AACE ADVICE TO ECCLESIAS
Domestic and Family Violence and Abuse

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1. Statement of Principle
Domestic and family violence and abuse are contrary to the law of God and violates the laws of the land and will not be tolerated within the ecclesial family. The ecclesia has a responsibility to care for the welfare and spiritual well-being of all members and must endeavour to protect those entrusted to it from all forms of violence both physical and psychological.

2. Purpose
This document is designed to:

2.1 raise ecclesial awareness of domestic and family violence and abuse;
2.2 enhance ecclesial knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding domestic and family violence and abuse;
2.3 provide scriptural guidance when considering the challenge of domestic and family violence and abuse;
2.4 suggest ways in which allegations of domestic and family violence and abuse might be managed while providing appropriate support for both those abused and for perpetrators;
2.5 assist ecclesias develop a domestic and family violence and abuse policy including procedures to assist in the management of allegations; and,
2.6 provide initial resources for further reading.
3. Definitions of Domestic and Family Violence and Abuse

3.1 Family and domestic violence and abuse has been defined in various ways, including:

...an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling through fear one’s partner or a family member or person with whom the abuser is in a relationship whether living in the same house or not often by using violent or threatening behaviour... the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics used by the perpetrator to exercise power and control ... and can be both criminal and non-criminal in nature.

Legislation in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, the ACT, the NT and South Australia defines domestic violence and abuse as occurring between intimate partners, relatives, family members, carers and children. An intimate relationship can exist between two people who don’t live together such as people in a dating relationship and members of the extended family whether living in the same house or not. In Tasmania, family violence is only considered in the context of a spouse or partner relationship.

There are many types of domestic and family violence and abuse. It is violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour by a partner, carer or family member to control, dominate or cause fear. It doesn’t have to be physical abuse. It can be emotional, psychological, financial, sexual or other types of abuse. It is not limited by financial status, social or ecclesial responsibilities or position, education or ecclesial membership.

Domestic and family violence and abuse can be committed against an aged family member who may or may not be living in the same house as the perpetrator.

3.2 The motivation for domestic violence may be deliberate or unconscious with perpetrators not understanding why they behave this way.

3.3 The reported incidence of domestic and family violence and abuse indicates males are more likely to engage in physical violence. Regardless of the gender of the perpetrator, domestic and family violence and abuse are sinful and perpetrators need expert assistance to change their behaviour. Such assistance is usually beyond the capacity of most ecclesias to provide. Ecclesias are, however, in a position to provide spiritual support and guidance which may not be available from any other source.

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4. Examples of Domestic and Family Violence and Abuse

4.1 **emotional abuse**—blaming the one abused for all problems in the relationship, so undermining the one abused’s self-esteem and self-worth through comparisons with others, withdrawing interest and engagement, and emotional blackmail;

4.2 **verbal abuse**—swearing and humiliation in private and public, focusing on intelligence, a spouse’s willingness to engage in sexual activity and/or the spouse’s perceived capacity to satisfy his/her partner, body image or the one abused’s capacity as a parent or spouse;

4.3 **social abuse**—systematic isolation from family and friends, instigating and controlling relocation to a place where the one abused has no social circle or employment opportunities and preventing the one abused from going out to meet people;

4.4 **economic abuse**—controlling all money, forbidding access to bank accounts, providing an inadequate ‘allowance’, recklessly spending large amounts of money considered to be joint property; preventing the one abused seeking or holding employment and taking away wages earned by the one abused;

4.5 **psychological/emotional abuse**—making regular comments that criticise or mock, belittle or cause public embarrassment so poisoning the minds of children, the wider family, ecclesial members and friends, making threats regarding custody of children, asserting the justice system will not believe or support the one abused, destroying property, abusing pets, driving dangerously, regular comments criticising a spouse’s ability to earn money, aspects of their personality etc.;

4.6 **sexual abuse**—any form of pressured/unwanted sex or sexual degradation, causing pain during sex, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, making the one abused perform sexual acts unwillingly and criticising or using degrading insults, withholding intimacy as a way of manipulating a spouse.

4.7 **physical abuse**—direct assaults on the body, use of weapons (including objects), assault of children, locking the one abused out of the house, sleep and food deprivation; and,

4.8 **spiritual abuse**—denial and/or misuse of religious beliefs or practices to force the one abused into subordinate roles and misusing Scripture to justify physical violence or other abuse.

5. Characteristics of People Suffering Domestic and Family Violence and Abuse

Victims of Domestic and Family Violence and Abuse:

5.1 may be so frightened of the abuser they continue to stay in the relationship despite the risks to themselves and their children;

5.2 may stay in a relationship for “the sake of the children”;

5.3 may blame themselves, feel guilty, helpless and have significant self-doubt and lack of confidence, even misusing scripture by describing abuse as their suffering to bear;

5.4 may feel sympathetic towards their abuser and continue to look for ways to make the relationship work even though they are distressed by the abuse;

5.5 worry about their dependence (particularly financial) on the perpetrator and may fear their own capacity to live independently of the perpetrator;

5.6 may be depressed or have other recurring health issues;

5.7 may through fear and shame be unwilling to give voice to their situation;

5.8 may feel that God has abandoned them, that He does not want them, that He does not hear their prayers; and,

5.9 may ask the question, “where was God when this was happening to me?”
6. Behaviours of Perpetrators of Domestic and Family Violence and Abuse

Perpetrators will often:

6.1 deny the abuse has happened and be effective at hiding the abuse;
6.2 minimise the abuse, blame the one abused, and attempt to justify their behaviour including through the misapplication of Scripture;
6.3 make the one abused appear unreasonable, spiritually wayward, mentally unstable or unwell;
6.4 denigrate the one abused’s spirituality, intelligence, ability to manage money or raise children;
6.5 blame others for their abusive behaviour such as their spouse, family members, the ecclesia, work stress, alcohol or financial issues;
6.6 be over-protective and control through fear caused by violent behaviour towards the one abused and their children;
6.7 be regularly and excessively angry without cause;
6.8 be skilful in manipulating other family and ecclesial members; and,
6.9 appear remorseful when the one abused leaves, even appearing as genuinely gentle and kind but continuing their abuse when the victim returns.

7. Scriptural Principles

7.1 Husbands and wives are to reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the ecclesia. Christ is an example of perfect love. Violence or abuse has no place in the commandment that we love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34).
7.2 Scripture says husbands and wives are to submit to one another in the fear of God. The husband is to be the spiritual head of the family as Christ is the spiritual head of the ecclesia. A wife is to work in cooperation with her husband. The husband is to dedicate himself to help ensure his wife and immediate family find a place in God’s Kingdom (Matthew 5:16 Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 John 4:16-19).
7.3 A husband must not abandon his position of care by behaving in a fashion that causes his wife or children physical or emotional damage (1 Peter 3:7).
7.4 It is the love of Christ that should control us so that we mirror Christ’s sacrifice in our relationships (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Deuteronomy 17:19-20).
7.5 If a husband is not Christ-like a wife should not submit to un-Scriptural demands or follow his behaviour. Likewise, a husband should not imitate a wife’s un-Christlike behaviour (Psalm 106:3; 3 John 1:11).
7.6 Husbands and wives are to be one flesh living in God-centred harmony (Ephesians 5:21-33).
7.7 Christ said to “do violence to no man” and that God hates those who love violence (Psalm 11:5).
7.8 Domestic violence and abuse damage the well-being of all family members including their spiritual development and may lead them to reject God and Christ altogether. When people professing godliness act abusively or condone such behaviour it can confuse others, particularly children, as to what godliness is, causing them to become discouraged or even abusers themselves (Ephesians 6:4; Matthew 18:6).
7.9 We have a duty to care for one another. We cannot ignore a brother or sister in need (Luke 10:25-37; Hebrews 12:12-17; Isaiah 35:3-4; Isaiah 1:17; Proverbs 31:9).
7.10 Helping in situations of domestic violence can be a difficult and challenging task but one we are called upon to attempt in love (James 5:19- 20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14).
7.11 Scriptural forgiveness follows confession and repentance but the consequences of sins remain (1 John 1:9; Ezekiel 33:10-15).
7.12 Hate must have no part in our lives (1 John 3:15).
8. Principles for Ecclesias

8.1 Victims of domestic and family violence and abuse have no cause to feel shame because of their experience.

8.2 Domestic and family violence and abuse can occur across all age ranges, ethnic backgrounds and without regard to a family’s wealth or poverty, ecclesial membership, position and responsibilities and can be perpetrated by males and females. It can be emotional, psychological, financial, sexual or other types of abuse.

8.3 The ecclesia should be a place of Godly example, safety and spiritual development and has a duty to care for its members.

8.4 We recognise domestic and family violence and abuse as a dominating behaviour intended to control in unreasonable ways that are a misinterpretation of Scriptural teaching.

8.5 We recognise domestic and family violence and abuse are criminal behaviours and the Government has God-given authority to legislate to protect people from these behaviours and to administer the law. We will cooperate with the Government in the execution of that authority.

8.6 All ecclesial members, according to their capacity, are responsible under the laws of Christ to take all reasonable, necessary and appropriate steps to protect those abused by physical and/or psychological violence from risk of harm.

8.7 We understand those abused by domestic and family violence and abuse may feel unwarranted shame because of their experience and we will do nothing to exacerbate such feelings.

8.8 Those who commit violence or abuse require professional and spiritual assistance.

8.9 Perpetrators of domestic or family violence and abuse must acknowledge their behaviour is unacceptable to the Lord and to our community and will be held accountable and accept the consequences of their behaviour.

8.10 Those suffering from domestic and family violence and abuse should see in our actions the love God had for us when he gave His only Son that we might be saved. They should be welcomed into our homes and treated warmly and feel included in every aspect of the life of our ecclesial family.

See Ephesians 5.
9. Policy Aspects for Ecclesias to Consider

If we suspect domestic or family violence and abuse are occurring:

9.1 responsible, accountable, respected and experienced brothers and sisters appointed by the ecclesia to support the welfare of ecclesial members should be informed and they will manage allegations according to ecclesial policy. (Individual eccesias will have different approaches. Some may require the arranging brothers/committee to be informed, others the recorder only and others will have designated welfare people);

9.2 direct threats or incidents of physical violence should be responded to immediately by informing the police and supporting victims to seek restraining orders should they wish or if it is a mandated State law requirement;

9.3 the well-being of possible victim(s) should take the highest priority including assisting with alternate accommodation and, should the victim wish, reporting allegations to police;

9.4 any response the ecclesia chooses to make should have the highest priority and be within terms of Scripture and State laws;

9.5 any allegation of domestic and family violence or abuse should be treated in the strictest confidence on a need to know basis;

9.6 any person, including arranging brothers/management committee members, who are seen to have an actual or potential bias or conflict of interest should not have information on an allegation provided to them nor should be able to attend meetings where an allegation is discussed;

9.7 support for the alleged perpetrator should take a high priority;

9.8 the position of the alleged perpetrator should be considered in terms of ecclesial and inter-ecclesial responsibilities and attendance at ecclesial meetings especially those where the alleged person abused might be present;

9.9 contact between perpetrator and the one abused should not be encouraged without consideration first to the abused’s safety, including their mental well-being; and,

9.10 confidential notes should be kept following each discussion with the abused, perpetrator or witness(es) and record times, those present, places, events, what was said and who said it.

9.11 Relevant State legislation should be considered in developing a policy.

9.12 Should an alleged perpetrator seek to transfer to another ecclesia that ecclesia should be informed of the allegations against him or her.
10. Suggested Procedures

(Selected with permission from Fiona Bosley, *Family and Domestic Violence, Recommended Protocols from QCSN* [https://www.hearbelieveact.org/resources])

10.1 Suggested procedures when domestic and family violence and abuse are reported or suspected

10.1.1 Domestic and family violence and abuse is an abuse of power. It is not an issue of communication or misunderstanding in relationships. The aim of the perpetrator is to maintain control and to discredit those who may move to expose the abuse. The perpetrator may present as one who is powerless and blame those who threaten to expose the abuse. Domestic violence is not a relationship issue; it is an abuse of power and is an illegal behaviour. (Prov. 21:24 and Prov. 22:10).

10.1.2 As domestic and family violence and abuse and any other sorts of abuse are illegal behaviours, the ecclesial role needs to be one which holds the perpetrator accountable. Mediation or reconciliatory responses may endanger the more vulnerable when abuse and violence is present. There needs to be clear evidence of a change of behaviour (repentance) on the part of the perpetrator. The aim is to help all parties in their spiritual walk. Below are listed some guidelines to assist in that process.

10.2 What to do if a husband or wife makes a report of domestic and family violence and abuse

10.2.1 Respect the report – he or she is unlikely to be lying.
10.2.2 Reassure him or her that this treatment is not acceptable. The abuser cannot claim it is “God’s will”.
10.2.3 Ask the person what he/she expects from reporting his/her experiences
10.2.4 Protect confidentiality.
10.2.5 Pray with and for the person, seeking God’s guidance.
10.2.6 Emphasise that the abuser has broken the vows made before God at his/her marriage.
10.2.7 Ensure victims have a plan to keep themselves and their children safe. (See Attachment 3.)
10.2.8 Encourage victims to find information that will assist them and their children to prayerfully consider their future course of action.
10.2.9 Contact your local support/care group for resources to assist you.
10.2.10 Recommend individual rather than couple counselling.
10.2.11 Encourage victims to seek professional help for themselves and their children.
10.2.12 When talking to either party see each separately (at least in the short term).
10.2.13 Don’t encourage the victim to return to the perpetrator or overlook the behaviour unless there is clear evidence of a change of behaviours and attitudes. Perpetrators of violence need God’s help, coupled with extensive professional help to challenge their thinking and behaviour.
10.2.14 Don’t minimise the experience. Say something like…. “From what you have told me, I am very much concerned for you (and your children’s safety).”
10.2.15 Do not attempt to counsel beyond your expertise.
10.2.16 Be aware that those who are helping may also be at risk.
10.3 **What to do for children who are witnesses of family and domestic violence**

Remember children are at risk in domestic violence situations and suffer enormously.

10.3.1 Encourage parents to seek help for their children.

10.3.2 Provide local numbers and information for children’s services.

10.3.3 Encourage as much normal interaction as possible with children and other adults in with violence-free activities.

10.4 **What to do if violence and abuse are suspected or an ecclesial member reports the possibility of domestic and family violence and abuse**

10.4.1 We have a duty of care for one another and it is not God’s will that these things remain hidden. It is important that the perpetrator be encouraged to confess their sins and seek forgiveness from the person(s) wronged. It is essential that this be accompanied by “works meet for repentance”.

10.4.2 Be aware of safety issues for the victim or victims. They need to feel as safe and secure as possible. (Does the victim have somewhere to live, have access to finances etc.?)

10.4.3 Victims carry the secret of the abuse and will probably be frightened or ashamed if approached to talk about the violence and may deny it is happening if asked.

10.4.4 Have safety information, phone numbers, local resources available.

10.4.5 Take time to talk to the victim and observe how they are.

10.4.6 Assess whether the victim has trusted friends in the ecclesia or if are they isolated?

10.4.7 Assess whether the victim have strong family support?

10.5 **What to do for the person perpetrating the violence (Matthew 7:19-20)**

10.5.1 Do hold the abuser accountable at all times.

10.5.2 Do name the violence both physical and/or psychological as the abuser’s issue. So long as the abuser perpetrates such violence, his/her spiritual walk is compromised. (Prov. 21:7)

10.5.3 Do encourage abusers to control their own behaviour not the victim’s.

10.5.4 Do help abusers face their behaviour and its consequences.

10.5.5 Do pray with abusers and for them and assure them of your support in their efforts to overcome the violence.

10.5.6 Do encourage abusers to seek professional help.

10.5.7 Do provide a package of local resources, phone number, web addresses where information can be accessed.

10.5.8 Do address any religious rationalisations abusers may offer for their behaviour. Violence is never acceptable.

10.5.9 Do assess the abuser for suicide or threats of homicide.

10.5.10 Do warn those against whom the abuser has made threats.

10.5.11 Don’t confuse remorse with true repentance. Repentance requires restitution and an understanding of the impacts of violence. (1 John 1:9)

10.5.12 Don’t go to the abuser to confirm a story. This could place other family members particularly children and the aged at risk. Remember violence often occurs in the home, when others are not there to observe.

10.5.13 Don’t give the abuser information about the victim’s whereabouts if he or she has left the family home for fear for their own children’s physical and psychological safety.

10.5.14 Don’t accept the abuser’s attempts to rationalise, blame, deny or justify rather hold him/her gently accountable.

10.5.15 Don’t quickly accept an apparent change of heart or remorse. It could be a way to manipulate you and others. Scripture teaches that a change of heart needs to be genuine and this occurs over time. It will be seen through recognition of personal accountability for their violent behaviour and a need for restitution. (Prov.22:24-25)

10.5.16 Don’t attempt counselling beyond your expertise.
10.6 **What can ecclesial members do to support victims and perpetrators of family and domestic violence** (Psalm 17:4)

10.6.1 Support those who disclose abuse and those who speak out against the problem.
10.6.2 Help to find resources to support both victim and perpetrator.
10.6.3 Accept the victim’s story. It is unlikely he/she is lying.
10.6.4 Talk to the perpetrator and encourage him/her to accept his/her accountability.
10.6.5 Don’t accept blame, justification and rationalisations as an excuse for the violence.
10.6.6 Give the children opportunity for normal interaction free from violence where they can experience safety to just “be” children.

11. **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1  Community resources**

Police emergency: 000  
Less urgent Police attendance: differs in each State  
Domestic Violence Helpline 1800 653 464  
Women’s Legal Service Helpline 1800 957 957  
Relationships Australia 1300 364 277  
National 1800RESPECT Line 1800 737 732  
Child Abuse Reporting Line – differs for each State  
Mensline Australia 1300 78 99 78  
Lifeline (includes suicide support) 131 114  
Uniting Communities Counselling for Perpetrators – South Australia 08 8202 51

**Appendix 2  Further Reading**

*An Evaluation of Interventions with Domestic Violence Perpetrators* August 2009  
ISBN 978 0 646 52479 5  

*Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy*  

*Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria*  

*A paper on Domestic and family Violence in Christadelphia*  
[https://www.hearbelieveact.org/](https://www.hearbelieveact.org/)

*Report on Domestic and Family Violence Against Males*  

Appendix 3  Personalised Safety Plan

(With permission from Fiona Bosley, *Family and Domestic Violence*, Recommended Protocols from QCSN
https://www.hearbelieveact.org/resources)

The following information may be of use to the victim of domestic and family violence

*If you are in an abusive relationship, think about....*

1. Having important phone numbers nearby for you and your children. Numbers to have are the police, hotlines, friends and the local 1800 number
2. Ecclesial member, friends or neighbours you could tell about the abuse. Ask them to call the police if they hear angry or violent noises. If you have children, teach them how to dial 000. Let others know a code word that if you use means you need help.
3. How to get out of your home safely. Practise ways to get out.
4. Safer places in your home where there are exits and no weapons. If you feel abuse is going to happen, try to get your abuser to one of these safer places.
5. Any weapons in the house. Think about ways that you could get them out of the house.
6. Even if you do not plan to leave, think of where you could go. Think of how you might leave. Try doing things that get you out of the house – taking out the rubbish, walking the pet or going to the shops. Put together a bag of things you use every day (see checklist). Hide it where it is easy for you to get.
7. Go over your safety plan often.

*If you consider leaving your abuser, think about....*

1. Four places you could go if you leave your home.
2. People who might help you if you left. Think about people who will keep a bag for you. Think about people who might lend you money. Make plans for your pets.
3. Keep change for phone calls or get a mobile phone.
4. Open a bank account or get a credit card in your name.
5. How you might leave. Try doing things that get you out of the house – take out the rubbish, walk the pet or go to the shops. Practise how you would leave.
6. How you could take your children with you safely. There are times when taking your children with you may put all of your lives in danger. You need to protect yourself to be able to protect your children.
7. Put together a bag of things you use every day. Hide it where it is easy for you to get.

**ITEMS TO TAKE IF POSSIBLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children (if it is safe)</th>
<th>Welfare identification</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Passports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver’s license</td>
<td>Lease/rental agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys to car, house, work</td>
<td>Mortgage payment info, unpaid bills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra clothes</td>
<td>Insurance papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Domestic Violence Order</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important papers (you and the children)</td>
<td>Any legal documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth certificates</td>
<td>Your will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health card, credit cards,</td>
<td>Address book</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centrelink identification</td>
<td>Photos, jewellery, things that mean a lot to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and medical records</td>
<td>Items for your children (toys, blankets etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankbooks</td>
<td>The spouse’s tax file number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Car registration</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. Think about reviewing your safety plan often.
If you have left your abuser, think about....

1. Your safety – you still need to.
2. Get a mobile phone.
3. Get a Domestic Violence Order (protection order) from the court. Keep a copy with you all the time. Give a copy to the local police, people who take care of your children, their schools and your boss.
4. Change the locks. Consider putting in stronger doors, smoke detectors, security system, outside lights.
5. Tell friends and neighbours that your abuser no longer lives with you. Ask them to call the police if they see your abuser near your home or the children.
6. Tell people who take care of your children the names of people who are allowed to pick them up. If you have an order protecting your children give their teachers and baby-sitters a copy of it.
7. Tell someone at work about what has happened. Ask that person to screen your calls. If you have a protection order that includes where your work, consider giving your employer a copy of it and a picture of the abuser. Think about and practice a safety plan for your workplace. This should include going to and from work.
8. Ensure bank accounts, mobile phone statements (all identifying information) go to a safe address where the abuser does not have access to the information.
9. Not using the same shops or businesses that you did when you were with your abuser.
10. Someone that you can call if you feel down. Call that person if you are thinking about going to a support group or workshop.
11. Find a safe way to speak with your abuser if you must. Consider putting in an answering machine to filter calls.
12. Go over your safety plan often.

SPECIAL NOTE:
Abusers try to control their victim’s lives.
When abusers feel a loss of control – such as when victims try to leave them – the abuse often gets worse.
Take special care when you leave.
Keep being careful even after you have left.
Appendix 4  Reconciliation and Restitution – the Restoration of Trust Through Word and Deed

A process for reconciliation

In Ezekiel 33 the Prophet speaks of the process of repentance:

Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy People, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. (Ezekiel 33: 12)

When a wicked person turns from their evil it is as if all the wickedness never existed in God’s sight:

When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. (Ezekiel 33:14-15)

True Repentance Requires Restitution - Giving Back What Has Been Taken Away

Ezekiel 33:15 talks of the particular process that a sinner must employ if he or she is to find acceptance with God by introducing the idea of restitution. He says that wicked people must restore what they have taken to the person against whom they have sinned. He refers to Exodus 22:26 where a poor man who, as a surety for a loan, gives his cloak to a rich man. The prophet draws attention to the evil of people taking advantage of others especially those weaker than themselves. "Give back the cloak”, says Ezekiel. Your brother is a poor man and you have used your power and advantage to take away the little he has."

Restitution and Family and Domestic Violence and Abuse

In the world restitution in the context of family and domestic violence and abuse speaks inevitably of a financial settlement of some sort. Scripture regards restitution as a far deeper concept. For true restitution to take place abusers must understand the damage they have done. Through their actions they have caused any number of serious negative consequences for their victim. Money cannot repair the spiritual damage domestic violence and abuse has caused.

In such circumstances how can restitution possibly be accomplished? It is a matter of developing trust by words and actions and by assuring the victim that the abuser has changed and deeply regrets what he / she has done. This could be through the production of evidence of meetings with counselors where anger management programs have been undertaken, through spiritual counseling with members of the ecclesia, through gradual contact with the family where new attitudes and behaviours can be witnessed, and through apology comprising a public or private statement that lets the wronged party know that the person recognises his/her sin, is sorry for it and is committed to change.

How can the healing process be commenced?

This can be a long and drawn out process because so much has been destroyed and it cannot be expected that love and trust can be restored overnight. Exactly how a perpetrator might restore the trust that has been taken away depends very much on the people involved, what was done and should be guided by both professional and spiritual counselors.

To restore takes great courage, humility and self-knowledge, but it brings life and a clear conscience. It is a change of behaviour that encourages the wronged person to develop, over time, confidence they can again trust the abuser and that the bad behaviour will not be repeated. However, consequences may remain even after forgiveness and restitution.
How should the victim behave?

Once assured the abuser has changed his/her ways and the victim and children are safe, ideally the victim should accept the restitution with humility and joy that a sinning brother or sister sees the principles of a life guided by God as more important than their own pride. This should not imply the victim should be required to restore the full family relationship although this is an admirable aim.

The Lord's Prayer gives further insight into the concept and practice of forgiveness that is at the very heart of God's relationship with men and women. It should, therefore, also be at the very heart of relationships between men and women in the ecclesia.

*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* (Matthew 6:12)

Let this mind be in all of us

On the cross our Lord cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". There is another prayer we all could pray: "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we have done". When we bring our gifts to the altar and we remember we have offended a brother or sister, let us leave our gifts and go and make our peace with them first. Then we can worship God with a pure heart.