

Domestic Violence/Abuse and Child Abuse/Neglect

Emergency Assistance

If you are in an emergency situation, dial 911.

In a non-emergency situation, contact the 24-hour National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233), or <https://www.thehotline.org>. Note that internet usage can be monitored and is impossible to erase completely. If you are concerned that your internet usage might be monitored, you are urged to call, and to erase your browser history as best as you can. More information about internet safety may be found at <https://www.thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/internet-safety/>.

Introduction

The sin of abuse and violence within families has been with us since the fall and sadly continues to this day, even at times in Christian homes. Tragically, some die as a result of the attacks, but even in survivors, the impact is life-long. This is truly a sanctity of life issue and is so common that it is considered by secular authorities to be a public health issue as well. Victims, survivors and perpetrators may be sitting in our pews, and it is important to be aware of the problem so that action can be taken. Your Lifeline Team offers some reflections on this issue along with links to the very helpful resources on the Synodical website.

Agape: God and His Plan at Creation

Every year on the Eve of the Nativity, we read the Epistle text 1 John 4:7-16 as we receive God's gifts in His services to us. In this text, God reveals His very nature to us. He is *agape*, namely that steadfast and eternal sacrificial love shared fully and perfectly among the Persons of the Trinity in Unity.¹ It is out of His essential goodness, lovingkindness and mercy that God created and sustains the world.² He created Adam in His image, meaning that he and all who followed, would, "apprehend God and reflect God," perfectly loving Him and ruling with Him as His steward over creation (another way to look at this is that man was created holy, namely set apart for God).³ And, desiring to see countless more created in His image, He built a woman from one of Adam's ribs to be his life-long helper.⁴ As Adam himself testified, she was to be "bone of (his) bones and flesh of (his) flesh." All that Adam had would be hers. He was to perfectly love her as God loved him. As one also created in God's image, she was to perfectly love Him by perfectly loving her husband, reflecting him and ruling with him as he with God. Together they were blessed to be God's agents in bringing new life into the world. They were to perfectly love and rear their children, and in turn, their boys would grow to join in perfect love in similar life-long one-flesh male-female unions with their wives, conceive, give birth to and perfectly love their children, and so on. Thus, God's intent in creation was (and still is) an earth filled with His human creatures made in His image, joined to Him, as a bride to her bridegroom, and to each other (yes, all of us humans are related to one another!) in that very same *agape* that is manifest in, and flows from, the Godhead.⁵

Fall, Cross and Restoration

Yet, in Adam's fall, man lost the image of God, and is no longer able to fear, love and trust in Him by his own power. And in the fall, human familial relationships suffered as well. Adam failed in his responsibility to sacrificially love his wife by preaching God's Word to her when she was tempted by the serpent, and both ate of the forbidden fruit. When then confronted by God, rather than confess his sin, Adam's first response was to scornfully cast blame on his wife, and on God Himself (in the end, when we sin against our neighbor, we sin against God!).⁶ A while later, Cain killed his brother Abel in the first instance of murder.⁷ Thanks be to God though, as He promised at the time, His steadfast and eternal sacrificial love for His human creatures did not change after Adam's fall.⁸ This *agape* flowed from the Godhead to the Cross when God the Father sent His only begotten Son to take on human flesh to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all of humanity for all time, including the sins of violence and murder.⁹ Of course this includes us! In Baptism, He gives us the Holy Spirit, who gathers us into His church, where He forgives us our sins, enlightens us with His gifts of Word and Sacrament, and keeps us in the One True Faith.¹⁰ In His creating clean hearts in us, God sanctifies us (makes us into saints, namely holy, set apart), restoring His image in us.¹¹ All of this He does out of His grace and mercy, with no worthiness on our part.

With God's restored image comes restored marriages and families. As in the Garden, the union of the Christian man and Christian woman again reflects that of God and His people.¹² And in this post-fall world, the headship of the Christian bridegroom, far from being selfish, is meant to reflect that of Christ, who willingly died for His church, so that she might be cleansed, and presented holy and unblemished.¹³ Through the one-flesh unions of fathers and mothers, God continues to create each of us out of His "pure, inexpressible love," "that He might redeem and sanctify us" (namely, restore His image in us).¹⁴ It is through our parents that God "nourishes, protects and defends us, and ... bestows so much good on body and soul."¹⁵ Indeed, He has established our nuclear families as the basic building blocks of His Church and society.¹⁶ As sinner-saints though, living in this vale of tears, as much as we would like to, we are far from perfect in our love for God and our neighbors, including those in our immediate families.¹⁷ Like Adam, we do not appreciate the tremendous gifts God has bestowed on us, and often complain rather than thank Him. We thus need to repent, confessing our sins at every available opportunity and receiving His Absolution. Furthermore, we need His daily "instruction and admonition," to subdue the old Adam, namely the sinner in us.¹⁸ Thus, to live in our vocations as families as He has intended from eternity, God provides that instruction and admonition in His Word, a sampling of which is contained in the *Table of Duties* in Dr. Luther's *Small Catechism*:

For Husbands

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. (Colossians 3:19)

For Wives

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22)
For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, as Sarah, obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. (1 Peter 3:5-6)

For Parents

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

For Children

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

Domestic Violence/Abuse and Child Abuse/Neglect

The interrelated sins of domestic violence/abuse and child abuse/neglect reflect an abject disregard for God's vocational calls on husbands, wives, parents and children. They tear into the very fabric of what God has intended for the pinnacle of His creation, violating the sanctity of human life. Rather than selflessly cherishing their wives and being prepared to die for them, husbands selfishly rage against them and are prepared to kill them. Rather than being subject to their husbands as the Church to Christ, wives rage against them and are prepared to kill them. Rather than nurturing their children, parents abuse and neglect them. And rather than honoring their parents, children hurt them. Sadly, these sins are all too common. One in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner (note that this is often manifest when couples are dating, before marriage). One in 15 children are exposed to "intimate partner" violence each year and 90% of these children are witnesses to this violence.¹⁹ Law enforcement data from 2021 indicate that 34% of the 4,970 female victims of murder were killed by an "intimate partner" (total 1,690), compared to 6% of the 17,970 male murder victims (total 1,078).²⁰ And this accounts for just physical violence; other manifestations of abuse may include financial, emotional and spiritual abuse. At least 1 in 7 children has experienced abuse/neglect, and in AD 2020, child abuse/neglect resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1,750 children.²¹ The manifestations include physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and outright neglect to meet the child's basic needs. The physical, emotional and spiritual impact of domestic violence and child abuse/neglect is life-long.

Synodical resources

Given the sheer numbers of affected individuals, it is fair to assume that victims, survivors and perpetrators may be sitting in our pews. Awareness is key to getting these sisters and brothers the help they need. Our Synod has developed and posted wonderful resources to assist, which your English District Lifeline team highly commends. Materials on domestic violence may be accessed at <https://www.lcms.org/social-issues/domestic-violence>; and materials on child abuse may be accessed at <https://www.lcms.org/social-issues/child-abuse>. Of special note are the following:

1. The emergency contact information noted at the top of this posting
2. *When Homes are Heartless*, a theological overview, downloadable at <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/G4XGfufR7zCqTIPqYcmW5N27SmuxJpC>
3. *You Are Not Alone: A Prayer Book for Victims of Domestic Violence*, downloadable at <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/3F7qrlo88mQOuICHMs5BI6rpNkfovAZ1>
4. *Hope and Healing* Bible study, downloadable at <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/Ma5xjZwbeGkCjWpKa95sJdmb5IBw06rt>
5. *Identify, Understand, Intervene: Training Manual on Domestic Violence*, aimed at Pastors and church workers, helping them to identify and understand domestic violence and abuse and its manifestations, and intervene with both victim/survivor and perpetrator (including encouraging them to seek professional assistance), downloadable at <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/Zekkag0MhzW3rqxUDNKAST1Cch75mW6h>
6. Coloring books for children impacted by domestic violence and child abuse, downloadable at <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/JMFEC3e8YKMqMyGcRK31I92JxPb6D8ys>, and <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/BhaIRDARPiodfG6Wl4SDQHdnqCSKGyQO>
7. An interesting paper on how CFW Walther (1811-1887), who may have been a victim of child abuse, approached domestic abuse in his day, and might apply Law and Gospel to cases of child abuse today, downloadable at <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/XjCFiq4dKx5uZ8LHZkDkvEbeLy7N92Uk>.
8. Various other resources, including child abuse policies and guidelines for congregations.

To be sure, none of this is easy reading but it is critically important, and useful for laity as well as Pastors and Commissioned Church Workers. The concern in all of this is the physical safety of victims/survivors, along with long-term follow-up to include pastoral care aimed at assuring these individuals of who they are in Christ. And of course, the reminder that Confession and Absolution are available for perpetrators, who if truly repentant, will willingly pay the earthly price for their sin.

Nothing can separate us from God's eternal sacrificial love, not even abusers.²² Furthermore, God does not desire the death of a sinner, but that s/he should repent, turn from his way, be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth, restored in God's image.²³ We in your English District Lifeline Team thank God for all He is doing through you and pray His comfort and peace on you as you engage in this difficult work with both the attacked and the attacker, that in the end we all feast together at the marriage supper of the Lamb, clothed "with fine linen, bright and pure."²⁴

Notes:

1. John 10:17-18, 15:9, 16:14, 17:21-26; c.f. Athanasian Creed
2. Psalm 136:4-9, 145:15-16; Acts 17:25, 28
3. Genesis 1:27-30, 2:15, 19-20; *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article II (Original Sin), paragraph 18. Here and henceforth, quotations from the Book of Concord are taken from Paul Timothy McCain, Edward Andrew Engelbrecht, Robert Cleveland Baker, Gene Edward Veith, eds., *Concordia, The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord, Second Edition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).
4. Genesis 2:16-25; Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9
5. 1 John 4:19
6. Genesis 3:1-12
7. Genesis 4:1-16
8. Genesis 3:15, 21.
9. Hebrews 10:1-18; 1 John 4:10
10. Ephesians 1:13; *Small Catechism*, Creed, Third Article
11. Psalm 51:10; Colossians 3:10
12. Isaiah 54:5-7, 62:5; Hosea 2:16-23
13. Ephesians 5:25-33; remember that death is a consequence of the fall, c.f. Genesis 3:19 (and the warning in Genesis 2:17).
14. *Large Catechism*, Creed, paragraph 64 (Third Article)
15. *Large Catechism*, Ten Commandments, paragraph 128 (4th Commandment)
16. For more on this, we commend Dr. Luther's discussion on the 4th Commandment in his *Large Catechism* (Ten Commandments, paragraphs 103-178).
17. Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27; Romans 5:13-25; c.f. *Lutheran Service Book* Confession and Absolution, Divine Service Settings 1 and 2
18. *Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, Article VI (The Third Use of the Law), paragraph 9
19. Data are from National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, at <https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS> (accessed 23 July, AD 2023). Here and henceforth, the term, "intimate partner" is taken from the data reporting agency.
20. Data are from <https://bjs.ojp.gov/female-murder-victims-and-victim-offender-relationship-2021>, (accessed 24 July, AD 2023).
21. Data are from the Centers for Disease Control, at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>, accessed 24 July, AD 2023; note that these data do not include children who are killed through abortion or who are harmed through "gender-affirming care."
22. Romans 8:38-39
23. Ezekiel 18:23; 1 Timothy 2:4; Titus 2:11; 2 Peter 3:9
24. Revelation 19:8-9