

RCH SPEECH TO THE FIRST PART OF THE MOTION

Thank you Bishop John for your introduction to this issue, and thank you for the leadership you have shown in raising the issue of Domestic Violence in Tasmania since at least 2001, and also for the material from 2004 on a Christian Response to Domestic Violence that sadly is as relevant today as when it was written,.

I will speak to the first part of the motion our statements about family violence, Helen will give an example of a pastoral response to family violence, and I will then speak to the second part of the motion, what we will do now.

INTRODUCTION

One of the first comments that Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty made, following the death of her son Luke at the hands of his father, was this: "I want to tell everybody that family violence happens to everybody. No matter how nice your house is, how intelligent you are. It can happen to anyone, and everyone."¹

Just as worrying as the widespread possibility of family violence is the widespread prevalence. Tasmania Police Commissioner, Darren Hine, recently spoke of "horrific" levels of family violence in Tasmania.² He also said "Police attend about 50 family violence incidents every day across Tasmania. Some days a police officer will attend three separate family violence incidents in a shift."³ These figures appear to be a 15% increase from those reported in 2012-13.⁴

In *The Mercury* this week it was reported that of the 1900 family violence incidents reported to the Tasmania Police, 203 involved drugs, 516 involved alcohol and 127 involved weapons.⁵

These figures are even more alarming as it is estimated that between 60-80% of incidents of domestic violence go unreported to Police.

Perhaps the most sobering statistic is that as of May 7, across Australia at least 25 women, five men and four children have allegedly died this year due to domestic violence. At least two of the deceased women were pregnant at the time of their deaths. There have been more deaths since then, including one woman shot on a main road in Tasmania.

Given these statistics I believe that as followers of Christ we cannot remain silent. This motion seeks to give voice to our reaction to this violence as well as commit ourselves to take action.

1. The Synod deplores the horrific levels of family violence in the Tasmanian Community,

As the Anglican Church in Tasmania we firstly need to recognise the enormity of this problem and deplore the horrific levels of family violence.

We cannot simply think of these as "domestic issues". The violence may usually happen behind closed doors but these are community issues that need to be brought out into the open, be part of the public conversation and addressed.

2. grieves with those who have suffered the pain and trauma of any form of domestic abuse,

Secondly we need to grieve with and stand by all victims of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is wider than violence, it can be physical, psychological, financial,

¹ <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2014/october/1412085600/helen-garner/mother-courage>

² <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-18/tasmania-police-called-to-50-domestic-violence-incidents-a-week/6477492>

³ <http://www.themercury.com.au/news/opinion/talking-point-when-a-home-is-far-from-sweet/story-fnj4f64i-1227383188028>

⁴ *Safe At Home Annual Report 2012-13*, Interdepartmental report, Tasmanian Government

⁵ Darren Hine, *The Mercury*, 11/6/2015, p13.

sexual, spiritual, or through neglect. Furthermore victims can be of any demographic, any age, any gender.

However we need to recognise that this is a gender biased issue, predominantly it is women who are abused, both more frequently and more severely. Children in these relationships are also victims directly or indirectly. Of the 1900 reported incidents in Tasmania till the end of March children and teenagers were present at 1140 of them.⁶ Such experience of, or witnessing such abuse, can lead to low self esteem, anxiety and other behavioural problems.

We also need to recognise that given the statistics it is very possible that there are some for whom this is more than just another Synod motion. We grieve with you.

Our view of God and in Jesus his identification with the persecuted and the victim means that we know he grieves and so we must grieve also.

We as Churches need to work for victims and those who care for them. It was encouraging to see Church Together donate over \$3000 to the work of the Hobart Women's Shelter this year. What can we do in our local situation?

3. recognises that such abuse occurs within the Christian community and the congregations of the Diocese of Tasmania,

But we must do so not from a position of any superiority. Whilst much more research could be done, studies in England have shown that the incidence of domestic violence within the church is at or about the same level as in wider society, and clergy and pastoral workers are not immune.⁷

This terrible reality was made plain in a recent article in the Sydney Morning Herald. A lady wrote "Ten years ago... my then husband was supposedly a Christian, a very pious, rather obsessive one. He was a great amateur preacher, very encouraging to his friends and evangelistically inclined. He led Bible studies. He wanted to train for the ministry... He just had one little problem. He liked psychologically torturing me. And dragging me by the hair around our apartment. And punching me – hard, whilst telling me how pathetic I was..."⁸

I wish I could say that I had not seen evidence of such abuse but I have, and I suspect that many members of the clergy would echo the seriousness of this issue within the Church.

There is a need for the church of God to grieve that such a distortion of the gospel occurs in our midst. This motion is a form of recognition, a confession even, that this denial of Christ occurs amongst our number

4. maintains that family violence is absolutely unacceptable in any circumstance,

We also need to say in the strongest possible terms that family violence is absolutely unacceptable in any circumstance. There may be all manner of triggers and context, and the prevalence of alcohol and drugs in family violence matters is truly alarming. Such issues need to be tackled.

But violence is never the answer and the victim is never to blame.

Particularly as Christians in our relationships we are to be modelling Christ. If we are to be like Jesus how can we justify violence.

Sadly the Church has not always equivocally taken this stand, but we must now. Just as statistically there are likely to be victims here today, it is possible that there are perpetrators: family violence is unacceptable in any circumstance.

⁶ Darren Hine, The Mercury, 11/6/2015, p13.

⁷ *Responding to Domestic Abuse*, Church House Publishing, 2006, p2

⁸ "Isabella Young" (pseudonymous), <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/smh-editorial/abuse-inside-christian-marriages--a-personal-story-20150301-13rrvr.html>

5. commits the Diocese of Tasmania to work to changing community values from those which allow this abuse to occur to those which foster respectful and safe relationships.

We must do more thought than simply recognise the seriousness of the current situation, we need to commit ourselves to changing it. The Governor in her recent Webber Lecture highlighted that this cannot be done by law reform but by societal change.⁹

We therefore need wherever possible to be challenging attitudes which allow such abuse to occur, whether it occurs at work, on a night out, or in the Church.

We must particularly seek to help our young people. The Our Watch website reports along with many other alarming statistics that 1 in 4 young people don't think it is serious if a guy who is normally gentle, sometimes slaps his girlfriend when he is drunk and they're arguing.¹⁰

A particular responsibility must fall those on the men of our community. We need to encourage respectful relationships and seek to model that particularly to our children especially our boys. Again to quote our Police Commissioner "Our boys will model our behaviour and they need to see that there is never a situation where violence can be excused, condoned or accepted."¹¹

We should support initiatives such as Our Watch – The Line Campaign which among other things aims to redefine a strong man as never hurting a woman

But as Christians we not only should expose the darkness but we can also shine light. We have the example of the self giving Christ, the wisdom of the sages who speak of turning from anger and shunning the way of violence, and the model early Christian community, and above all the God of love. We not only can speak against unhealthy attitudes but can point to Christ and his means as the way to foster safe and truly loving relationships.

Conclusion

It is not enough for us then to move motions in Synod and have our emotions moved in speeches we need to raise these issues in our families, in our Churches and in our communities.

The Ven. Helen Phillips is going to give an example of how she raised family violence and domestic abuse at the Parish of Howrah.

HELEN PHILLIPS SERMON

Over the past few months it became clear to me that it was time we commenced an open discussion in our parishes about Family violence.

I decided to bring up this topic during our regular teaching program.

I was grateful for material Bishop John prepared many years ago as a starting point.

In the sermon I focused at one point on the traumatic circumstances of a friend experiencing emotional and physical abuse. At another point in the sermon I made some comments about forgiveness.

I'd like to share these parts with you.

Where there is family violence of any kind, there is darkness, there are shadows and the truth is very often hidden.

Where there is family violence, the ways of God are not lived out or reflected because behaviour, where people are pressured, demeaned, abused, physically,

⁹ http://www.govhouse.tas.gov.au/sites/default/files/speeches/webber_lecture_-_20_may_15.pdf

¹⁰ [http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-\(1\)/The-Line](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-(1)/The-Line)

¹¹ <http://www.themercury.com.au/news/opinion/talking-point-when-a-home-is-far-from-sweet/story-fnj4f64i-1227383188028>

emotionally, sexually, or financially are not compatible with the behaviour that reflects the love of God and the high standing he intends for humanity.

Tragically violence occurs in homes in our community, and in the homes of members of our churches.

These people are living in fear in their own homes ... the place where they should be able to feel safe and protected.

STORY

Some time ago I walked a journey with a woman, and her children who had suffered significant family violence for many years.

Her daughter also suffered sexual abuse from her father.

My friend was married to a man who intimidated her, both physically and emotionally.

She, along with her children, lived with constant anxiety and fear. Part of the problem for her was that her husband appeared to be a 'nice' man.

He attended social functions in our community and occasionally attended church.

He held down a respectable job.

To all intents and purposes they had a happy life, in a nice suburb, in a neat and tidy home.

It took a long time for my friend to gradually reveal the life she was living.

Her husband had become an alcoholic, while still holding down his job.

Her teenage daughter started staying over at her friend's house whenever her father had days off.

You can guess why.

The sons would often not come home and also began to blame the mother for the father's behavior.

My friend began experiencing not only verbal, but violent physical attacks, including rape.

At times she would withdraw. She was often anxious.

A couple of close friends came along side her, but because so many things appeared to be 'normal', and the husband appeared to be a 'nice' man, people could not conceive the complexity of the situation and the horror the family experienced.

This put her in the position of feeling at times that she was not really telling the truth, and also, that telling did not help.

Her self esteem suffered greatly and she felt at times she was the bad person in the situation, and that what was happening to her and her children was in some way her fault.

She kept trying harder, and harder to please everyone, but nothing changed, except for the worst.

She eventually left and separated from her husband.

It took a long time.

I attended court hearings with her, I had a lot of cups of coffee, I took her kids places, and supported her and the children through divorce proceedings. Just being available was so important.

About 8 years ago I had the privilege of conducting her second marriage to a very different man.

Everyday life, did change for her, bit by bit, but there are scars which will always remain.

Through a very painful era, which lasted perhaps 15 years, she has felt only a few have understood.

What was worse, she felt that because there was no deep understanding, and the violence continued for such a long period of time, she worries the problem may be

repeated with her children, who, having grown up in that situation for many years, may think that family violence is normal.

The church, you and me, have often been far from helpful.

The church has not always been there for survivors of abuse in the home.

We have often been naive, and have not always believed the tentative truth telling of victims and survivors.

We have often not known what to say or do.

In our uncomfortableness, sometimes we have drawn away from a victim when we should have been like Christ, and drawn closer in love and support.

We have not always acknowledged family violence for what it is.

A mammoth wrong, that in no way honors God, or the victory Christ has achieved. It can never be justified.

FORGIVENESS

There is another topic we must be very clear about as Christians connected with family violence.

Sometimes we have misused the wonderful and liberating message of forgiveness, and turned it into a heavy burden on victims.

Forgiveness has sometimes been used as a solution, but often as a far too simple a strategy to resolve issues, and has actually kept victims in a position of powerlessness and danger.

True repentance is part of the pathway to forgiveness. Evidence of changed hearts, changed behaviour and the acceptance of consequences for causing harm to others are part of true repentance.

Jesus does give forgiveness freely to all who TRULY REPENT but it is not a quick remedy to a prickly situation.

We make it very clear that repentance by offenders involves much more than remorse and confession.

It involves completely changing both attitudes and behaviour.

As we read in Ezekiel 18: 30-31 God requires of perpetrators a turning from transgressions and completely new hearts which means changed attitudes and changed behaviour.

We must also be prepared to hold offenders accountable and to work with them to change their behaviour.

Today, I want to say, I want to be a part of the end to family and family violence, I want us all to be part of the end to family violence in whatever way we are able.

To do this we must firstly be prepared to talk about it.

We must also provide open and safe places where people can talk about how life really is at home.

And we must not close down difficult conversations, just because we feel uncomfortable.

The protocols we can adopt today take us forward to creating places in our churches where we are prepared to talk about difficult personal issues, to do it as well as we possibly can and to then walk beside others as they find a path to a healthier transformed life.

RCH SPEECH TO THE SECOND PART OF THE MOTION

In the second part of the motion there are three specific actions that we as a Diocese can take.

OUR BISHOP

We call on our Bishop to continue to speak out on this issue as he has done in the past, to help raise awareness and help give a voice to a Christian response.

DO SOME WORK OURSELVES

We also need to ensure that our Churches and organisations can respond well to the reality of domestic abuse which happens amongst us and near us.

I am suggesting then that suitable material is sent to all Anglican organisations and parishes to stimulate discussion and create a culture of awareness as well as formulate appropriate local responses to the real situations of domestic abuse that occur amongst us and near us.

We must be able to be loving neighbours to those who are in need of support and care. To this end I commend the 2006 document from the Church of England entitled "Responding to domestic abuse: Guidelines for those with pastoral responsibilities."¹²

The document is a realistic, thoughtful, and thorough consideration of how the church may well respond to domestic abuse. It offers a sociological study, a theological framework, and clear guidelines at every level of church ministry: for clergy and pastoral workers, parishes, and for dioceses.

It gives many helpful practical suggestions, such as including a discussion of domestic abuse in marriage preparation which I have started doing at the Cathedral. There are also very helpful appendices in the fuller document on "Harmful Theologies" and "Challenging myths, excuses and denial."

I hope that all of you and many in your Churches will read it.

FORMULATE A TASMANIAN RESPONSE.

This though is only a first step. Whilst there is much in this report that we could well adopt it is designed for the English context with numerous demographic and legal differences from our own.

So we will be looking for your response to this material so that we can have a Tasmanian resource which will give us appropriate protocols and standards throughout that the Diocese so that our organisations, parishes and leaders are equipped to respond as the body of Christ and God's family should to all forms of domestic abuse.

This is a serious issue. It deserves our attention. It deserves a good and godly response.

I commend the motion to the house.¹³

¹² <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1163604/domesticabuse.pdf>

¹³ Thanks to The Rev'd Will Briggs for his work in the preparation of this material.

HELEN PHILLIPS TO PRAY**A PRAYER FOR THOSE SUFFERING ABUSE**

Loving God,
whose Son was both victim and victor,
we cry to you for those who suffer abuse,
....(silence for us to fill in names) ...
Be with them in confusion and pain.
Heal the wounds of body and mind;
break open the prisons of fear, self-doubt and despair;
and strengthen them to face the future with faith, hope and courage.
Enable us to listen, to believe and to love.
Reach out to them with your love,
that they may be made whole in body, mind and spirit,
through the healing touch of the suffering Christ. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO ABUSE

Judge of all the earth,
God of justice,
we bring before you all who abuse others.
Turn the hearts of the violent from the way of evil.
Fill them with a hatred of the damage they do,
so bringing them to true repentance
and amendment of their lives,
for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.