

# Breaking the Silence

## *A Resource to Equip United Methodists to Speak Up and Speak Out about Domestic Violence.*



The following resource is to educate members of The United Methodist Church on the reality and prevalence of domestic/family violence in our communities. It is offered in the hope of gaining advocates willing to **speak up** and **speak out** against the pandemic of intimate-partner violence.

Excellent resources exist that seek to address the pastoral response to domestic violence, how to minister to the **individual response** of the victim (see "Resources and Further Information" at the end of this booklet for more details). This resource's primary aim is to address the need to act as a community of faith upon **social and structural systems** that perpetuate circumstances in which victims remain silent and perpetrators continue cycles of violence.

The goal is to build faithful advocates. The General Board of Church & Society suggests three things to keep in mind when engaging in faithful advocacy.<sup>1</sup>

- Relate** Most people are willing to hear your perspective if you take the time to develop a positive, respectful relationship with them.
- Educate** People with whom you work will want to clearly understand why an issue is important before they are willing to get involved. Take time to lay the groundwork. The more people understand, the more enthusiastic they will be as advocates.
- Act** Studying and discussing social issues among ourselves isn't enough. We need to become part of the public witness and advocacy process. Visit your members of Congress when they are in town. Invite them to your church. Send a card, letter or e-mail to legislators. Make phone calls. Write letters to the editor. Talk to friends and neighbors. Take a stand.

Ideally, religious leaders, both clergy and individuals within congregations, are already in relationships with members of their community. For these leaders, the next steps are to educate themselves and others in their congregations about issues of domestic and family violence and move towards advocacy. Spiritual leaders are often among the first entrusted with the cries for help of victims. Yet these spiritual leaders have little crisis-intervention training at the seminary level and an historical inheritance of scriptural interpretation around issues of marriage and fidelity. As a result, these leaders are often ill-equipped to handle such confessions.

This resource is to help clergy and lay understand the complexities of these violent relationships, to examine their theological understanding of this violence, to challenge the way leaders of The United Methodist Church teach and preach troubling texts of violence, and to know how to advocate for victims of such violence in their churches and in the world.

# A Case for this Cause

## Facts, Stats and Stories to Educate Future Advocates

This section offers information to increase general knowledge of the prevalence and gravity of the problem of violence in our communities. Specifically, by addressing the violence that takes place in some of our most intimate relationships, this first section's goal is to establish this as an issue to which the reader can RELATE by helping to EDUCATE the reader.

### Defining Domestic/Family/Intimate Partner Violence

#### Sexual

Any non-consenting sexual act or behavior:

- When she says "No"
- When she is afraid to say "No"
- When she is sleeping
- Any unwanted touch
- Degrading or sexually attacking comments
- Penetration: vaginal, oral, anal
- Jokes aimed at the victim's sexuality, body, etc.

#### Physical

Any forceful behavior:

- Hitting
- Slapping
- Kicking
- Choking
- Pushing
- Burning
- Throwing objects
- Denial of physical needs
- Use of weapons or other objects

**Domestic violence**, also known as *battering*, is a pattern of behavior where one person tries to control the thoughts, beliefs or actions of a partner, friend or any other person close to them. While the violence may cause injury, it does not have to be physical. Domestic violence can also take the form of emotional, verbal, mental, sexual and economic abuse.

Jane Doe, Inc.<sup>ii</sup>

#### Verbal

Any verbal assaults or threats to do bodily harm to partner, children, pets, or self:

- "I'm going to let you have it"
- "You'll be sorry!"
- Threats to disclose confidential information
- Yelling, screaming

#### Economic/Financial

Creating economic dependency:

- Refusing access to money for food, clothing, basic needs
- Controlling the assets
- Putting all bills in partner's name and running up the charges

#### Psychological

Renders partner emotionally helpless and insecure about self worth or ability to escape further abuse:

- Continued attacks on self-esteem
- Repeated harassment, interrogation or degradation
- Blaming the partner for all that goes wrong
- Minimizing concerns, ignoring feelings of the victim

#### Using Privilege

To maintain power and control:

- Always claiming to be right
- Giving commands
- Using religion, culture and/or gender roles to impose authority

*Battering is a pattern of behavior used to **establish power and control** over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence. Battering happens when one person believes [he or she is] entitled to control another. Assault, battering and domestic violence are crimes.*

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence<sup>iii</sup>

*[Domestic violence is] a continuum of behavior ranging from verbal abuse, physical and sexual assault, to rape and even homicide. The vast majority of such violence, and the most severe and chronic incidents, are **perpetrated by men against women and their children.**"*

U.K. Department of Health<sup>iv</sup>

#### Intimidation

Any act which imposes fear:

- Destroying possessions
- Threatening to call social service agencies and/or law enforcement authorities
- Threats other than physical (take the children, have an affair, etc.)

*Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is emotional, verbal, physical or sexual violence occurring between partners. IPV takes place regardless of sexual orientation, race, social status, economic status, age group or educational background. **IPV is not a heterosexual phenomenon nor is it based on gender.** IPV is a choice to exert power and control over one's partner.*

Casa de Esparenza<sup>v</sup>

#### Isolation

Attempts to make the victim feel alone:

- Limiting contact with friends and/or family
- Restricting access to transportation
- Monitoring phone calls

*Adapted from a variety of resources including: Abuse Victims Hotline<sup>vi</sup>*

# Domestic Abuse Intervention Project <sup>vii</sup>

The primary and central factor motivating violence in intimate relationships is an effort to gain or maintain **power** and **control**. The wheel demonstrates how many of these expressions of violence are all related to the abuser's need for power and control. Abusers employ the behaviors, each a form of violence, within the wheel to keep their victim within their control.

## As a Teaching Tool:

This Power Wheel is a teaching tool for use with individuals or small groups wanting to learn about the dynamics related to abuse. These symptoms of physical and sexual abuse may be new to discussion participants. Asking if any of these points is a surprise might be a good place to begin with a discussion group.

Talking about domestic violence can be difficult, especially if one has been a victim or perpetrator. Creating a safe place, with confidentiality agreements, is essential prior to any discussion.

*\* Power Wheel courtesy of Domestic Abuse Intervention Project [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org)*



# Domestic Violence Statistics

Published by Safe Havens: Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence. <sup>viii</sup>

- Globally, **one third of women (31%)** report being physically or sexually abused by an intimate partner. <sup>ix</sup>  
Each of these victims has parents, brothers, sisters, partners, grandparents, neighbors, coworkers, children, fellow congregants, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends, who will also be affected.
- In the United States, more than three women are killed by intimate partners every day, more than **1,200 women every year.** <sup>x</sup>
- During the first five years of the Iraqi war, 4,000 U.S. soldiers were killed in combat. During those same five years, more than **6,000** Americans have been killed, not by enemies, but by intimate partners.
- **Pregnant women** are more likely to be victims of homicide than to die of any other cause. <sup>xi</sup>
- **More than 33%** of all female homicide victims are killed by their intimate partners. <sup>xii</sup>
- Domestic violence is the **leading cause of death for African-American women** aged 15 to 34 years. <sup>xiii</sup>
- **3.3 million American children** witness abuse in their homes every year. <sup>xiv</sup>

- Between **12% and 35% of teens** have experienced some form of violence, from pushing and shoving to hitting, in a dating relationship. <sup>xv</sup>
- Estimated annual U. S. health care costs for domestic violence: **\$4,100,000,000.** <sup>xvi</sup>
- Victims from immigrant communities face additional barriers to safety:
  - Language
  - Isolation
  - Poverty
  - Immigration status
  - Documentation and employment issues
  - Racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination
  - Distrust of law enforcement
  - Distrust of government and its agencies <sup>xvii</sup>
- Studies show that immigrant women often suffer higher rates of battering than U.S. citizens because they may come from cultures that accept domestic violence or because they have less access to legal and social services than U.S. citizens. Additionally, immigrant batterers and victims may believe that the penalties and protections of the U.S. legal system do not apply to them. <sup>xviii</sup>

The General Board of Church and Society has published a series of downloadable resources for other forms of domestic violence, including **elder abuse, adolescent bullying, and violence against men.** Download these brochures to learn more about the statistics surrounding these forms of violence.

<http://www.umc-gbcs.org/domesticviolence>







# The Church and its Teachings

Clearly, faith leaders are in a unique place to hear the confessions of victims: "Each year, more abuse victims, perpetrators and family members seek help from clergy and religious leaders than all other helping professionals combined."<sup>xix</sup> Faith leaders are viewed as trusted persons in the community, persons whom we trust and confide in with life's joys and struggles.

And yet, several things have historically blocked the church and its leaders from responsibly addressing the needs and safety concerns of victims of domestic violence.

## Interpreting Scripture

Tragically, Christian women often feel compelled to stay in abusive relationships. Scripture tells them to "submit to their husbands" or "turn the other cheek." The Center for the Prevention of Sexual & Domestic Violence reports that rather than offering resources and alternatives to battered women, pastors, priests and rabbis have often advised women to return to violent homes and be "better wives."

## Condemnation of Divorce

Couples who enter into Christian marriage do so by making vows to love, honor and cherish... "until death do you part." Many victims of domestic abuse refuse to leave their spouse because of this commitment, despite the fact that the vow to love, honor and cherish is completely incompatible with behavior patterns of violence and abuse.

## Christian Teaching on Suffering

In some cases, the suffering these women endure is taught as redemptive, and a necessary part of the Christian journey. The ability to "suffer" becomes an opportunity for salvation and redemption as a way to be more Christ-like. To bear this involuntary suffering, to endure the violence against their very bodies, is conveyed as a way to "carry one's cross," to live as a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

## Christian Symbols and Sacraments

The church has rarely given consideration to ways in which battered women and victims of sexual assault might respond to symbols, sacraments and rituals at the very foundations of the Christian narrative. The Cross, filled with wonder and mystery, is held in its historical framework by a gruesome display of violence in the name of love. The Eucharist, a sacramental remembrance of Jesus' last meal with his disciples,

asks participants to celebrate a broken body and spilled blood. The images and symbols, central to the Christian identity, have rarely been examined in light of the experiences victims might have at the foot of the cross while living in perpetual remembrance of the trauma of their own bodies broken and blood shed.

## Silence

Silence, which surrounds domestic violence in so many social circles, seems to have been the primary course of action for the church. Despite the overwhelming statistics, most clergy have assumed that this is not present in their congregations, and therefore is not something necessary to address. Safe Havens director, the Rev. Dr. Anne Marie Hunter says this is what leaves the church and victims in a "negative feedback cycle."<sup>xx</sup> Victims do not come forward, so clergy don't believe they need to address it; clergy don't address it, so victims do not feel comfortable coming forward.

# Are you ready to ACT?

## Moving from Knowledge to Action

The section explains ways in which lay and clergy can ACT to respond to the injustice of domestic violence. The first course of action is knowing what to do in personal encounters with victims. The resources at the end of this guide contain links to organizations with materials on how to respond.

### What can I do to be helpful if an abusive situation is revealed to me?

Faith Trust Institute offers the following suggestions for pastors on what to do when domestic violence is disclosed to them:<sup>xxi</sup>

- Listen to the victim and believe her. **Tell her that the abuse is not her fault, and is not God's will.**
- Tell her **she is not alone** and that help is available.
- Let her know that without **intervention**, abuse often escalates in frequency and severity over time.
- **Seek expert assistance.** Refer her to specialized domestic violence counseling programs only, **NOT to couples counseling.** Help her find a shelter, a safe home or advocacy resources to offer her protection. Suggesting that she merely return home places her and her children in real danger.
- **Hold the abuser accountable.** Don't minimize his abusive behavior. Support him in seeking specialized batterers counseling to help change

his behavior. Continue to hold him accountable and to support and protect the victim even after he has begun a counseling program.

- If reconciliation is to occur, consider it **only** after the above steps.

**Faith Trust Institute** is a pioneer in producing resources on domestic violence prevention and advocacy tools for faith communities. Visit [www.faithtrustinstitute.com](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.com) for more information and resources from the faith perspective.

*The 2008 Book of Resolutions* addresses this history in "Violence Against Women and Children" (#3423):

*We acknowledge the ways in which misinterpretation and misuse of Christian Scriptures and traditions have contributed to violence against women and children, and to the guilt, self-blame, and suffering which victims experience, and to the rationalizations used by those who abuse. A reexamination of those misused passages can help us reclaim traditions in ways that support victims and challenge abuse in the family.*

### Why should we, The United Methodist Church, become advocates?

As The United Methodist Church, we have acknowledged a need to address the historical teachings and their implication on the lives of those victimized by domestic violence. We must be willing to take action.

The church must re-examine the theological messages it communicates in light of the experiences of victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. We must treat with extreme care the important, but often-misused, concepts of suffering, forgiveness, and the nature of marriage and family.

The call to action for United Methodist congregations includes tasks for both clergy and lay leaders. Engaging these steps as a community of faith lives into the commitment we made as a denomination when this resolution passed. It is a huge step in becoming advocates on this issue.

**Clergy** must take on the responsibility to teach and preach on domestic violence and sexual abuse. They must commit themselves to breaking the silence by taking the opportunity to educate and empower their congregations. They need to seek out training on how to respond when a victim comes forward. They must learn how to respond with compassionate, responsible pastoral care.

Furthermore, a visible witness to how your church seeks to help and heal all of God's children is to partner with community organizations and other religious communities that focus time and resources to those facing domestic violence.

**Laity** also play an important role as advocates, and developing a safe, welcoming space for victims in the church. Laity can help the process of healing and advocacy for those victimized by family violence.

By encouraging their clergy to speak and preach about this topic, laity can help to make their church an environment for ministries of healing to take place. By connecting with local organizations and other faith communities committed to this issue, laity take part in the ministry of all believers, into which they were baptized.

The United Methodist Church affirms the sacredness of all persons and their right to safety, nurture and care. It names domestic violence and sexual abuse as sins and pledges to work for their eradication. The church commits itself to listen to the stories of battered spouses, rape victims, abused children, adult survivors of child sexual abuse, and all others who are violated and victimized. The church further commits itself to provide leadership in responding with justice and compassion to the presence of domestic violence and sexual abuse among its membership and within the community at large.

*"Violence Against Women and Children" (#3423)*

# Moving from Knowledge to Action

## What does Resolution #3423 require of ME?

### CLERGY

**Create a church climate of openness, acceptance and safety** that encourages victims to speak of their pain and seek relief and healing.

**Work collaboratively with community agencies on prevention strategies** and provide for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of victims, offenders and other family members.

**Adopt policy and procedures for keeping children and vulnerable adults safe** from abuse in church facilities and programs.

Assess currently available **prevention and response resources in the community** and, where appropriate, initiate new programs and services. Wherever possible, undertake new programs ecumenically or as part of a community coalition.

**Set up peer support groups for battered spouses**, for adults who were sexually abused as children and for rape victims. A trained resource person or professional counselor should be consulted for assistance in setting up peer support groups.

**Re-examine, and change if necessary, scriptural and theological messages, cultures and traditions** that validate violence or abuse, or support a view of women as subordinate to men, or children as property of adults. Pay particular attention to church teachings on repentance and forgiveness.

Maintain a **library of printed and video resources on domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse** and the role of the church. Develop a utilization plan.

Participate in **Domestic Violence Awareness Month** each October and **Child Abuse Prevention Month** each April in the United States, or similar emphases in other countries.

**Preach on domestic violence and sexual abuse topics;** urge congregants to host or cooperate in community education events and to highlight opportunities for involvement in prevention and service activities.

### LAITY

**Maintain a church climate of openness, acceptance and safety** that encourages victims to speak of their pain and seek relief and healing.

**Work collaboratively with community agencies on prevention strategies** and provide for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of victims, offenders and other family members.

**Volunteer** your services to existing shelters, crisis centers and other community services. Insist upon training for volunteers

**Set up peer support groups for battered spouses**, for adults who were sexually abused as children and for rape victims. A trained resource person or professional counselor should be consulted for assistance in setting up peer support groups.

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Encourage your clergy to **preach on domestic violence and sexual abuse topics;** urge congregants to host or cooperate in community education events and to highlight opportunities for involvement in prevention and service activities.



# Embracing Our Theological Task

## A Reflection on Advocacy through the Quadrilateral

The remainder of this resource considers the reality of domestic violence, and connects it to our obligation as United Methodists to bear public witness, calling for you, the reader, to **speak up** and **speak out** as an advocate in ending domestic violence. This section offers an overview of our theological task, and four reflection exercises focusing on our call to advocacy. In considering Scripture, Reason, Tradition and Experience, the discernment tools of our Wesleyan heritage, we see evidence and opportunities moving us to action on behalf of those who have experienced violence in their most intimate relationships.

These reflections can be explored as a **small group** or **individually**. You are encouraged to read through the section explaining our theological task. Following the explanation of our theological task is a guide through the four-fold discernment process we receive from Wesley's writings and sermons. In light of each of these

tools, a case for advocacy and action can clearly be made for The United Methodist Church's ministry with and to those experiencing domestic violence.

### Additional Recommended Resources:

This guide includes links or passages needed to complete the activities herein. Two additional books, however, may be helpful in working through this resource. Access to these texts offers additional detail and insight that cannot be covered here. Both can be purchased through Cokesbury's online store.

Rueben P. Job. *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*. Nashville: Abingdon Press., 2007. (\$5.00 at Cokesbury.com)

Marie M. Fortune. *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*. New York: HarperOne, 1987. (\$6.39 at Cokesbury.com)

## Knowing God means answering the Call to Action

While many members of The United Methodist Church may feel uncomfortable or even intimidated by the term "theology," *The Book of Discipline* explains our theological task as follows:

*Theology is our effort to reflect upon God's gracious action in our lives. In response to the love of Christ, we desire to be drawn into a deeper relationship with the "author and perfecter of our faith." Our theological explorations seek to give expression to the mysterious reality of God's presence, peace and power in the world. By so doing, we attempt to articulate more clearly our understanding of the divine-human encounter and are thereby more fully prepared to participate in God's work in the world.* (§104)

By this definition, we as United Methodists are charged with a theological task of experiencing and expressing God's work in the world. The ways we articulate our reflections on God's graciousness in our lives affects how we live out that understanding in the world. The way we talk about God's relationship with and concern for the victims of domestic violence, for instance, is part of the way we as United Methodists are participating in God's care and concern for the world.

*Theology serves the Church by interpreting the world's needs and challenges to the Church and by interpreting the gospel to the world.* (§104)

We acknowledge that domestic violence is sadly among the world's most frequent injustices. We desire to see the church respond. The way in which "the people called Methodists" have gone about the task of discerning "God's gracious action in our lives" is often referred to as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

*[John] Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in **Scripture**, illuminated by **tradition**, vivified in personal **experience**, and confirmed by **reason**.* (§104)



# Scripture

The primary tool by which John Wesley instructed the people called Methodists to discern God's leading in their lives was through the disciplined study of the holy text of the Bible. Scripture is the primary source of Christian doctrine, and the primary criteria by which Wesley urged early Methodists to shape their theological reflection.

Passages in scripture, specifically those concerning marriage and divorce have historically been misused by church leaders in their responses to victims of domestic violence, often with harmful outcomes. These responses often focus on the submission of the wife to the husband and warnings against divorce. The United Methodist Church passed a resolution addressing these scriptural interpretations by acknowledging "misinterpretation and misuse of Christian Scriptures and traditions have contributed to violence against women and children, and to the guilt, self-blame, and suffering which victims experience, and to the rationalizations used by those who abuse." (2008 *Book of Resolutions*, #3423).

(The **Reason** activity in this resource will address specific verses that have been problematic for victims. Turn to that section for those verses if you need help calling them to mind.)

To fulfill the call to action in Resolution 3423, members of The United Methodist Church must find a way to engage and address these texts, especially given the prevalence of

domestic violence in our communities and congregations. "Reexamination of those misused passages can help us reclaim traditions in ways that support victims and challenge abuse in the family" (#3423). Wesley's teachings urge us as leaders of the church to do so responsibly by engaging these texts in light of tradition, reason and experience.

The Bible is a vast collection of writings; instructional letters, dynamic sermons, personal narratives and beautiful poetry. In addition to addressing troubling interpretations of texts, church leaders also have a great opportunity to explore texts of LIFE and PROMISE with victims.

Further, it is through reflection on these texts we are reminded of the value we each possess as children of God. As we remember and embrace these expressions of grace and sacred worth, we are reminded of the need to protect and encourage that in others. We know victims of domestic abuse often have a hard time believing these promises. So we take a step as advocates to use scripture to reach out with our ministry of affirmation.

## Activity

This lesson is a guided meditation through selections of Psalm 139. This is one of the most recognizable in the Book of Psalms. It has been interpreted many ways to speak to different causes. For this exercise we will use the process of *Lectio Divina*, a Latin phrase from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E. that means "spiritual reading."<sup>xxii</sup>

The process has four parts or moments. How long you spend on each moment will depend on your own situation. Don't rush this. Allow time for God.

**Lectio** — Read the lesson several times. Read it once silently, then out loud (if you are in a group, have a member read the passage out loud), and then read it a third time silently, very slowly.

**Meditatio** — Think about the passage in terms of your own life. What strikes you about the passage? Is there a particular work or phrase that jumps out at you? Spend time going over and over parts of the passage.

**Oratio** — Open your heart to God and allow the passage to lead you to a new place. If your thoughts move from the passage, let them go and follow along. Where does your heart take you?

**Contemplatio** — Finally, listen for God speaking to you in this moment. What is it that you are learning from the scripture and where it takes you?

Read each passage that follows, remembering to do in each of these moments just described. After each section are questions to consider. Space is included for you to journal your experience with each passage. Use the space to write about any part of your experience with the passage. Do not be tied to the questions suggested here.

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# Scripture

## Psalm 139

## The Inescapable God

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

## Consider journaling about ...

Often victims feel alone in their struggle, and as though they cannot share the truth with anyone of the violence they are experiencing. Frequently, abusers try to make victims feel alone in an effort to maintain the power and control they possess over the victim.

What do these verses teach us about God's involvement in our lives? What does it mean for victims who feel alone and isolated? How does this passage speak to you?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. In the bottom right corner, the number "10" is printed in a large, light-colored font. The rest of the page is blank.

**Lectio** — Read the lesson several times. Read it once silently, then out loud (if you are in a group, have a member read the passage out loud), and then read it a third time silently, very slowly.

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# Scripture

## Psalm 139

## The Inescapable God

Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

## Consider journaling about ...

So much of advocacy around this issue is about breaking the silence.

What does this passage say about God's involvement with us, even in our silence? How might this image of being hemmed in be particularly "wonderful" for a victim who is scared to break the silence?

Read each passage that follows, remembering to do in each of these moments just described. After each section are questions to consider. Space is included for you to journal your experience with each passage. Use the space to write about any part of your experience with the passage. Do not be tied to the questions suggested here.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"  
even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

This passage acknowledges life has moments of happiness and glory, glimpses of heaven, as well as periods where we make our beds as far from the life-giving light of God as we can. How might this understanding of God's presence in our highs and lows offer hope to victims of abuse?



**Meditation** — Think about the passage in terms of your own life. What strikes you about the passage? Is there a particular work or phrase that jumps out at you? Spend time going over and over parts of the passage.

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# Scripture

## The Inescapable God

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.

## Consider journaling about ...

These verses speak to the intimacy with which God knows each person's creation. The Psalmist uses a lot of words to describe the physical body (inward parts, womb, frame, substance). Consider the way a victim of abuse, someone who has experienced violence against their own body, might respond to some of these descriptions.

What does it mean that God has created and cares for these physical aspects of our bodies?

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# Scripture

## The Inescapable God

In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.  
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them — they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end — I am still with you.

The decision to leave an abusive home is painful. The future feels unknown. The image of life after this reality is still unformed. Many victims are fearful of leaving because of their economic dependence on their abuser. They have not been able to exert any power or control in their relationship and are fearful of what life will look like on their own. How will they provide for their children? Will the abuser find them and hurt them again, or even go so far as to kill them, as they often threatened?

How might this passage offer hope for someone who has made the decision to leave? How might a victim find God in these moments?

[illegible]

# Tradition

The second piece of Wesley's Quadrilateral examines the traditions of the church. John Wesley drew upon the works of the Patristic writers, writings produced by early ecumenical councils, and the teachings of the Reformers to read, understand and teach the Bible to those who followed his teachings early on.<sup>xxiii</sup> He believed the traditions of the church are important to consider in the process of discernment because they bear witness to the way in which the Holy Spirit moved others before us. Tradition, along with reason and experience, becomes a vehicle by which we can see the Spirit moving throughout the history of the church.

As United Methodists, in addition to the church traditions to which John Wesley turned, we must also add his teachings and the historical movements of Methodism to our understanding of tradition. John Wesley's sermons and Charles Wesley's hymns are vital in understanding tradition for United Methodists. The theology expressed in these historic texts continues to be a source for understanding the call of God on the lives of the people called Methodists.

The Book of Discipline explains:

*"The story of the church reflects the most basic sense of tradition, the continuing activity of God's Spirit transforming human life. Tradition is the history of that continuing environment of grace in and by which Christians live God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ. As such, tradition transcends the story of particular traditions." (§104)*

Exploring tradition in an effort to discern God's intention for our response to domestic violence can be complicated. This is especially so as we consider the responses of the broader church throughout history, as in the instances of misuse of scripture. In many cultures, abuse and rape are incorporated into the contextual tradition. The treatment of women is defined by these cultural norms and not by any broader understanding of God's intention for God's creation, or an ethical concern for basic human

rights.

In considering these challenges, The Book of Discipline states:

*We are now challenged by traditions from around the world that accent dimensions of Christian understanding that grow out of the suffering and victories of the downtrodden. These traditions help us rediscover the biblical witness to God's special commitment to the poor; the disabled, the imprisoned, the oppressed, the outcast. In these persons we encounter the living presence of Jesus Christ.*

*These traditions underscore the equality of all persons in Jesus Christ. They display the capacity of the gospel to free us to embrace the diversity of human cultures and appreciate their values. They reinforce our traditional understanding of the inseparability of personal salvation and social justice. They deepen our commitment to global peace. (§104)*

*The Wesleyan tradition is one that takes seriously the commands and guidance in scripture as they pertain to the practical, day-to-day actions of the followers of Methodism. Based on broader ethical mandates Wesley understood to guide followers of Jesus, Wesleyan tradition challenged certain interpretations of specific scriptural passages. It is a tradition that has continually called people to action as they discern God's leading.*

Slavery, for example, was for Wesley an injustice he refused to accept, despite the fact it appears in stories and metaphorical language in the Bible. In the last letter he wrote, Wesley urged William Wilberforce to stay strong in advocating for the end of the British slave trade.<sup>xxiv</sup> Later, in America, early Methodists committed to Wesley's stance on slavery would divide the largest Protestant church at the time, to **speak up** and **speak out** against slavery.

This particular tradition of advocacy could, then, logically speak to the issue of domestic violence.

## Activity

Do you remember doing book reports in school? We were asked to read a book, find out some basic information about the author and the book, summarize the plot, and conclude with what we had learned by reading the book.

To employ tradition as a discernment tool by which we understand God's movement in history, we need to know the roots of our heritage. We need to be able to articulate what has happened in our church previously, and learn from the ways the Spirit has moved our church. The following are brief summaries of two different sources of information about our United Methodist history and tradition.

Read through both and select one that you want to know more about. Then, write a "book report" about it. Do some research. Who wrote it? When? What were they trying to get across about humanity and about God? What else were they

known for? Who else has something to say about this text? How was this received?

If you are doing these reflections as a group, divide up the resources you are most interested in and then share your "report" with the members of your group. If you are working through these reflections individually, share your "report" with your pastor or a colleague in ministry if you are clergy. Ask for feedback. See if they can offer additional information about your topic. Learning more about our history as a denomination is an important part of understanding tradition's role in the Wesleyan quadrilateral.

Share with your small group or your pastor whether or not you think this knowledge of your tradition has equipped you for advocacy. How do you see the Wesleyan tradition as one that calls you to action around the injustice of domestic violence?

# Tradition

## The General Rules of John Wesley

The writings and sermons of John Wesley have been preserved over the years in a variety of volumes. Ministers continue to work with the topics in his sermons and writings as they instruct members of The United Methodist Church today. The General Rules, for example, consisted of an extensive list of practices Wesley thought would foster accountability to those in the early Methodist church. These rules continue to be a part of *The Book of Discipline*.

Among the many sermons of John Wesley collected and studied by Methodists over the years, many teachings have been incorporated into more contemporary contexts. For instance, Wesley's "General Rules" have been popularized by Bishop Rueben Job's recent book, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*.<sup>xxv</sup> Bishop Job paraphrases Wesley's General Rules into a more concise: "Do no harm," "Do good" and "Stay in love with God."

### Activity

Read The General Rules as they appear in *The Book of Discipline* (§ 103). Write your book report on the first rule, "Do no harm" in light of the teachings of Wesley and reflections of Bishop Job.

If you do not have access to *The Book of Discipline* through your church, this section of the *Discipline* is on UMC.org at <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=1658>.

In considering the first rule, "Do no harm," Job offers the following definition,

*To do no harm means that I will be on guard so that **all my actions and even my silence will not add injury to another of God's children or to any part of God's creation.** As did John Wesley and those in the early Methodist movement before me, I too will determine every day that my life will always be invested in the effort to bring healing instead of hurt; wholeness instead of division; and harmony with the ways of Jesus rather than the ways of the world.*<sup>xxvi</sup> (emphasis added)

## The Theology of Hymns by Charles Wesley

It is difficult to understate the importance of hymns in the early life of the Methodist movement. Charles Wesley, John's brother, is well known for authoring numerous hymns throughout his ministry. More than 50 of his hymns are in the current United Methodist Hymnal. These hymns, in addition to being a familiar part of the worship services, were important teaching tools used to explain theological concepts.

### Activity

Read the words to the popular Methodist hymn below and write a report about what this might mean for the way Methodists understand God's love for them and their call to love one another.

One line of each verse is in boldface type for you to specifically consider in relation to domestic violence. Also, consider the way this theology of God's love might be received by victims of domestic violence.

### Love Divine, All Loves Excelling<sup>xxvii</sup>

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down;  
fix in us thy humble dwelling;  
all thy faithful mercies crown!  
**Jesus thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;**  
visit us with thy salvation;  
enter every trembling heart.
2. Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit  
into every troubled breast!  
Let us all in thee inherit;  
let us find that second rest.  
Take away our bent to sinning;  
Alpha and Omega be;  
end of faith, as its beginning,  
set our hearts at liberty.
3. **Come, Almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;**  
suddenly return and never,  
nevermore thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray and praise thee without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.
4. **Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be.**  
Let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Words: Charles Wesley, 1747  
Music: John Zundel, 1870



# Reason

Wesley focused on the ways in which we read, understand and interpret scripture for discerning how we should live into God's call on our lives. He definitely regarded the Bible as the primary source by which we know and understand God's presence and direction on our lives. Yet, the other parts of the quadrilateral are vital to our comprehension of this direction.

*The Book of Discipline* explains:

*By reason we relate our witness to the full range of human knowledge, experience and service. Since all truth is from God, efforts to discern the connections between revelation and reason, faith and science, grace and nature, are useful endeavors in developing credible and communicable doctrine. We seek nothing less than a total view of reality that is decisively informed by the promises and imperatives of the Christian gospel, though we know well that such an attempt will always be marred by the limits and distortions characteristic of human knowledge. ¶104)*

Though we understand our human knowledge is limited, it offers us a way to connect biblical passages with our current circumstances and decisions we face. As humans, we have been created with the ability to reason. Further, the gospel writer in Matthew reminds us that Jesus commanded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, **and with all your mind.**" (Mark 12:30, emphasis added)

Our ability to think critically and use our minds to solve problems is a gift from God. It is one of the ways we

grow in love for God.

The church has too often failed victims of domestic violence in interpretations of scripture based solely on rule-based ethics. Dr. Marie Fortune explains this rule-based decision making in her book, *Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us*:

*For many people, much of traditional ethics as it was applied to personal decision making has been rule-based ethic. Someone (parents or the minister) handed down a list of rules (for example, the Ten Commandments or the Church's teaching), and the only thing that was important was that you learned the rules and followed them. If you followed the rules, you were considered a good person and your salvation was assured. If you didn't follow the rules, you were a bad person and often guilt-ridden.* <sup>xxviii</sup>

When we adhere so strongly to a certain doctrine or interpretation of scripture, offering simplistic responses without considering the current context of victims who come to us seeking spiritual guidance and physical safety, we risk imposing unfair and unhealthy expectations on those who have come to us for help. Fortune explains:

*These examples of rule-based ethics, unconnected to consequences or to the concern for doing least harm to one's neighbor, are only one indicator of the profound failure of many official religious teachings which ignore the very real and immediate ethical dilemmas of our day.* <sup>xxix</sup>

## Activity

This activity looks at troubling passages in light of our Wesleyan call to use reason in interpreting scripture. Following are a few examples of verses used to defend and preserve marriage, despite the violence and abuse present in the home. They are listed in one of Dr. Fortune's other resources, *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*.

Read each verse and the example of a rule-based ethical response to it. Then, think through what else is going on in each of these passages. Using the knowledge you've gained about domestic violence in this resource and what you know of God's good intentions for all of God's children, what other ways might we be able to respond to these statements.

**Note:** Fortune's text is a great resource for how you might respond to these questions. The page numbers for each response are included here. Feel free to offer a different response if you feel led to do so. If you do not have access to a copy of *Keeping the Faith*, consult a trusted religious leader about other responsible interpretations of these verses in scripture.



# Reason

## Activity

Read each verse and the example of a rule-based ethical response to it. Then, think through what else is going on in each of these passages. Using the knowledge you've gained about domestic violence in this resource and what you know of God's good intentions for all of God's children, what other ways might we be able to respond to these statements. The columns "Another Reasoned Response" features selections from Dr. Fortune's book.

Verse	Rule-based Ethical Response	Another Reasoned Interpretation	Your Response
<b>Matthew 19:6</b> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.	"I promised to love him for 'better or for worse.' I can't break that vow. The Bible says divorced is wrong."	"Scripture doesn't simply prohibit divorce... it points to the importance of faithfulness...Bringing violence into one's marriage is also unfaithfulness." <i>(pp.36-37)</i>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>Ephesians 5:21-23</b> Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.  Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior.	"Clearly, the wife is directed to submit to her husband in the Bible. Does this mean that I have to submit to his violent outbursts too?"	"[Verse 21] is the starting point for all our relationships as Christians... [it] means that we should all.. seek to be flexible with each other and give way to each other... Jesus was the servant of all who followed him, and he gave himself up for them. Never did he order people around, threaten, hit, or frighten them." <i>(pp. 14-15)</i>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>Matthew 5:39</b> But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;	"He asked me to forgive him, and I think that he's changed. Doesn't the Bible say that we should forgive, and turn the other cheek?"	"Jesus is trying to teach us that we should not act out of vengeance, that we should not seek to punish the one who harmed us by returning evil for evil." <i>(p. 30)</i>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>Matthew 16:24</b> Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."	"I've read in the Bible that suffering is just something we as Christians have to expect. Maybe this is just my cross to bear."	"[T]he suffering of being abused in one's family is very different. It has no good purpose. It never brings God's will for our lives... You do not deserve to suffer abuse at the hands of a member of your family." <i>(p. 18)</i>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



# Experience

The first three lessons have examined the importance of our scriptural inheritance, the historical church teachings, and our human capacity to read and understand these writings and teachings and use them in our decision making.

The final piece of the quadrilateral focuses on the individual and communal experiences of people of faith as the Holy Spirit continues to work in our lives today. Wesley taught that experiences should be examined to confirm the ways in which God's grace was attested to. Experiences affect the way we approach scripture. Conversely, how we read scripture affects our religious experience. Examining these experiences for the way in which they reflect what we know to be true of God's love and concern for us is vital in our theological task as United Methodists.

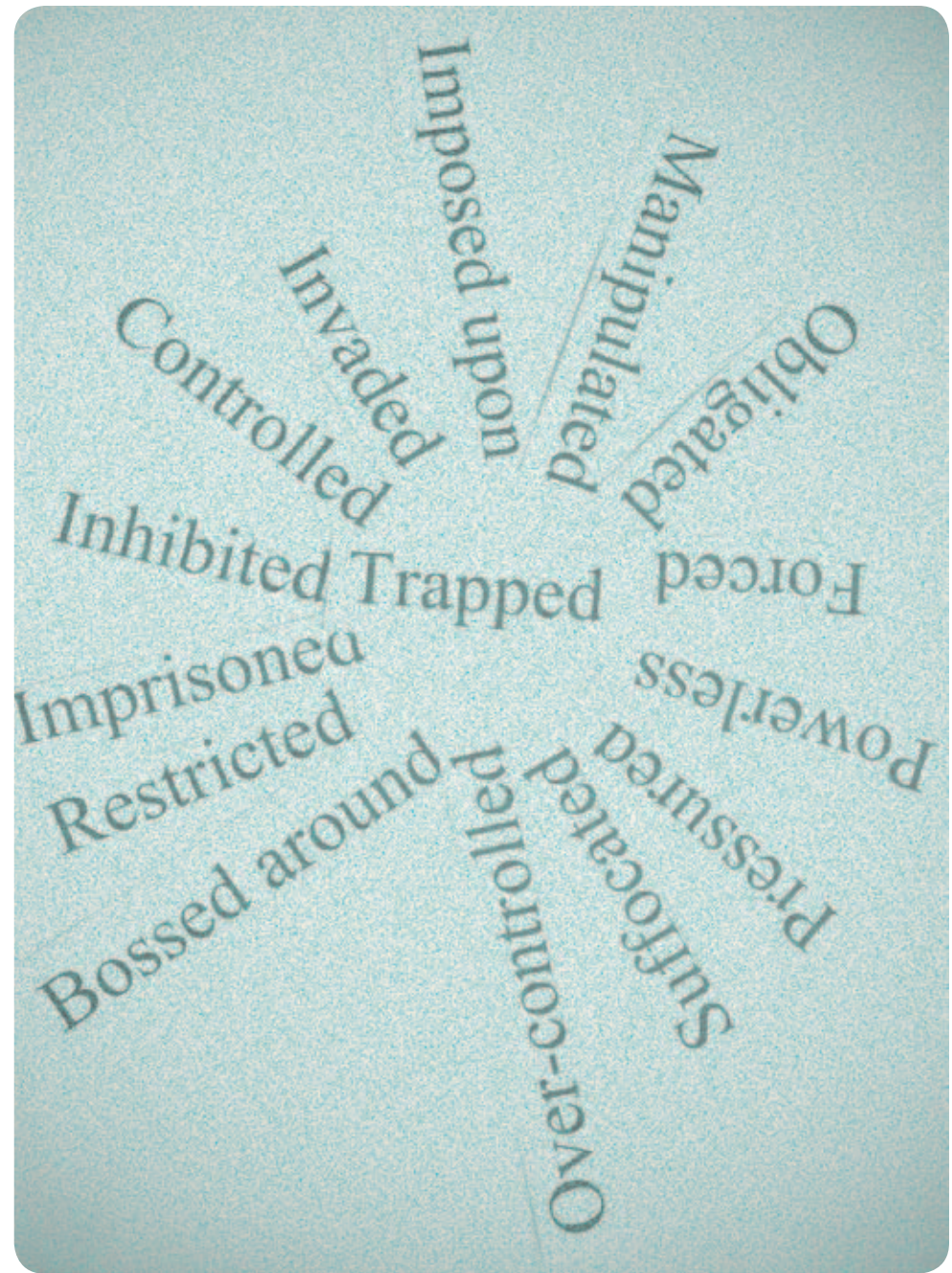
Sadly, we acknowledge that not all life experiences reflect the promises and expressions of love and grace reflected upon in the lesson on scripture. In *The Book of Discipline*, we read:

*Some facets of human experience tax our theological understanding. Many of God's people live in terror, hunger, loneliness and degradation. Every day experiences of birth and death, of growth and life in the created world, and an awareness of the wider social relations also belong to serious theological reflection. (§104)*

As we consider life experiences in light of God's intention for us, we

should call into question violence and abuse. If we consider how we have understood God's love toward us, then we cannot see experiences of violence as compatible with this understand of what God wants for our lives.

When we read that one in three women are victims of violence, and for most this violence is perpetrated by their most intimate partners, we must question how this experience reflects or rejects God's care and concern for these women. Allowing the experiences of victims to be told and heard is important in helping others reflect and discern God's leading. If these experiences go unspoken, how can we really determine what God is trying to do in the lives of families around the world?



# Experience

## Activity

Following is an article that reflects personal stories from Kenyan women, who are struggling to give voice to the reality of gender-based violence in their communities. Read this reflection in light of the understanding of experience. Ask, as you read, if these are experiences reflecting God's good intention for God's daughters in this community.

### 'Fearfully and Wonderfully Made' <sup>xxx</sup>

*A glimpse of abuse and women in Kenya  
by Linda Bales Todd*

Hearing women talk about the power of men over women is not really unusual when one considers the horrific statistic that one out of three women experience some level of abuse from men during their lives. Hearing those stories in parts of the world where women are extremely poor and marginalized, however, can be even more alarming due to the lack of options for women living with ongoing violence.

Last week I had the privilege of meeting 14 dynamic women in the Ngando slum outside Nairobi, Kenya, during a visit to Riruta United Methodist Church located right in the heart of the area. Ngando is a smaller slum, with about 5,000 people where only about 10% of the people are employed. There are no jobs. It is estimated that there are some 500 AIDS orphans in the area with no orphanage.

This Sunday, the church was filled. Twenty some adults, 18 children, several of them orphans, and 14 youths gathered to take part in holy worship praising a God who loved them. All 52 of us were crammed

into a small square structure that sat dead center in a neighborhood where the homes were within inches of the outside walls. This church, indeed, was a visible entity in this impoverished area. The singing was vibrant — some songs were from the traditional culture rather than the UMC hymnal. Singing in Swahili, those gathered allowed the spirit to move within, as evidenced by the intensity in voice, passion and movement. The children were just as much a part of this service as the adults, and clearly engaged with enthusiasm in the ministry of music.

The women present were willing to gather after the Sunday service to talk about life and issues affecting them and their families. Although somewhat reticent at first, they soon broke into conversation about their dreams and heartaches.

What's it like living in situations where women have no — literally no — options to move out of violent situations? What's it like having a dream for your children to go to school, but having no money to support that dream? What do you like best about being a woman? These were some of the questions quietly discussed as we sat in a close

circle having an unspoken covenant to protect each other in this sacred space.

One woman spoke of what typically might happen if a woman is abused and calls the police. "Well, the police, if they respond at all, might show up five hours later and then will demand sex from the woman." "Nothing will result." "Many people when talking about violence in the home blame the women and the man goes unpunished."

What about leaving the man? "Impossible. We have no income of our own, no place to go, plus we have our children." Marital rape is common and goes virtually unreported.

When talking about birth control and ways to protect oneself from the spread of AIDS, it became clear this was tricky. Men demand sex and women don't (can't) say no. One spoke about her desire to have a tubal ligation so she wouldn't continue having one baby after another, but said it was costly: "When I have money, I need to spend it to feed my children and pay their school fees; so, my needs are put aside for them."

As we closed our session, it was agreed that one option would be having some kind of ongoing gathering like this where the women could share in confidence what's happening in their lives, a support group of sorts. My prayer is that this idea comes to pass. This is one church that just may provide that beacon of hope for these women who love God with their whole hearts, believe they are "fearfully and wonderfully" made and want to see their dreams, at least for their children, come true.

## Questions

What other actions feel appropriate to take in light of reflecting on experience?

If you are **clergy**, how might you share this or another woman's experience in a sermon? How might this sharing experience have an impact on others in your congregation who have had similar experiences?

If you are **laity**, can you talk to your pastor about this woman's experience, sharing what you've learned about just how common this is? How might you work to make your church a place where women can share their experiences and reflect upon them in light of God's good intention for their lives?

Finally, **write a statement** of your own experience with this study. How has the Spirit moved you? How have you experienced God during these reflections?

Is there an outlet where you can share this story: a church newsletter, a blog, the local paper? Ending domestic violence will only be possible when the social structures that hide the reality from public view are broken down, when the lies we tell about it being some other community's problem are dispelled.



# Conclusion

As we consider stories and images in scripture, and reflect upon them in light of our tradition as United Methodists, the gift of our human ability to reason and the ways in which God is reflected in our experiences and those of others, we begin to see a clear directive to offer a public witness when faced with injustice.

Jesus' life of ministry was spent questioning the powers and principalities in light of what he knew of the kingdom of God. Jesus knew this kind of Shalom, firsthand. He could not remain silent when presented with anything short of this kind of peace. If he had, he would have been complacent.

Now it is our turn.

As a disciple of Jesus and a minister of the gospel by your baptism, you have been given information about this injustice that *is* affecting people in your community and congregation. Will you **speak up**?

Through this resource you have reflected on God's intentions for creation, and Jesus' concern for the marginalized. Will you **speak out** and create congregations that are places where the silence is broken?

Or will you, in your silence, be complacent?

The world is awaiting your voice.

Advocacy begins with **breaking the silence**.

Are you ready to become an advocate?

## Resources and Further Information

### National Organizations and Resources:

U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE  
(1-800-799-7233)  
TTY – 1-800-787-3224.

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (<http://www.nrcdv.org/>)  
The Domestic Violence Awareness Project (<http://dvam.vawnet.org/>)

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (<http://www.ncadv.org>)  
The Remember My Name Project (<http://www.ncadv.org/programs/RememberMyNameProject.php>)

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)  
1-800-656-HOPE (Call this national hotline to be automatically connected to the nearest rape crisis center. It is available 24 hours a day and is confidential.)

### Specific Groups of Interest:

Native American Women (<http://www.amnestyusa.org/violence-against-women/maze-of-injustice/page.do?id=1021163>)

The Survivor Project ([www.survivorproject.org](http://www.survivorproject.org))  
Trans and Intersex Survivors of Domestic Violence: Defining Terms, Barriers, & Responsibilities. This website addresses violence that occurs in gay or lesbian relationships.

Men's Initiative for Jane Doe, Inc. ([www.mijd.org](http://www.mijd.org))

### Faith/Denominational Resources:

The Faith Trust Institute ([www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org))

National Declaration by Religious and Spiritual Leaders to Address Violence Against Women (<http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/take-action/declaration>)

The United Methodist Church (<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=5259669&ct=8189821>)

General Board of Church & Society (<http://www.umc-gbcs.org/site/apps/nlnet/content.aspx?c=frLJK2PKLqF&b=5282929&ct=7161645>)

National Council of Churches – Justice for Women's Working Group (<http://www.ncccusa.org/womensministry/domesticviolence2.html>)

Presbyterian Church USA (<http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/dancing.pdf>)

Safe Havens: Interfaith Partnership against Domestic Violence (<http://www.interfaithpartners.org/>)

### For More Information:

Department of Justice – Office on Violence Against Women (<http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/>)

Statistics ([http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc\\_Files\\_VAWnet/NRC\\_Stats.pdf](http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/NRC_Stats.pdf))

# About the Author



Meredith Hoxie is a Master of Divinity candidate at the Boston University School of Theology. She has completed two consecutive summer internship experiences with the General Board of Church & Society (GBCS) in Washington, D.C. Prior to her work on this resource, she worked last summer on building and implementing GBGS's John 10:10 Campaign, advocating health-care reform that was accessible, inclusive, accountable and available to all. Her care and concern for all of God's children come from her daily desire to be a disciple of Jesus, who's life and ministry inspire acts of radical love.

As a declared candidate pursuing Deacon's Orders in The United Methodist Church, Meredith's vocational calling continues to focus on the intersection of religious education and social ethics. This resource bridges these interests, often housed in different departments in the seminary, but so vital in the life of the church.

Meredith is a member of Front Street United Methodist Church in Burlington, N.C., and is grateful for the ways the congregation continues to support her call to ministry.

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