

"WHAT IF..."

WHAT IF YOU ARE A NEW PASTOR IN A NEW COMMUNITY?

Community/Congregational Response

- ❖ Familiarize yourself with local domestic violence shelters, support groups and hotlines.
- ❖ Introduce yourself to local shelter workers and other advocates. Remember that often pastors have given abused persons harmful messages that have endangered them. You will need to show that you will be a good partner with them. If possible, attend the training that they provide for volunteers.
- ❖ Join your state coalition against domestic violence.
- ❖ Ask whether your new presbytery has a committee that addresses domestic violence.
- ❖ If your presbytery does not supply them, arrange to have cards printed with hotline numbers in the restrooms of the church. Encourage other churches to follow your lead.
- ❖ In the church narthex and/or fellowship hall, make available pamphlets about PADVN and domestic violence, especially the pamphlet, "What Every Congregation Needs to Know About Domestic Violence..." (see resources)

Theological/Scriptural Response

- ❖ In worship services, include prayers for those suffering from, recovering from and survivors of domestic violence.
- ❖ Name and discuss the problem of domestic violence in sermons. Even the slightest reference indicates to victims that you can be trusted with their situation.
- ❖ Study scripture readings from the perspective of someone experiencing domestic violence. Listen carefully to how the text might be heard by victims and survivors.
- ❖ Be alert to those who might misinterpret scriptures that keep women in submissive roles.
- ❖ Be aware that victims may have distorted theological beliefs concerning suffering and forgiveness and that their beliefs may keep them in abusive relationships.

Legal Response

- ❖ Find resources within the congregation: Are there any congregation members who work in shelters, social workers, or lawyers who specialize in family law? Utilize such members to familiarize yourself with local laws and answer any questions you might have.
- ❖ Try to identify an attorney who is willing to work on a pro-bono basis with victims.

Pastoral Response

- ❖ Make a list of hotline and shelter phone numbers, and have the list in several places — in your car, in the office, and at home.
- ❖ Practice how you will respond to both victims and abusers.
- ❖ Make sure you discuss domestic violence during family or pre-marital counseling sessions. Always meet with persons individually to establish that violence is not part of their relationship.

Educational Response

- ❖ Continue to educate yourself. Use your continuing education funds to attend the next national or local event on domestic violence.
- ❖ Talk to elders (or other pastors) in your church: What has the church done lately to address domestic violence in the community and in the church?
- ❖ Ask the church's Christian Education Committee to offer an age-appropriate series on domestic violence for all Sunday School classes, from preschool through adult.
- ❖ If your church is not already a member, ask the church to become a member of Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (PADVN) to obtain current information about abuse.
- ❖ Ask the presbytery if you can make a presentation on PADVN or have table space for materials about abuse at a presbytery meeting.
- ❖ Use the denominational resources for educational events. Members of PADVN are available for training or consultation and many resources can be borrowed from the PHEWA office. (see resource list)