothers, or family friends.<sup>5</sup> Boys are also sexually assaulted although accurate statistics are difficult to obtain. A quarter of all sexual abuse occurs before the age of seven and will typically continue from two to six years.<sup>6</sup> Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable.<sup>7</sup> Experts say rape and incest are not sexually motivated, but are motivated by the assailant's need for power and control.<sup>8</sup>
- b. Verified, reported cases of child abuse and neglect doubled from 1976 to 1981, and they continue to rise.<sup>9</sup>
- c. In addition to the one million cases of child maltreatment reported annually, there may be yet another million unreported (1984).<sup>10</sup>
- d. Of all women who are murdered, 41% are victims in their own homes, attacked by husband or another household member, such as boyfriend.<sup>11</sup>
- e. Almost 20% of *all* murders (men, women, children) involve family relationships.<sup>12</sup>
- f. Uncounted numbers of older people suffer physical, mental, and sexual abuse from family members.<sup>13</sup> Statistics for this category have not in the past been gathered by health or government agencies. Victims are very reluctant to report crimes committed by their adult children.
- g. Men also are victims of violence from spouses and family members.<sup>14</sup> Women abuse partners psychologically, verbally, and physi-

cally, sometimes even resorting to murder (sometimes in self-defense).

h. Family violence is not predominately found in any one geographical area, income level, ethnic background, profession, educational level, or religious affiliation.<sup>15</sup>

i. While violence committed by a stranger is classified as an assault by the criminal justice system, usually resulting in arrest and prosecution, the same act between family members is generally considered a family squabble, not a "real" crime, and is rarely followed by prosecution.<sup>16</sup>

j. Women and children who live with batterers never know when an assault will be triggered by innocuous behavior patterns, such as choice of clothing or an offhand remark not intended to offend.<sup>17</sup> Such families live in constant terror. Women who are repeated victims of assault by their husbands report that the abuse escalates during pregnancy.<sup>18</sup> Kicks and blows previously aimed at the woman's face and breasts are often directed toward the womb and genitals of a pregnant woman.

k. Psychological abuse, such as belittling, insults, demands for control over every detail of a spouse's or child's or elderly parent's life, as well as the torturing or killing of pets, etc., can be as damaging as physical abuse. This kind of abuse happens daily to millions of victims.<sup>19</sup>

3.3 The insufficiencies of available responses to domestic violence can be demonstrated by these problems:

a. Victims seeking shelter from a violent partner may not find a suitable place to stay, since existing shelter space is woefully inadequate. Some areas have no shelters for women; few areas have shelters for men who are victims.

b. People are increasingly unwilling to endure years and years of senseless cruelty, violence, and unhappiness. One of two marriages now ends in divorce.

c. Women and children who separate from their husbands and fathers to escape violence may face another kind of brutality: poverty. Many women have no income of their own or they have out-of-date job skills due to devoting time to child care. Families headed by a single female parent comprise a disproportionate percentage of people living in poverty today.<sup>20</sup>

d. In addition to failing often to provide child support, noncustodial parents with increasing frequency seek to kidnap their children from the custodial parent.<sup>21</sup>

e. More and more children simply run away from violent or sexually abusive relatives. This method of relieving abuse, together with parental kidnapping and foul play by strangers, causes at least 1,500,000 children to be reported missing from their homes each year.<sup>22</sup> Some of these children become trapped in prostitution, pornography, or other life-threatening situations.

f. Separation or divorce is sometimes not enough to prevent violence from continuing. Many separated spouses are assaulted and murdered by former mates.<sup>23</sup>

g. A family member who seeks legal protection is often frustrated by a nonresponsive police force, unwilling prosecutors, and/or unsympathetic judges. Local governments are so lax regarding family violence that the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence (1984) has asked that family violence be recognized as a criminal activity to which law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges should develop a coordinated response.<sup>24</sup>

h. Many women who seek counseling about violent spouses from family members, friends, pastors, doctors, and others are often told that the violence may be a response to the wife's inadequacies, or that the woman has a duty to keep the marriage intact, or that she should forgive her assailant and pray harder for him. Many men are embarrassed to seek advice when they are victims of physical or sexual abuse. Poorly informed advisors worsen the situation by making the victim feel guilty or responsible for the crime, therefore discouraging immediate legal action against the assailant.

3.4 The above examples of the abuse some family members face, and of the distressing experience encountered by those who wish to escape, demonstrate the great need for assistance which family members require in their daily quest to avoid terrorism and to stay healthy and alive.

#### **4. Should People in the Congregation Become Involved?**

4.1 Some people believe that there are better agencies than the church to deal with family violence. It is the job of the justice system, for example, to apprehend and prosecute assailants. Persons well trained in abuse therapy might be more appropriate counselors than pastors for both perpetrators and victims (less than 1% of U.S. clergy have such training).

4.2 While other agencies certainly must be involved in particular aspects of combating family violence, there remains appropriate and unique roles that the church can play.

4.3 Primarily, the church is already involved because our own members are doing violence to, even killing, each other. Spirits are being broken, not nurtured, in many of our members' families. Other church members and leaders need to respond to this crisis.

4.4 Churches, and especially pastors, are closely associated in the parishioner's mind with marriage and family. It is a pastor who likely officiated at the wedding, who baptized the children of that union, who offered through Sunday sermons guidance for daily Christian living. Very often, it is a pastor who is first approached when a person seeks counseling about family abuse. The pastor may be seen by the victim as an authority figure who, speaking for God, could tell the abuser to stop such hurtful behavior. (Most victims do not initially seek a divorce or criminal prosecution but simply want the terrorism to cease so life can become peaceful and meaningful again.) This hope may be unrealistic due to the seriousness of the abuse or the limited

training of the pastor. If so, the pastor should suggest appropriate help immediately.

4.5 Christianity has always proclaimed justice and hope for those who are disadvantaged, impoverished, unjustly attacked, and enslaved. This focus alone should inspire the church to action on behalf of the millions of victims who are being sexually abused, physically assaulted, psychologically demeaned, and spiritually damaged. The church especially proclaims "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). This good news should surely include deeds of mercy and love and liberation from assault. It relates directly to family violence. For example, one reason that abuse victims say they remain in a violent home is a lack of economic independence.<sup>25</sup> Spouses without paid work, usually women, do not have the resources to pay for transportation, housing, or legal aid to get away from the violent wage earner. In addition, a victim may not have job skills to earn enough to support the children as a single parent.

4.6 Participants in family violence may interpret their predicament in a theological way although that interpretation may be erroneous.<sup>26</sup> Some women believe they *deserve* to be beaten because of a sin in their past for which they think "God is punishing me," or they are told they are bad wives and deserve retribution, or they have been taught that family order requires the man to be dominant (and sometimes violent). Some men believe they have a God-given role that includes physical "discipline" of wives. Some parents believe their God-given role includes physical "discipline" of children. Legal authorities, secular counselors, or family friends can't seem to satisfy the longing these people have to discuss their predicaments theologically. In addition to legal and medical help, victims and perpetrators need a *religious* counselor who can help interpret Scripture and tradition, who can assure the person of forgiveness, and who can explain that the *victim* need not feel guilty for another's actions. Many victims need to be helped to see themselves as respectable people loved by God, so that they can begin to see the attacker as the one who is at fault and responsible for his or her own behavior. No one deserves to be assaulted, nor does anyone have the right to abuse another.

4.7 The church is one institution through which God works, the one most visibly identified with God in the minds of many people. The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt occurred when God chose to call the people of God out of an oppressive situation. It was accomplished through religious leaders and institutions. So, too, religious leaders and institutions today have a responsibility to call forth God's oppressed and abused people from their deadly or crippling situation.

4.8 The church can become, and needs to become, a surrogate family for healthy but overworked and overstressed members, who, because of our society's high rate mobility, have found extended-family support system diminished. People often have nowhere else to turn for advice, child care, reassurance, and support than to their acquaintances at church. Crisis situations, of course, should always be treated immediately and professionally by appropriate agencies.

4.9 The church provides a way for humanity's sinful nature to be addressed, for people's inadequacies to be forgiven. Few of the secular studies or theories on family violence assume the basic brokenness of humanity. The church is the logical place to pursue such realities.

## 5. Biblical and Theological Considerations

5.1 The Judeo-Christian tradition offers its adherents Shalom, wholeness, and peace. The brokenness or sinfulness which is evident in our present world is promised the healing touch of a new creation. There *is* hope and reconciliation for all broken people.

5.2 "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

5.3 Another Christian emphasis is love, which Christ showers upon us. Love—not coercion or violence—most accurately speaks to us and about us Christians. "Love one another; even as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

5.4 Family relationships, especially, have been held in high esteem by our biblical tradition, which generally holds up the godly ideal of respect for individuals within the family by other family members, a necessity for healthy growth and a stable life.

5.5 "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Col. 3:19-21).

5.6 Traditions such as these can form the basis for a life of wholeness and respect for one another. These and similar biblical and theological texts need to become the focus of our teaching and counseling, so that our members will be led to give and receive respect for one another. People already in the tragedy of violent behavior cycles, of course, need intervention and counseling, not naive platitudes about how life "could" or "should" be.

5.7 People within and without the church community sometimes appeal to the Bible to justify violence against members of their family. It is both a misunderstanding of the causes of family violence and a misinterpretation of biblical texts to claim that the Bible mandates or condones violence.

5.8 Examples of biblical passages which have been erroneously interpreted to justify violence include the following:

a. Genesis 2:24. (italics ours) "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife and *they become one flesh.*" According to early American law, that *one* was the husband. During marriage, the woman gave up her entire legal identity, name and all. Such an interpretation led to a disregard for the woman as a person in her own right. The man believed he could do as he liked with her as his own "self," his own "property." The intent of the biblical verse, however, is not that the identity of one member of the couple be annihilated but that a new, equal partnership be created.

b. Ephesians 5:21-33. "Wives, be subject to your husbands" has often

been quoted as rationale for insisting a wife obey every demand her husband might make (or be subject to a beating for *not* obeying him). Often ignored is the previous verse urging both to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." Brutality, excessive physical or sexual demands or nonloving, nonreverent behavior negates the relationship.

c. Proverbs 13:24 has been paraphrased as "spare the rod and spoil the child."<sup>27</sup> The form of discipline which used physical force has fed upon a few isolated Scripture verses, such as this one, which seem to condone beating one's relatives as a form of love and discipline. Biblical admonitions to parents to love their children and not provoke them to anger far outweigh the occasional references to using the "rod."<sup>28</sup> A child will hardly be spoiled by genuine love and respect, but research has shown over and over that beating a child results in that person beating his or her own children in later life,<sup>29</sup> and may also teach violence as a way of settling disputes with strangers. American prisons are filled with people who were regularly beaten as children. From 80% to 100% of inmates make such claims.<sup>30</sup> Sometimes the violent reaction comes sooner than adulthood. Children have been known to kill their abusive parents, in response to years of abuse.

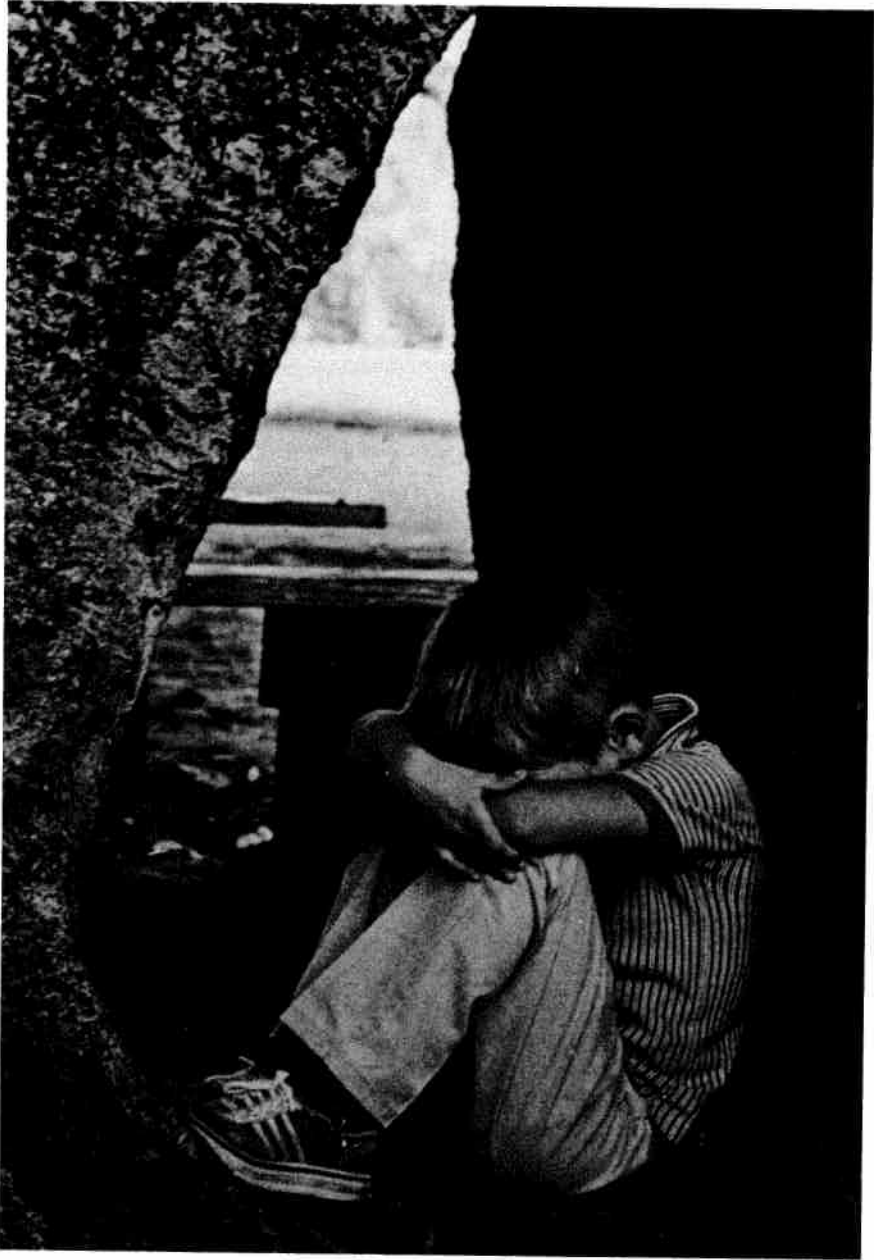
5.9 Besides these examples from the biblical tradition, other theological ideas have fed the justification of treating family members violently. One such concept is the dualism of body and spirit, in which the male is identified with spirit (the superior force) and the female is identified with body (a base element needing to be suppressed, controlled, and disciplined). These conclusions distort the rationale of spirit-body dualism, which intends that all persons recognize *in themselves* both spirit and body. For a person's spirit to discipline one's own body is one thing. For one person to claim the power to discipline another person's body is quite another thing, and is potentially diabolical.

5.10 Perhaps more pertinent is the doctrine of sin and grace. God, in grace, stands ready to forgive all of us and to support us in changing our destructive behavior. Rather than keep silent, or treat violence as a man's (parent's) right in the home, the community and the congregation should treat it as the sin it really is: to be confronted, judged, condemned, treated professionally, forgiven, with changed behavior as a result. Forgiveness does not mean overlooking genuine offenses, or offering "cheap grace." Behavior must change. Repentance must be genuine.

5.11 The pastors and people of each congregation need to be responsible for the effects of their theology and biblical interpretations among members of the church. A 1982 study of pastors' theological assumptions in connection with family violence indicates that some pastors put more emphasis on saving a marriage at all costs than upon saving the health, sanity, or life of an individual in the marriage. A wife is expected, by some pastors, to endure any amount of pain or indignity so that the "marriage" remains intact.<sup>31</sup> A congregation may want to question what kind of counseling is being done by its pastors. Will counseled congregational members be encouraged to



*More and more children simply run away from violent or sexually abusive relatives.*  
*(Beth Slatery photograph)*



perpetuate the illusion of an intact marriage even to the extent of enduring assault and insult, or will they be supported in their attempt to relieve the danger to health and life by, if necessary, separation or divorce?

5.12 Researchers vary in their opinion about causes of intra-familial violence. Some reasons given to explain violence are jealousy, failure to see the other person as an independent individual, personal history of violent environment, inability to express any emotion other than anger, need for power and control, belief that a man has a right to batter his wife, lack of responsibility for one's own actions, frustration, exhaustion, and lack of self-esteem. In the United States, masculinity is strongly identified with aggression and violence. Furthermore, in cases where the male is taught that he must be the head of the household, that may be erroneously interpreted to mean his opinion must stand unquestioningly, and must be enforced upon other family members. Research has shown that in families where the decisions and authority are shared by all, especially both parents, members experience considerably less violence.<sup>32</sup>

5.13 Self-esteem is perhaps the characteristic most needed by both the victim and the perpetrator of family violence. Studies have found family members (spouses and children, if involved) to be lacking in self-respect and self-confidence. Aggression is both perpetrated and accepted because the participants believe they do not have either the personal power or ability to stop doing it or accepting it. Continued psychological abuse can even create low self-esteem in a person previously self-confident, setting that person up for physical abuse later on in a relationship.

5.14 Violence appears to happen with or without theological justification. Quoting Scripture or tradition to justify violence happens after the fact, as an excuse. Positive aspects of the biblical tradition can and should be used by congregations to shape a loving peaceful stance toward life, and to create self-esteem.

## 6. Positive Action

6.1 There are a number of steps churches and pastors should take to address family violence and abuse.

6.2 A congregation collectively should consider the following in addition to the immediate crisis intervention steps of separating the perpetrator from the victim, and offering aid and safety to the victim:

- a. Study the general theology of the church and its local interpretations to see whether the Bible and theology are being used to condone violence or to promote growth, wholeness, and health.
- b. Plan worship services and congregational life so as to celebrate positive role models and involvement of all people. Make visible and intentional efforts to affirm all people and to bolster their self-esteem.
- c. Offer open discussion and information sessions on the topic of family violence so members become aware of the problems, the facts, the studies, and so victims will be encouraged to report their life-threatening situations to appropriate authorities. Children especially

should be encouraged to speak confidentially to trained teachers and pastors about sexual and physical abuse. They need to know somebody cares.

d. Offer opportunities for parents and spouses to participate in programs which teach peaceful means of parenting and settling disputes, such as assertiveness training, Parent Effectiveness Training, Parents Anonymous, Couples' Communication, and Systematic Training for Effective Parenting.

e. A study group within the congregation could design models for what steps may be taken by the victims, the perpetrators, the congregation, the pastor, and any appropriate secular institution. Collect a list of local resources, such as organizations which respond to victims and perpetrators, legal aid, emergency shelter, food pantries, and other necessary agencies. Publicize this information in congregational newsletters, bulletins, counseling, bulletin boards, etc.

f. Consider declaring your church a sanctuary, or provide a shelter, as a safe haven for anyone who is in danger from hostile family members. Or provide transportation and financial aid to bring victims to an existing shelter.

g. Open or join with other churches in sponsoring a 24-hour hotline for people to call when they are in danger and in need of counseling, protection, or shelter away from an abuser. Support your local existing shelters.

h. Open a day care center for children, for disabled, for elderly persons, so family caretakers may have respite from the heavy demands made on their physical and emotional energy. Exhaustion, frustration, and lack of expressed appreciation may lead to violent acts.

i. Plan a way for the congregation to offer encouragement and direction to all family members who are involved in violent situations. Such people deserve the church's support for seeking a healthier and more peaceful way of life, even if that means living apart from abusive partners. There should be no doubt in either the man's or woman's mind that the health and safety of individuals is far more important than the preservation of a destructive marriage, and that a marriage license is not a license to assault or kill one another, or to injure children.

j. Join organized efforts to rid the American media and public sales floors of depictions of violence, both general and sex-related. People who are repeatedly exposed to demonstrations of violence become desensitized to it and come to believe that women enjoy pain, want to be raped, and welcome physical assault.

k. Discuss what it means to be a worshipping and believing *community*. Does the church's responsibility lie only in gathering on Sunday morning to worship, or does it extend to being caring and responsible for the health and life of its members during the week as well?

### 6.3 Pastors will find it beneficial to:

- a. Get training in how to counsel victims and perpetrators of child abuse, spouse abuse, elder abuse, self-abuse (attempted suicide, etc.), and how to build self-esteem, self-respect. Many pastors have never had such training and may say the wrong things to victims or perpetrators. Sharing by victims must be included in such training.
- b. Make it known through sermons, newsletter, and bulletins that members may approach the pastor for confidential counseling and assistance on family violence. Many victims are hesitant to speak of it because they feel ashamed or guilty or are threatened with harm if they tell the secret of sexual or physical abuse. Such victims need encouragement and permission to speak. Perpetrators may fear reprisal if they seek to change their violent behavior. They, too, need both reassurance of confidentiality and counseling to develop more positive relationships.
- c. Examine their own theology, sermons, and attitude. Pastors should consider whether their communication encourages families to deal with violence in their homes or to hide it out of fear that they will be perceived as poor Christians if their weaknesses become known.
- d. Include, in premarital counseling, discussions on violence, non-violent conflict resolution, stress reduction, and problem solving. Seek to learn whether a couple is prone to violence. (Many couples are violent even during the courting stage.) Let the couple know that violence is inappropriate and illegal, and that help is available. Problems can be solved peacefully.
- e. Know the laws, the available resource centers, shelters, reporting locations, and other sources of help for your locale, so instances of abuse may be legally and wisely handled. Make such information known to all members.
- f. Make evaluation guides and tests available for members who may not have enough experience to judge whether a certain behavior is abusive or not. For example, a newly-married younger woman may have been told that a demand for sex several times a day is normal, even when it seems excessive and abusive to her. Another example is that people who are raised violently by parents allow spouses to be violent because they have learned to view it as normal family behavior. Both partners need an evaluative test to measure their own behavior.
- g. Offer educational opportunities for positive sexuality at all ages. Include biblical examples for sexuality, the marks of a healthy relationship, proper touch, and sexual and physical abuse prevention both in and out of marriage, and an overall respect for the sexual integrity of all individuals.

### 6.4 Congregation members individually should consider the following:

- a. Befriend members of the congregation who may need someone to talk to or someone to help with problems. Abuse victims need to feel

a high level of trust before they are comfortable about sharing experiences.

b. Urge legislators to provide funds for shelters and to reconstruct the legal process so that victims of family violence will be treated as respectfully, equitably, and rapidly as victims of violence from strangers.

c. Volunteer to work in a helping agency that treats family violence victims or perpetrators.

d. Pray for fellow members, especially those who experience sexual, physical, and spiritual abuse. Pray also for those who perpetrate such violence.

e. Encourage churches, schools, and other agencies to teach nonviolent parenting, sex education, and children's self-defense.

## 7. Conclusion

7.1 This document does not intend to imply that all homes within the church experience violent physical, sexual, or psychological acts. The number of homes so affected is not known, and estimates vary. The existence of many healthy, wholesome homes is positive testimony to the basic integrity of our members. Some homes, however, do contain violence, and the many healthy homes should not be used as a denial of the crisis present in the lives of some of our members.

7.2 Family violence is a concept that covers many different aspects. It could be mild or severe, physical or mental, hurtful or confusing. The fact that it is done by a family member (however that is defined by the family itself) and that it is damaging to the victim over a period of time is of concern. What is needed is for the community and the church to respect individuals more, and to respect a bit less "the family" and "the marriage" as abstractions to be preserved at all costs.

7.3 When the church provides the encouragement, means, and rationale for victims of violence to escape terrorism, God's will for us is being affirmed. The awful irony and betrayal of someone suffering torture, terrorism, even the threat of death within a union formed for love is an affront to God and to all of us.

7.4 While in a state of terrorism, dependency, and ignorance, family violence victims want especially for the violence and abuse to end, and to establish healthy relationships. Such people may also be interested in reading about the problem or discussing the theories behind its prevalence in America. The first and foremost need is for safety to get the perpetrator and victim out of a dangerous situation, and later to rehabilitate all participants in the violent situation and to establish healthy relationships.

7.5 Legal progress is being made. Laws are being changed to offer protection to abused family members. Women and children are being recognized as independent people with personal needs and legal rights of their own.

7.6 But more should be done. The list above is but a partial list of how both victims and perpetrators of family violence and sexual abuse can be

helped. Congregations need to become actively involved in addressing the problem, to keep informed on the latest developments in help for such people, and to make such helps available to victims. Individual members need to help themselves and to respond to each other with sensitivity, knowledge, and understanding.

7.7 The exodus away from abuse, exploitation, and violence has already begun in the United States. It remains for the people of the congregation to guide the development of a new life for broken people, and to prevent the need for exodus in the first place, by teaching peaceful and healthful living to our members of all ages.

#### NOTES

1. R. C. Dentan, "Redeem," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol 4* (Nashville: Abingdon Press) p. 22, "The concept of God's saving work as a process of redemption from possession or control by an alien power is . . . one of the fundamental concepts of the Bible."
2. Richard J. Gelles and Claire Pedrick Cornell, *Intimate Violence in Families* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985), p. 12.
3. Karen Burstein and Marjory Fields. *Domestic Violence: Second Report to the Governor and the Legislature* (State of New York: Governor's Task Force on Domestic Violence, 1982), p. 3.
4. Murray A. Straus, Richard J. Gelles, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980), p. 32, "If you are married, the chances are almost one out of three that your husband or wife will hit you (sometime during your marriage)." Also, pp. 73-74, "Millions of children each year face parents who are using forms of violence that could grievously injure, maim, or kill them . . . Consider how we would react if we found that millions of children faced guns and knives and experienced beatings in schools. If we were talking about smallpox, mumps, or flu, these figures could be interpreted to mean there is an epidemic of these diseases in the United States . . . One wonders why, when so many have expressed concern about violence in television, no one has ever voiced concern about the consequences of children seeing or being victims of violence in their own homes."
5. Edward W. Gondolf, *Men Who Batter: An Integrated Approach for Stopping Wife Abuse* (Holmes Beach: Learning Publications, 1985), p. 3, "Incest researchers conclude that . . . 90% of the abusers are fathers or stepfathers." See also Lee Coppernoll and Peggy Halsey, *Crisis: Women's Experience and the Church's Response* (New York: The United Methodist Church, 1982), pp. 23-24.
6. Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983), p. 166.
7. *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 186.
8. *Sexual Violence*, pp. 16-17, 19-20; *Men Who Batter*, p. 83.
9. *U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence Report* (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, 1984), p. 11.
10. *U.S. Attorney General's . . . Report*, p. 11. Also, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 74-75, "Evidence appears to support . . . that our homes and how we raise our children are the main sources of our violent society. . . A society in which millions of children are kicked, beaten, punished, bitten, shot, and stabbed by their parents has a bigger problem than mere child abuse. Millions of our children are 'time bombs' of violence which can explode at home, at school, or in the streets."
11. *U.S. Attorney General's . . . Report*, p. 11.
12. *U.S. Attorney General's . . . Report*, p. 11. Murray Straus and Gerald Hotaling, eds., *The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), p. 40.
13. "Elder Abuse," *Intimate Violence*, pp. 100-106.
14. *The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence*, p. 32.
15. *U.S. Attorney General's . . . Report*, p. 11. This does not imply, however, that such sociological factors have no effect on family violence. They do play a role, and need attention in any plan to end violence. See, for example, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 151-152, "The factors which have a strong bearing upon family violence are age, income, having a full-time, part-time or no job. To a lesser extent, religion, residence in a city or the country, and race are related to violence in the home . . . We can argue with conviction that personal counseling will never be enough to treat or prevent violence in the home . . . (Counseling) would have no effect if we send them back into the same social environment which influenced them to be violent in the first place."
16. *U.S. Attorney General's . . . Report*, p. 11. Regardless of the attitude of our justice system, crimes against family members are real and serious. Note *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 34 (italics theirs), ". . . over 1.7 million Americans have at some time faced a husband or wife wielding a knife or gun, and well over 2 million have been beaten up by his or her spouse."
17. *Men Who Batter*, p. 85.
18. "Violence and Pregnancy," *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 187.
19. For a treatment of the entire range of psychological and physical abuses within the family, see Wesley R. Monfalcone, *Coping with Abuse in the Family* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980). For definitions of the various kinds of abuse, see *Men Who Batter*, p. 84, Table 3-3.
20. Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, U.S. House of Representatives, 98th Congress, *Families and Child Care: Improving the Options* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), pp. iv-xiii. For discussion purposes and a more personal treatment of the problem, see Sydney Thomson Brown, "Squeezed Into Poverty," *The Lutheran* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Church in America, Nov. 7, 1984), pp. 8-10; and a videotape (20 min.) by

- The American Lutheran Church, *A Woman Named Mary: The Feminization of Poverty*, available through Augsburg Publishing House or ALC District Resource Centers.
21. Patricia Hoff, *Parental Kidnapping: How to Prevent an Abduction and What to Do If Your Child Is Abducted* (Washington: National Center for Missing and Abducted Children, March 1985).
  22. Statistics provided in a 1985 brochure from The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Washington, D.C.
  23. "Family Violence," *Bureau of Justice Statistics: Special Report* (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, 1984), p. 4, "Although divorced and separated people make up only 7% of the population age 12 and over, about 75% of the spousal violence reported in this survey involved people who are divorced or separated."
  24. *U.S. Attorney General's . . . Report*, p. 10.
  25. *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 44, "Women are locked into marriage to a much greater degree than men. Women are bound by many economic and social constraints, and they often have no alternative to putting up with the beatings by their husbands. Social policy should be aimed at helping those who are in the weakest position."
  26. *Crisis: Women's Experience and the Church's Response* quotes examples of the positive and negative responses given by pastors and congregation members to situations of family violence.
  27. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is not found in the Bible. It appears to be a paraphrase of Proverbs 13:24, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." See also "Violence Toward Children," pp. 7-9, and "Spare the Rod?," pp. 51-77, *Behind Closed Doors*.
  28. Judaism, which uses much of the same scriptural base as Christianity, does not seem to produce families which are as violent. Jewish families in the U.S. are considered the least violent group. See Ch. 5, *The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence*.
  29. This point cannot be stressed too often or too vigorously. Studies generally agree that violence toward children in the home predisposes them to becoming violent adults. There is not only the crime of assault against the children at issue, but also the crime against future generations which will bear the fruit of future violence.
  30. *Men Who Batter*, p. 3, "80% of all men in American prisons were abused children." Stephen Goode, *Violence in America* (New York: Julian Messner/Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1984), p. 254, "100% of inmates at San Quentin experienced some form of extreme violence in the family before age 10."
  31. Jim A. Alsdurf, "Wife Abuse and the Church: The Response of Pastors," *Response to the Victimization of Women and Children*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1985 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Women's Policy Studies, Nancy King, ed.), pp. 9-11.
  32. *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 242; *Men Who Batter*, p. 50; *The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence*, p. 230.

## RESOURCES

### ORGANIZATIONS:

**Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence**, 1914 N. 34th Street, Suite 105, Seattle, WA 98103. An educational and training organization: newsletter, teen curriculum, book, pastoral guide, clergy workshop manual.

**Center for Women Policy Studies**, 2000 P Street, N.W., Suite 508, Washington, D.C. 20036. A policy research organization: information on issues pertaining to women. Journal available, articles on abuse.

**Lutheran social service agencies** across the country are able to provide help with counseling and referrals. Contact your local church or telephone directory for address.

**National Center for Missing and Exploited Children**, 1835 K Street, N.W., Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20006. Education and information center for the location of missing children, and the prevention of abduction. Resources on request.

**National Center for Prevention of Child Abuse**, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 950, Chicago, IL 60604. Information and resources. Write for catalogue.

**Office of Ministries with Women in Crisis**, National Division, United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 338, New York, N.Y. 10115. Survey of abuse within the United Methodist Church; resource packet.

Your local mental health agency and crisis hotline.

## PUBLICATIONS:

*Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence: Final Report*, September 1984. U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. Analysis of the problem and recommendations for change.

Bussert, Joy M. K., *Battered Women: from a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment*, Division for Mission in North America, Lutheran Church in America, 231 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016; 1986.

Fortune, Marie, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin; an Ethical and Pastoral Perspective*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983. Provides an ethical and pastoral perspective on family violence.

Fortune, Marie; Hormann, Denise, *Family Violence: A Workshop Manual for Clergy and Other Service Providers*. Seattle: Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1980. Educational ideas, workshop formats, questionnaire.

Gondolf, Edward. *Men Who Batter: An Integrated Approach to Stopping Wife Abuse*, Holmes Beach: Learning Publications, 1985. Extensive index of resources: books, films, manuals, periodicals, resource centers, self-help books, bibliography, research on wife abuse, programs for batterers, counseling tips and questionnaires.

Harrison, R.; Edwards, J. *Child Abuse: A Personal Account. . . . A Guide for Teachers and Professionals*. Portland: Endick Communicatons, 1983. Manual for understanding child abuse; list of people required to report abuse; contact points for reporting abuse; indicators of abuse and abusers; curriculum.

Martin, Del. *Battered Wives*. San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1976. Discusses wife beating; the batterer; problems with the legal system and social services; suggests remedial legislation.

Monfalcone, Wesley. *Coping with Abuse in the Family*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980. Discussion of a wide range of family problems; family abuse scale; practical ideas on helping others.

Tiemann, Wm.; Bush, J. *The Right to Silence: Privileged Communication and the Law*. Nashville: Abingdon, rev. ed. 1983. Discusses legal aspects of confidential confessions.

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