

Resources for 16 Days of Activism 2022

WORSHIP AND PRAYER RESOURCE FOR 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

This resource includes a range of reflections and prayer templates that you can draw on for activities in your Branch during 16 Days.

Bible Reflection

This Bible study could be done if meeting in groups of six, online via Zoom, or even done at home with your family or on your own.

At the heart of our campaigning against domestic abuse is our love for God, which motivates us to keep his command: to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbour as yourself.

Luke 10:27 (NIV)

Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and love your neighbour as well as you do yourself.

Luke 10:27 (The Message)

With such a well-known Bible verse the temptation is to use it without stopping to consider its implications, both for ourselves and those whom we accept as our “neighbour”; in this case those affected by violence and abuse.

So, it’s worth taking a moment to focus on the verse and the challenge it presents.

Reflect for some time on the verse, asking God to highlight words and phrases which will develop your thoughts and understanding.

After a while share together in pairs or small groups what has stood out to you personally. You may find that your individual strands of thought combine to bring new insight and motivation.

Then consider together the following in the light of the passage and your reflections on it.

- The Bible tells us to love, not just in word but indeed 1 John 3:18. In what ways do our actions to challenge domestic abuse show our love for God?
- The second command exhorts us to love our neighbours as ourselves. Reflect on how or whether we actually do love ourselves and how this is practically lived out. What are the stumbling blocks to loving ourselves?
- If we find it hard to love ourselves, what implications does this have for those we are seeking to support?
- Survivors of domestic abuse may find it hard to love both God and themselves. Reflect on how or whether they can be helped to do this and how this may benefit them in the long term?

We find this command in the context of Jesus being questioned on the way to gain eternal life. As we pray for God’s help in all we do to love our neighbour, we give thanks that we are able to show our love for God and his people through our actions; and that these will have eternal as well as earthly significance.

Service outline template

This service outline may be used and adapted for a variety of contexts. You could ask your church to use this as a basis of their service during 16 Days either in person or online or just use the intercession. You could use this to hold your own branch service either in person or online via Zoom

Please add hymns and other prayers as wished.

As people arrive give them a link for a paper chain for them to write on before the service starts one short prayer, name of victim or survivor of domestic abuse or other appropriate word or phrase. If online ask beforehand for them to complete this before them. Assure them of confidentiality

Welcome and call to worship

Welcome to our service which is part of Mothers' Union's global action against domestic and sexual abuse. As we raise our voices on behalf of the voiceless, we also raise our voices in worship and intercession to our loving righteous God.

I love the Lord because he hears my voice
and my prayer for mercy.
Because he bends down to listen,
I will pray as long as I have breath!
Psalm 116:1-2 (NLT)

We draw near in faith to the Lord who draws near to us with love
and hears our prayers for mercy.

Opening hymn

Collect the paper links during the singing of this hymn. Then during the service have volunteers create a chain from them ready for the intercessions.

Opening prayers and confession

Loving Lord,
who came to proclaim justice,
make us bold to speak out truth
and break the power of silence.

Loving Lord,
who came to minister mercy
make us agents of compassion
to release the oppressed from fear.

Merciful and loving God,
forgive us when we have closed our eyes
to the sufferings of others;
when we have stayed silent
in the face of abuse and oppression;
when we have declined to challenge
unacceptable actions and attitudes.

Take away our selfishness
and fill us with new resolve
to proclaim justice and mercy
in the name of Christ. Amen

Readings

Jesus stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’
Luke 4:16-19

A Woman’s Psalm

O God, I am a woman in a violent world
let me know your peace.

Let blind rage born of despair
not find its target in me.

Let the value of my life
not be reduced to the jewellery I wear.

Let my family life not end
that life in a gang may begin.

Let rape not violate my body
nor anger ravage my soul.

Let fear not enter my heart
but caution sharpen my mind.

Let the light of Christ so shine in me
that I may reflect your love.

Let the joy that the apostles knew
infuse my spirit and alleviate my pain.

Let Love who suffered and died on the cross
find resurrection and new life in the world you love.

O God, I am a woman in a violent world
let me know your peace.

Elizabeth Kaeton, (from *Lifting Women’s Voices*: Canterbury Press; 2009)

Hymn

Homily

Intercessions

Bring the paper chains of prayers to the front and break them apart throughout the intercessions, or during the moment for quiet prayer.

Loving Lord,
hear our cries for justice
and break the chains of abuse
that all may live in safety.

Loving Lord,
hear our cries for righteousness
and break the chains of oppression
that all may live in freedom

We take a moment in the quiet to bring our own prayers to God.

Loving Lord,
hear our cries for mercy
and break the chains of fear
that all may live in peace. Amen

Final Hymn

Closing Prayers and Blessing

May God give us eyes
to recognise abuse where it exists.
May God give us a heart
to reach out in compassion.
May God give us courage and resolve
to make a difference wherever we are.

And the Blessing of God Almighty,
the Holy Trinity,
guide our steps today,
this week and always.
Go in peace and in resolve. Amen
Source unknown

Sample Prayers

Great God we give you thanks that you call us out of silence
to name hidden and domestic abuse.

We pray for all those women who despite suffering from abuse and violence, continue to care for family and children, to grow and prepare food, carry water, earn a living and offer support to others.

We pray for women who are trafficked as domestic or sex workers; for women who are raped and do not know how to find words to name their pain or a way into the future.

We pray for transformation of our societies which often find it easier to judge the victims of violence than to solve the problems of injustice

We pray that women's voices may be heard and taken into account in all peace and reconciliation work.

We pray for a transformation in the violent way many men act towards and think about women.

We pray for right and just relations between women and men that together we may transform and overcome violence in all its forms and learn to celebrate our diversity and interdependence

We look forward to the age of peace, when violence is banished, both women and men are able to love and to be loved, and the work and wealth of our world is justly shared. World Council of Churches

Stir us with a resolve not to be silent.

To speak out against the abuse of power;
especially in our homes.

To speak up
for those who have been pushed down
in any way.

To speak to
the needs of those who are suffering
at the hands of another.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ,
who extended his forgiving hands to all. Amen (Restored Church Pack)

Compassionate God,
may those experiencing all forms of violence
be given courage, hope and the means
to break free from their abuse.

We pray for all who live in fear of violence
and despair that life will ever change:

Bring to an end their suffering;
restore their sense of worth.
Bring to light deeds of abuse hidden in darkness,
that they may find safety and refuge, free from fear.

We pray for all to follow your example
of treating women with equality and respect.
We pray for the dawn of a better world
where justice and peace may flourish. Amen

Creative Prayer Ideas

Inspired by God's Word

This idea could work well when holding a vigil. When each prayer is shared a candle could be lit as a symbol of God's light overcoming the darkness.

Provide Bible verses connected with aspects of domestic abuse on pieces of card or paper – there are some examples below but feel free to use your own ideas.

Give people opportunity to choose a card and then have a time of quiet for each to reflect on their verse.

Then take turns to use your verse for prayer. Each read out their verse and then either finish with Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer or if people are confident, speak out their own prayer arising from their reflection.

This idea could be combined with the use of a prayer tree with the verses hung on a tree after being shared.

Prayer Tree

Provide a prayer tree along with labels for people to write their prayers on and hang on the tree. If you can participate in a service, you could bring the tree forward in the service and offer up the prayers as part of the intercessions. You may like to open this to the wider community.

Instead of the thorn-bush will grow the juniper,
and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.
This will be for the Lord's renown,
for an everlasting sign,
that will endure for ever. Isaiah 55:13

Loving Lord,
we offer up these prayers
for all who are affected
by domestic or sexual abuse.
May blighted lives be transformed
through the healing power of the Spirit. Amen

STORIES OF SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

This resource shares stories of domestic abuse survivors for you to use during 16 Days to help people understand domestic abuse and how it can affect people. Print them out and distribute them to be read aloud, to be prayed for or for publicity.

Ailish's story

"That Christmas, I couldn't take any more. Things were getting more and more volatile – not only were we walking on eggshells but we were holding our breath so often and for so long that we felt like we were running out of oxygen.

Christmas day was spent with my three children huddled around the kitchen table staring at the tiny portable TV screen and taking turns to hold the broken indoor aerial in a certain position. He, on the other hand, was lying on our huge seven seater settee watching the 47 inch brand new TV. We weren't allowed to go in there.

As Christmas turned into another new year, things got worse. I could sense his rage bubbling under the surface, ready to explode. I also knew that, in order to shield the children from it, I would be in the firing line. He had almost killed me once, this time I might not be so lucky. So I contacted Women's Aid. They couldn't find a place for us straightaway as just after Christmas is the busiest time. Tis the season to be jolly...ha! But after a few days, find us a place they did. As soon as he left for work, we ran.

When my children and I arrived at a women's refuge, scared, skint and emotionally battered, I had no idea what to expect. We were shown to our room, and left to settle in. And you know what? Those nights in the refuge were the happiest we had known in years.

The children played to their hearts' content, they laughed, they tumbled, and they were children. We bought what WE wanted, and ate when WE wanted. Nobody shouted at us for making too much noise when we ate, or for spilling a drink, or for dropping a knife on the table. We were free. It was bliss.

I wasn't strong enough that first time. Amid hundreds of suicide threats from him, promises of change, and counselling, I went back. And that night he did it again... But something inside me had changed, I was no longer going to put myself, and more importantly my children, through it. [With ongoing support] I went to court, got a court order, and had him removed from the house.

I would never have had the strength to do it if it hadn't been for the time we spent in that refuge. Being there changed our lives. I met the strongest, most inspirational women I have ever met. Women who had lost everything yet had the ability to rise again from the ashes."

Emily's story

"I had lived and created a great life for myself before the abuse but ending up having to leave it all behind.

I lost my home, my car, my belongings, my career, my self-worth, and my dignity. I even physically lost my voice because of the trauma I'd experienced.

When I left, I had no money to support myself or my child because he had all financial control. There were days in the beginning of leaving when I stood in the housing line with my two year old, wondering if I was going to be able to provide a meal for us that day.

My pride was on the floor and I felt like a charity case. I didn't want to be a burden to anyone.

Through abuse, I became isolated from people and withdrawn from life. I was a shadow of myself and had almost lost my faith in humanity. After reaching rock bottom, I started to rebuild my life away from my ex-partner.

I was lucky enough to have the support of Women's Aid, an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor and a few close family and friends along the way. Having these services and people around me were invaluable and helped so much.

Rebuilding myself after such a disempowering situation has been the toughest but most rewarding journey I think I will ever have to go through."

More stories of survivors are available on the Mothers' Union website

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS: HOW DOES OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH GUIDE OUR UNDERSTANDING?

The reasons for campaigning against violence against women and girls are many; any number of individuals and groups will find themselves drawn together to champion such a cause. For us as Mothers' Union however, we must have a distinctive voice as we join with others to support 16 Days of Activism and our Global Day of Action. We find this distinctiveness at the heart of our vision: that of a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful, and flourishing relationships.

God exists in and created equality of relationship. The relationship of the Trinity powerfully illustrates this; each distinct from but equal to the other; relating together in loving agreement. The equality of human relationships is established at the beginning of creation:

God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

All are created in the likeness of God, whatever our gender; as such all are entitled to be treated as God's precious children, whose image we reflect.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

Thus, any culture of violence against one another, whether physical or emotional, is a distortion of relationships as originally intended; equality and respect in the sight of God.

Throughout the Old Testament God's attitude to women is positive and pastoral. There are many instances of women in positions of influence and leadership; also provision made for those in positions of vulnerability, as in Deuteronomy 26:12. A woman's choice in marriage is highlighted in Genesis 24:57 and other examples; whilst in Proverbs "wisdom" is personified as a woman.

Where instances of violence against women are recorded, they are described as a wrongful action with negative consequences, for example the rape of Tamar by her half brother in 2 Samuel 13 which led to serious family conflict and bloodshed. God's position remains constant.

Within Jewish society attitudes began to change towards women through the times of exile and intermingling with other cultures. The religious leaders attempted to protect the purity of their race through more restrictive laws, many of which had a negative effect on the lives of women. Thus, by the time of Jesus' birth Jewish men would pray every morning and thank God that He had not made them a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.

However, Jesus radically challenged this culture through his actions and teaching. He treated women as completely equal to men calling them "Daughters of Abraham", Luke 13:16.

He openly conversed with women; met their needs and included them amongst his followers and supporters. He disregarded Jewish edicts when he healed the woman suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years; choosing compassion over the letter of the law. He revealed his divinity to Martha, John 11:25-26, and chose to appear firstly to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection, John 20:10-18.

In a situation where violence against a woman was allowed under Jewish law, that of the woman caught in adultery, Jesus averted the aggression with wisdom and compassion; using the situation to challenge her accusers without condoning her wrongdoing.

Thus, the arrival of Christianity transformed life for women. The New Testament indicates that they played a significant role in the life of the early church. They were involved in leadership roles alongside Paul and others; they used their homes for gatherings of believers and had important input into the missionary growth of the church. Relationships between Christian men and women were surely ones of equality and mutual respect.

Within the marriage relationship the sometimes controversial edict by Paul for wives to submit to their husbands, Ephesians 5:22, becomes less so when seen in the context of the previous verse, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, and the instruction to husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church v25: that is, to be prepared to lay down their lives for them. With this perspective there is no room for violence or abuse of any sort; whether psychological, physical, sexual, financial, or emotional.

However, history has unfolded since New Testament times, both in the church and the world: there can never be any justification for violence against women. In our campaigning against it we seek to follow the example of God. We look for inner change within perpetrators as they are enabled to conduct equal loving relationships, respecting women as made in the image of God.

We build our campaign on God's command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. Where this is followed there will be no place for violence against anyone.

The Church's response to violence against women and girls (VAWG)

We have examined the truth of God's equal respect and love for all made in his image, lived out through the example of Christ and the early church. But the reality is that throughout history and still in recent times the Church has not always handled the issue of VAWG well.

There are a variety of reasons for this, including:

- The Church has sometimes been slow to accept that this can happen within Christian relationships, and when a church leader is involved.
- The nature of the issue is such that it is very often hidden behind closed doors; protected by a veneer of respectability which has covered up the truth.
- The question of forgiveness has been a stumbling block to the need for justice.
- Within some church traditions a distorted view of the nature of submission within a marriage relationship and gender roles within a relationship led to allegations of abuse not being taken seriously.

The Church of England guidelines Responding to domestic abuse (2006) states:

It is particularly disturbing that not only has the Church failed at many points to protect the vulnerable and to address the processes that lead to domestic abuse, but has also (intentionally or unintentionally) reinforced abuse, failed to challenge abusers and intensified the suffering of survivors.

However, there is now a much greater acknowledgement of the prevalence of VAWG both within and outside the Church, and recognition of the Church's responsibility in dealing with it.

"Gender-based violence is one of the greatest injustices in our world today... The Church is already supporting and caring for those affected; it must continue in that work and must condemn the notion that such violence is ever acceptable. The Church must be an advocate for restored relationships of mutual respect and love, modelling the reconciling love shown by Christ to all people."

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

Support services and how to respond

Gender-Based Violence Helplines

Domestic abuse

National UK Domestic Abuse Helpline

- Free helpline, 24/7.
- Online Live chat support and British Sign Language options.
- Number: 0808 2000 247
- Website: <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk>

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage helpline

- Free helpline, 24/7.
- Online chat and email support available.
- Number: 0800 027 1234
- Website: <https://sdafmh.org.uk>

Welsh Women's Aid

- Free helpline, 24/7.
- Online chat and email support available.
- Number: 0808 80 10 800
- Website: <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk>

Domestic abuse and sexual abuse helpline Northern Ireland

- Free helpline, 24/7.
- Online chat support available.
- Number: 0808 802 1414
- Website: <https://dsahelpline.org/>

Women's Aid Ireland National Helpline

- Free helpline, 24/7.
- Number: 1800 341 900
- Website: <https://www.womensaid.ie>

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline

- Free helpline, open Mon – Fri, 10am – 5pm; Wed and Thurs, 10am – 8pm.
- Online chat available Wed and Thurs, 5pm – 8pm.
- Number: 0800 9995428
- Website: <https://galop.org.uk/get-help/helplines>

Men's Advice Line

- For men experiencing domestic abuse.
- Free helpline, open Mon–Fri 9am-8pm.
- Online chat and email support available.
- Number: 0808 8010 327
- Website: www.mensadvice.org.uk

Men's Aid Ireland

- For men experiencing domestic abuse.

- Online chat and email support available.
- Number: 01 554 3811
- Website: www.mensaid.ie/

Respect Phonenumber

- For men using violence or abuse.
- Free helpline, open Mon – Fri, 9am – 8pm.
- Number: 0808 8024 040
- Website: www.respectphonenumber.org.uk

Sexual violence and abuse

Rape Crisis England and Wales

- Free helpline, open every day, 12pm – 2.30pm and 7pm – 9pm.
- Online chat available.
- Number: 0808 802 9999
- Website: <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help>

Rape Crisis Scotland

- Free helpline, open every day 6pm – midnight.
- Email support available.
- Number: 08088 01 03 02
- Website: www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Rape Crisis Northern Ireland

- Free helpline, open Mon and Thurs, 6pm – 8pm.
- Email support available.
- Number: 0800 0246 991
- Website: <https://rapecrisisni.org.uk>

Rape Crisis Help Ireland

- Free helpline, 24/7.
- Email support available.
- Number: 1800 778888
- Website: <https://www.rapecrisishelp.ie>

Forced marriage

Honour Network Survivors Helpline by Karma Nirvana

- National helpline for forced marriages and honour-based killings
Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm
- Number: 0800 599 9247
- Website: www.karmanirvana.org.uk

UK Government Forced Marriage Unit

- Open Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm.
- Number: 020 7008 0151, out of hours: 020 7008 5000
- Website: www.gov.uk/stop-forced-marriage

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage helpline

- Details above under 'domestic abuse'.

Stalking

National Stalking Helpline (UK)

- Free helpline, open Mon – Fri, 9:30am – 4pm, Weds 9.30am – 8pm
- Number: 080 8802 0300
- Website: <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/refer-someone-to-us>

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Helpline by National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

- Free helpline.
- Email support available.
- Number: 0808 800 5000
- Website: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

Legal advice

Rights of Women

- Family law advice line open Tues – Thurs 7pm – 9pm; Fri 12pm – 2pm.
Closed bank holidays.
- Number: 020 7251 6577
- Website: www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

FLAWS (Finding Legal Options for Women Survivors) – England and Wales

- Open Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm.
- Number: 0203 745 7707
- Website: <https://www.flaws.org.uk>

Responding to Domestic Abuse Survivors – ‘Do’s and ‘Don’t’s

DO

- Find a safe place to talk.
- Have someone else present if this is acceptable to the survivor. It is advisable that at least one person is the same sex as the survivor.
- Allow time for the person to talk.
- Listen to what they have to say - and take it seriously.
- Believe them. Their description of the abuse is probably only the ‘tip of the iceberg’.
- Give priority to their immediate safety (and that of any children involved).
- Support them in making their own decisions.
- Support and respect their choices. If they choose to initially return to the abuser, it is their choice. They have the most information about how to survive. If there are children involved, however, their safety must come first, and child safety procedures must be followed.
- Give them information about relevant support agencies available (as detailed above). Offer to support them to contact an agency and offer a safe and private place to do this from.

- Be aware of your own limitations and use the expertise of those who are professionally trained.
- Reassure them that it is not their fault, they don’t deserve this treatment, and (only if it is appropriate

DON'T

- Don’t judge them or what they tell you.
- Don’t make unrealistic promises.
- Don’t suggest that they should ‘try again’. Evidence shows that survivors experience several violent incidents before seeking help.
- Never minimise the severity of their experience or the danger they are in.
- Don’t react with disbelief, disgust, or anger at what they tell you or react completely passively.
- Don’t ask them why they did not act in a certain way.
- Never blame them for the violence or abuse.
- Never act on the person’s behalf without their consent and/or knowledge (unless children are involved).
- Don’t expect them to make decisions quickly.
- Never make decisions for them or tell them what to do.
- Don’t encourage them to forgive their abuser and take them back.
- Don’t recommend couple counselling/family meditation/praying for them/ marriage courses/healthy relationship courses. These will not help and increases risk in domestic abuse situations.

- Don’t send them home with a prayer/directive to submit to her spouse/bring them to church/be a better Christian spouse.
- Refrain from contacting the person at home unless they have agreed to this.

<p>and you know they have faith) it is not God's will.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assure them gently that what the abuser has done is wrong and completely unacceptable.• Be patient and kind.• Protect their confidentiality. Keep any information in a secure place and consider coding the information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't approach their partner for their side of the story, as this will endanger them.• Don't give information about them or their whereabouts to the abuser or to others who might pass this information on to the abuser.• Don't discuss the situation with church leaders who might inadvertently/unintentionally pass information on to the abuser.• Don't encourage dependence on you or become emotionally involved; this can be problematic and make you seem to be the answer to their problems.
---	--

For more information on how to support others, see advice from Women's Aid [here](#) and Safe Ireland [here](#).