

A close-up photograph of a dark grey door. Two vertical metal plates are mounted on the door, each with a long, rusted metal bolt. A heavy metal chain is wrapped around both bolts and secured with a large, silver padlock. The door has a recessed panel design.

REPORT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Report produced by the Ad Hoc
Committee on Domestic Violence



THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF QUEENSLAND



OFFICE OF CLERK OF ASSEMBLY

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXTRACT MINUTE

At Brisbane, and within the Assembly Hall, Brisbane Boys' College, Brisbane, at 1.30pm on the 21 June 2016 on which the General Assembly being duly constituted.

INTER ALIA: MINUTE 74

74. Deliverance as a Whole

The deliverance as a whole was approved as follows:

That the Assembly:

1. Affirm the inherent dignity of all men, women, and children, whatever their age, or marital status, as people made in the image of God, to bear this image in his world, so thoroughly repudiates any use of Christian concepts of submission or authority in any relationship to justify the physical or emotional abuse of any person.
2. Determine that this repudiation does not extend to the gentle, but firm, physical discipline by parents of a child in order to prevent harm or because of dangerous behaviour; but urges parents to carefully guard their hearts in such situations so that discipline is not retributive, angry, or abusive.
3. Request the Clerk of the Assembly and Moderator to write a letter on behalf of the Assembly thanking the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales Gospel, Society, and Culture Committee for their work on this issue.
4. Request the Clerk of the Assembly and the Director of Ministry Resourcing and Christian Education to contact the relevant people within the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales to ensure our practices and policies are consistent in this area with those recommended by the *Breaking The Silence*.
5. Circulate the report and the 2015 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales Statement on Domestic Violence to all sessions of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland.
6. Request that the Committee on Outreach and Nurture, Ministry Resourcing and the GIST Committee to take on the work of equipping our churches to respond to domestic violence within our churches and as an issue of public policy in accordance with this report.
7. Thank and discharge the Ad Hoc Committee on Domestic Violence.

Extracted from the records of the General Assembly by me

Please note that this extract minute is as yet unconfirmed. If there are significant changes I will advise you accordingly.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Clark', is written over a horizontal line.

(Rev) R Clark
Clerk of Assembly

Report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Domestic Violence

The 2015 Presbyterian Church of Queensland Assembly created this ad hoc committee to create a Domestic Violence Policy for the Presbyterian Church of Queensland.

At the time, there was a public conversation about Domestic Violence, or Family Violence, taking place, after the publication of a review paper from the Queensland Government's *Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland*. This taskforce published a paper called *Not Now, Not Ever*.¹ The civil magistrate has a role to play in wielding the sword and seeking justice in these circumstances and are our partners in addressing this scourge in our churches and community, and while we do not want our policies or response to domestic violence to be entirely led by this taskforce, we note the following recommendations from their report:

- Leaders of all faiths and religions to take a leadership role in fostering and encouraging respectful relationships in their community, and to teach their communities and congregations that coercive control and violence are never acceptable
- Leaders of faith to provide support to victims of domestic and family violence and encourage their community to do so.
- Community organisations to play a leadership role in creating a community environment where all members of their community feel empowered to take action to stop violence. This includes helping members to develop skills in preventing and safely intervening in domestic and family violence incidents in their community

Shortly after our Ad Hoc task force was commissioned, the 2015 Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales adopted its own position paper on Domestic and Family Violence, and issued a statement to the public, and to all sessions of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales. We are thankful for the work of the New South Wales Committee on Gospel, Society and Culture. And would recommend that our Assembly adopt it as the basis of our response to Domestic and Family Violence with some additions regarding expectations when domestic violence occurs within marriage.

Our challenge as Christians, in responding to evil, is to humanize both the survivor, and the perpetrator, and offer the Gospel of Jesus to all parties. This does not, however, mean covering up abuse or not letting the civil magistrate play its part in upholding justice and protecting those in our community; and it does not mean staying neutral. We are to side with the vulnerable and the oppressed, not join the oppressor; and to be silent or neutral in some mistaken approach to the Gospel, is to be complicit. Speaking the truth in love means calling those in sin to repent and to account for their sins. Part of seeing the humanity of the perpetrator is to acknowledge that their actions, as actions of people who are human, have consequences; it is not loving for the cost of these consequences to not be paid. If we pretend actions don't have consequences in a human sense we actually dehumanise

¹ <https://www.qld.gov.au/community/documents/getting-support-health-social-issue/dfv-report-vol-one.pdf>

the perpetrator and fail to do our duty to them, to the victim, and to our society. The Gospel itself is built on Jesus seeing our human acts as acts with real costs and consequences and paying for them; but this payment does not remove the role of the court system in seeking justice for those who are wronged. This is not to say true repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation is never possible, or that it should not be our aim, but rather that we should exercise care as a church community to protect our flock, and to stand clearly with the wronged party as we offer our strength for their protection.

Definitions of Domestic and Family Violence

We believe the definition of Domestic and Family Violence from *Not Now, Not Ever*, and the relevant Queensland legislation, is a good working definition for our committee, and our Assembly, in forming a position. These statements come from this report:

- Domestic violence, also called intimate partner violence, occurs in a variety of forms including physical, emotional, and economic violence within any type of relationship against any person.
- Domestic violence presents a unique definition challenge, as it encompasses a broad range of behaviours.
- Domestic violence can occur within any form of relationship, towards any person, at any time, regardless of personal, cultural, or economic standing.

In Queensland, the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012 (the Act) provides the legal instrument to respond to domestic and family violence.

The Act covers:

- People who are in a relevant relationship, which includes intimate personal relationships (married and de facto spouses, parents of a child, engaged and couple relationships, including same sex couples)
- Family relationships (adult relatives by blood or marriage, including extended or kinship relationships where a person is regarded as a relative)
- Informal care relationships (where the carer is unpaid).

The Act defines the conduct of domestic violence as including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse or any other threatening, coercive, or controlling behaviour which causes the victim to fear for their safety or wellbeing or that of someone else.

Many experts have noted a category of spiritual abuse, or a spiritual aspect of domestic and family violence, which might involve

- Using biblical or religious texts to justify / rationalise abusive behaviour or control
- Ridiculing a persons' beliefs
- Isolation from spiritual family
- Denying access to ceremonies, land or family,
- Preventing religious observance,

These are aspects that we, as an individual's Christian community, may notice before others in our community do. Unfortunately, these are flags for abuse to which Christian leaders can be blind because they may be concealed in what appears to be a healthy headship/submission theology."

A starting point for legal discussion around these issues may be found on the website of law firm in Brisbane, who seek to have a Christian mind around these issues.²

The Situation in Queensland

According to the *Not Now, Not Ever* report:

- *In 2013-14, there were 66,016 occurrences of domestic and family violence reported to Queensland police.*
- *This equates to over 180 incidents of domestic and family violence being reported every day across the state.*
- *17 homicides relating to domestic and family violence occurred in Queensland in 2012-13. On average, across Australia, one woman is killed by her partner every week.*
- *The annual cost of domestic and family violence to the Queensland economy is estimated to be between \$2.7 billion to \$3.2 billion*

We would be naive to the extreme, and to the damage of our people, if we assumed such abuse was not happening behind closed doors for members of our churches. These statistics only represent the volume of *reported* domestic and family violence.

Dr Lynne Baker from the Uni of Qld in her book *Counselling Christian Women on how to deal with Domestic Violence* (Australian Academic Press June 2010) has written a solid part to the conversation. She unequivocally believes from first hand experience as a Salvo Care Line Emergency responder in Qld, that Domestic and Family Violence is occurring within our congregations, and that we all must take responsibility to notice and to respond. She challenges many ideas of response, especially in the area of forgiveness of perpetrator, rather than acknowledgement of sin as a starting point towards moves in relationship.

Our existing framework

As ministers and elders, and members of PCQ, our responsibility is to be followers of Jesus, being transformed into the likeness of Him who called us into His light. We are to be the Church, the body of Christ, which creates safe, and nurturing growing relationships for all connected.

As is already the case with the PCQ Childsafe standards,³ and other Safe Church, and Breaking the Silence policies, we must seek to create a church where those who are experiencing Domestic and Family Violence can be present within our congregations, both protected from, and supported in their attempts to escape from, the destruction of the violence.

Gods' word tells us that God abhors violence and abuse in his people, and especially in the family, and marriage, where his picture of loving relationship is expressed.

Teaching in congregations must foster deep understanding of the need to submit one to the other, and to serve one another, as Christ loved the Church. In the words of Tim and Kathy Keller Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York (writers of *The*

² <http://www.corneyandlind.com.au/resource-centre/brisbane-family-lawyer/7225-2/>

³ <http://www.pcq.org.au/childsafephp>

Meaning of Marriage) and The Gospel Coalition *Marriage in Gospel Focus June 2012*
precis of lecture :

“Both parties take the ‘Jesus role’ in the relationship, giving up right of equality with God to care for others, as our Lord did (Philippians 2). Marriage is meant to be a reflection of this relationship of God the Father with the Son, and the church is to be a Bride, being prepared for marriage to the Lamb.”

These descriptive and winsome metaphors are totally denigrated if one uses marriage to manipulate, control or destroy the life of another.

God’s prophets speak strongly of the consequences for those who abuse any under their care, or who do not follow His ways. Active teaching around the issues of violence, and clear, reflective Bible Study on these issues is essential for the Body of Christ to become informed, responsive, and communicative about them.

Because of this challenge from God’s word, a further consideration as we seek to protect the vulnerable is that the Presbyterian Church of Queensland consider adoption of the position that domestic violence can be a form of the ‘desertion’ envisaged by the Westminster Confession of Faith 24.VI, even while a married couple live together, and thus might be considered legitimate grounds for separation and divorce.

What will we do, then, as we continue to dialogue, to respond to the challenges of our Church leaders, and our Governments, in bringing in the Kingdom of God?

Our recommendations

We believe we should be aiming to create a culture where leaders and members of our churches are equipped to respond to Domestic and Family Violence with these three aims in mind:

- 1. Recognize,**
- 2. Report,**
- 3. Prevent**

This requires a readiness to see sin and distortion in our lives, to recognize that we all fail and will treat each other poorly. There is no less likelihood of this in our church communities, and we may see violence and control in them, sometimes in the most unexpected places, or persons.

For these steps to be possible we must, as a church:

- 1. Very clearly repudiate Domestic and Family Violence, and any forms of abuse, as sinful and incompatible with Christian living.**
- 2. Provide a clear framework for recognizing and reporting Domestic and Family Violence (through adopting the New South Wales Assembly Paper).**

⁴ Various sources for programs against Intimate partner violence, domestic violence or child abuse have adopted variations of this slogan.

3. Teach and educate our ministers, elders, and congregations about the nature of domestic violence to prevent wrong thinking about what submission, authority, and love look like in Christian relationships

To that end, suggestions for the steps on the journey and its conversation along the way would be:

1. Recognize -- Raise Awareness of

- the theological and social reality of Domestic and Family violence,
- the possibility that it could occur, and be hidden within our congregations.
- Legal and ethical issues surrounding care of those involved
- Resources in your area with whom to engage and converse

2. Report -- Be ready to act.

- We need an appropriate body of professionals skilled in pastoral support and counsel, and individuals trained to refer people to these professionals as required, while loving and supporting victims.
- We need people who are aware of what options are available so that they might take deliberate steps to establish the physical safety of victims if needed
- To contact police and follow through on requirements
- Elders need clarity around church discipline and restoration if required (see CCEF Journal of Biblical Counselling – Counsel in the local church: Rev Tim Lane)

3. Prevent -- Teach and equip our leaders and members

- for readiness of ministers to teach around these issues (theological training),
- towards willingness to challenge distortions of biblical message (in training and in congregations)
- in recognition of possible early signs
- to develop policies and safe standards
- of personnel for early contacts and support
- to respect and nurture each other as Heirs together
- from early lives to see the goodness of healthy relationships.

Resources

The 2015 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales Statement on Domestic Violence: <http://pcnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Domestic-Violence-Statement-July-2015.pdf>

An example on how to teach on domestic and family violence from Creek Road Presbyterian Church:

- Bible talk, resources, and Biblical Theology paper: www.creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/abuse
- Small group material: <http://creekroad.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/What-the-Church-Gets-Wrong-SC.pdf>

Further discussion option

<http://st-eutychus.com/2015/jesus-does-not-abuse-his-bride-there-is-no-place-for-domestic-violence-in-the-church>