

**Mothers' UNION**

Christian care for families

Province of All Ireland

# Prayer Diary...

16 days with 16 prayer  
requests to end violence  
against women

**NO MORE  
1 IN 3**



CHURCH OF IRELAND

## 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence...

*Mothers' Union calls for an  
end to violence in all forms*

**The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign beginning on 25th November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and ending on 10th December, International Human Rights Day.**

Mothers' Union has identified three major pillars of change which members believe are needed in all communities worldwide. The first of these is gender justice. Throughout this annual campaign, Mothers' Union joins with other participating organisations to raise awareness of, and call for an end to, gender-based violence in all forms and in all societies.

In Ireland, our focus will continue to be on highlighting domestic abuse, now sadly termed by the World Council of Churches as the "second pandemic". Each year our MU activities evolve prayerfully and practically as we host a Vigil in each diocese, support our local refuges, provide information and worship materials, contact politicians and, in some dioceses, lead school assemblies and workshops.

Domestic abuse and gender-based violence can affect any person at any time, but statistics demonstrate that women and girls are particularly at risk. For these 16 days we focus on women and girls, also recognising the value of men and women reflecting, praying and acting together to call for an end to violence in all its forms.

*"For the LORD is a God of justice." Isaiah 30:18b*

*"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.  
Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes  
of him to whom we must give account." Hebrews 4:13*

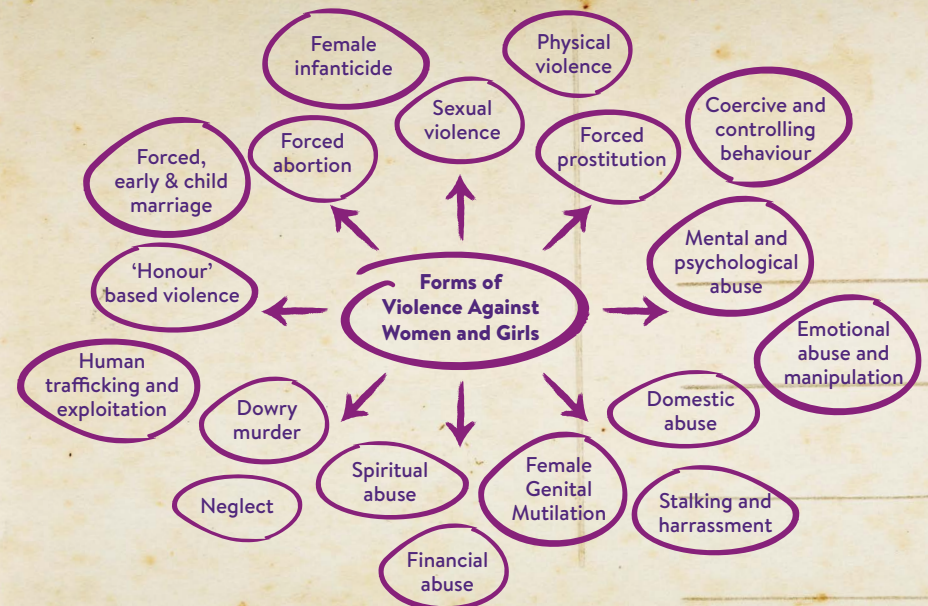
*Jane Butler*  
All-Ireland President

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## What is Gender-Based Violence?

**Gender-based violence is any form of violence which is perpetuated against someone because of their gender and, unfortunately, gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls.**

**No more 1 in 3** refers to that fact that one in three women globally will experience some form of gender-based violence at some point in their lifetime (World Health Organisation). A staggering fact in today's world.



To download Mothers' Union resources go to this link:  
<https://www.mothersunion.org/projects/16-days-activism-against-gender-based-violence>

**Content warning** - as this diary contains themes of violence its content is suitable for those aged 18 and over and readers' discretion is advised. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of information provided and any possible issues will be addressed in future editions.

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## Why a Prayer Diary?

# Reaching out in love and service...

**In challenging social injustice, Mothers' Union has a long standing three pronged approach - Praying, Enabling and Campaigning.**

'To transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence, and pursue peace and reconciliation', is the focus of the Anglican Communion's fourth mark of mission. As people of faith in *Romans 12:2* we are challenged not to conform to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed. When we are changed from the inside out God daily brings out the best in us.

Given the data available surrounding the increase of domestic abuse and gender-based violence in our communities, each one of us has a responsibility to play a vital role in ending violence and in taking part in conversations with fellow members of our church.

Evidence shows that, in churches worldwide, violence is being experienced within the church. In this diary we signpost to and highlight the positive work being undertaken by many bodies within the Church of Ireland.

We are created equal in God's sight. To tackle abuse, we must stand together to challenge the culture and attitudes around us, and in so doing reflect God's love.

As we take this journey of reflection, prayer and action may we find encouragement, empowerment, hope and confidence in the words of *Micah 6:8*:



*"But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love." The Message*

*Jacqui*

Jacqui Armstrong  
16 Days All-Ireland Coordinator

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## What our faith leaders say...

*"How terrible must it be to be afraid when you hear a key in the door. How demoralising must it be to live your life in the home you have created against the dark background of control and belittlement. A civilised and compassionate society should do everything in its power to root out domestic abuse. And every Christian should help where they can."*

*The Most Revd John McDowell,  
Archbishop of Armagh*

*"Domestic abuse is all the more devastating because so often it is invisible except to the person who suffers and to the person who does violence to that person. The light goes out on life itself through the stripping out of personality, dignity and humanity itself. Domestic abuse is not an accident; it is a deliberate act of cruelty."*

*The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson,  
Archbishop of Dublin & Glendatough*

*"The sad reality is that a large number of homes and families are impacted by domestic violence and separated from Christ's peace. Domestic violence is not often spoken about openly, but my wish is that Christians everywhere will be empowered by God's grace to become active ambassadors for peace in the Church and in the world, beginning in their own homes, families, workplaces and neighbourhoods."*

*The Most Revd Eamon Martin  
Archbishop of Armagh*

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*More on page 27...*



# Day 1: *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*



## *Reflect:*

- 1 in 3 women and girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most frequently by an intimate partner (UN).
- 1 in 2 women, worldwide, were killed by their partners or family in 2017; while only 1 out of 20 men died under similar circumstances (UN).

*“There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable.” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon 2008*

*“A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” John 13:34*

Loving one another like Christ means caring and respecting each other. In its fulness we seek to serve one another, to be uplifting, gracious, supporting and encouraging.



## *Pray:*

- That God will reveal situations of violence, discrimination and abuse in our communities and help us speak out against all forms of violence.



## *Act:*

Plan to become better informed of the wider picture and talk to one person about it today: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

# Day 2: *Spotlight on FGM*



## *Reflect:*

- In 2017 an estimated 5,790 women and girls living in Ireland had undergone FGM, Central Statistics Office data / Akidwa.
- In 9 months, 17 cases of FGM presented in the Belfast Trust area.
- Worldwide, 200 million women and girls have undergone Female Genital Mutilation (UN).

*“So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27*

God designed us in his image to work in his created world. Our physical bodies are an important part of the body of Christ, and the ‘temple of the holy spirit’.

Every aspect of our bodies has a purpose. To damage our body is to say we know better than God. We are each beautiful and precious in his sight.



## *Pray:*

- For women and girls living with health problems as a result of FGM.
- For effective education programmes to eradicate this harmful cultural practice.
- For workers and volunteers who accompany survivors on their journey of healing.



## *Act:*

Check out Barbara Mugisha’s MU work in Uganda to eradicate FGM: <https://www.mothersunion.org/news/gender-justice-educating-eradicate-harmful-cultural-practice>

Learn more about FGM in Ireland: <https://akidwa.ie/female-genital-mutilation/>

## Day 3:



### Reflect:

The General Grant applications Protestant Aid receives relate to a wide range of financial needs. They increasingly stem from situations of domestic violence. Incidents have increased during the pandemic and we are aware of circumstances where women have had to flee from their homes in fear, often with their frightened children.

Because this can occur suddenly, women and children are often left without funds, food and changes of clothes etc. We attempt to assist these applicants via their Clergy or Social Workers.

*"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*  
John 10:10



### Pray:

- For those who are living in or close to poverty because of this abuse.
- For the agencies and the Gardaí who work with women who have experienced this trauma.
- For the 1,000 plus families who contact Protestant Aid every year for assistance.

If you have questions please contact your Rector, Social Worker or Protestant Aid directly (*via our website at [www.protestantaid.org](http://www.protestantaid.org)*).



### Act:

For many Food Poverty is endemic - pledge to make a food donation to one of your local foodbanks or at a supermarket collection point.



## Day 4: *The Story of Tamar*



### Reflect:

Today we consider a powerful uncomfortable story of perpetuated sexual violence and God's condemnation of it. It is a stark reminder that sexual violence is a violation of human rights.

*Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22*, reflect on this biblical story and how it mirrors the experiences of many in the 21st century. Then consider:

- How did Amnon's abuse of his victim trigger his hate for her after his actions? What does this show us about the ongoing risk that victims are at from their perpetrators?
- Consider Absalom's initial reaction to Tamar's ordeal. How can we counter similar attitudes in our day?
- In what ways does our society make it hard for those who have experienced gender-based violence to speak out about their experiences?



### Pray:

- For the healing of pain caused by sexual violence.
- For caring men and women who will speak out against sexual violence and endeavour to protect vulnerable people.



### Act:

The link to this MU Bible study is found in the 16 Days Resources at: [www.mothersunion.org](http://www.mothersunion.org)

**Thursdays in Black - towards a world without rape and violence...**

*join with a growing number of people who are committed to wearing black on Thursdays with a Thursdays in Black Badge.*



*See page 25*

## Day 5:

### The Girls' Friendly Society



#### Reflect:

GFS participates in the 16 Days of Activism and around the world marks the 25th of each month as 'Orange Day', when members are encouraged to wear orange, to raise awareness and encourage discussion of the ongoing campaign against violence towards women and girls.

In the words of GFS World Wide President, Mrs Thembeke Pama, "when we stand up we are 'bearing one another's burdens' to make a difference in our homes and communities."

*"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the Law of Christ."*  
Galatians 6 v2

Reflect on these words, what do they mean for you today?

How can we inspire girls in challenging circumstances to continue to know and feel God's love for them, to know that they are precious and known by name?



#### Pray:

- That we find new and innovative ways to keep supporting and encouraging each other through the challenges of life.



#### Act:

The GFS Worldwide Prayers of Hope booklet is dedicated to the girls and women who have suffered at the hands of others by any form of gender-based violence. Download your copy today and use it as a guide for your thoughts and prayers towards a hopeful safer future: <https://www.gfsworld.org/prayer-diary/prayers-of-hope-for-orange-day-addressing-gender-violence>

For further information email: [office@girlsfriendsociety.ie](mailto:office@girlsfriendsociety.ie) or check out: [www.girlsfriendsociety.ie](http://www.girlsfriendsociety.ie)

(Alison Jackson, GFS All Ireland President)



## Day 6: Safe Places



#### Reflect:

Lockdown was a protective measure, a way to shelter people from a deadly pandemic. Yet throughout it, we saw a shadow pandemic growing, of violence against women.

Where is your safe place? As Christians we understand God to be our stronghold, our place of refuge - a God of solidarity in suffering. How can we join him by standing in solidarity with women and children without a safe refuge from violence?



#### Pray:

- For Bishops' Appeal funded Christian Aid and Anglican Service of Diakonia and Development safe houses in the Sante Maria and Ariquemes in the Amazon. Two local bakeries are managed by the women involved in the safe houses, helping them to develop skills and generate income.
- For the women who are healing from trauma. Pray for Rev Elineide Ferreira de Oliveira. The minister and co-ordinator of the Casa Noeli dos Santos safe house is on the frontline of the fight against gender-based violence in Brazil.



#### Act:

On average 9 requests for refuge are turned away in Ireland every day. Find out what shortages there are in your local area and write to your local TD / MLA / MP asking them to prioritise funding and resources for these.

(Lydia Monds, Bishops' Appeal)



## Day 7: CRITICALL



### Reflect:

*“For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”  
Psalm 30:5*

Imagine if during the pandemic you were forced to remain at home in an abusive environment. For many people this has been the reality since March of this year and as a community many partners came together to create CRITiCall - Community Response Team Call to:

- Collect **donations** (food, vouchers, home starter kits, hygiene supplies and more).
- Source **homes** (for victims ready to move on from refuge).
- Encourage **letters** (of hope and courage from the public).



### Pray:

- For the many victims feeling trapped in abusive situations.
- For the volunteers who selflessly dedicate time and energy to our refuges and partner organisations.



### Act:

The response to CRITiCall has been incredible:

- Regional hubs are appearing around the country to collect food and supplies for victims and you can be a part of this movement to support women and children in our communities.
- Write a letter to encourage people who are embarking on a journey to a new, safe life.
- Donate to a local hub.

For more information contact: [KelleyBirmingham@theiveaghtrust.ie](mailto:KelleyBirmingham@theiveaghtrust.ie)  
/+353 86 606 10 80

*(Kelley, Birmingham, CRITiCall, Iveagh Trust Community Consultant)*

## Day 8: The Samaritan Woman at the well



### Reflect:

Jesus challenged many of the social customs of his day. Here we find a woman, regarded as ‘unclean’, despised and rejected by her own people, yet Jesus chooses to demonstrate to us that this woman is created and loved by God. He does not treat her as a social outcast, or condemn her, but meets her in her need and gives her life. Like Jesus, we have a responsibility to challenge judgemental attitudes and consider no race or group of people as inferior to others.

*Read John 4:1-30*, reflect on this biblical story and how it mirrors the experiences of many in the 21st century. Then consider:

- How do we respond to people who feel isolated, unworthy or excluded?
- What do you think are the reasons survivors of sexual violence don't report an attack?



### Pray:

- That we can really love as Christ did and be a faithful witness in representing God and sharing his unconditional love.
- That people who have survived sexual violence can find love and support and share their gifts within our church communities.



### Act:

Reflect further on this story in the Tearfund resource: *Hand in Hand: Bible studies to transform our response to sexual violence*  
[https://learn.tearfund.org/~/\\_media/files/tilz/hiv/hand\\_in\\_hand\\_bible\\_studies\\_sv.pdf?la=en](https://learn.tearfund.org/~/_media/files/tilz/hiv/hand_in_hand_bible_studies_sv.pdf?la=en)

Everyone has a story - make eye contact with those whom you meet today, greet each one with a welcoming smile.

## Day 9: *Coercive Control*



### *Reflect:*

Coercive control is the most pervasive form of domestic abuse. It is not necessarily physical but is a persistent and deliberate pattern of behaviour by an abuser over a prolonged period designed to achieve obedience and create fear. It may include coercion, threats, stalking, intimidation, isolation, degradation and control. It may also include physical and/or sexual violence.

It is a criminal offence in the Republic of Ireland and, at present, a similar Bill is before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

*"...as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people."  
Galations 6:10*

How can we act to change a culture that accepts coercive behaviour in a relationship?



### *Pray:*

Thank God for the progress made in recent years:

- For the Legislators who are forming and amending legislation.
- For effective resourcing and implementation of the Bills to enable victims and their families to regain their lives.



### *Act:*

Coercive control can be very subtle, yet can have a devastating impact on children and women's lives. Learn the signs and look out for anyone who may need help in your community.

<https://www.safeireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/Safe-Ireland-Coercive-Control-Leaflet.pdf>

Contact your TD/MP/MLA and ask for appropriate resources to be put in place to see these Bills fully implemented.

*Cultural change is important, and achievable.*

## Day 10: *Breaking the Cycle of Trafficking*



### *Reflect:*

Maya Angelou, the famous author and activist, said of her rape as a seven year old child and her subsequent five year mutism, that cynicism in a young person who has been violated is one of the worst things because they move from knowing nothing to believing nothing.



### *Pray:*

Bishops' Appeal has funded Tearfund Ireland programmes in Cambodia where children are at risk of trafficking, prostitution and other exploitation.

- Pray for children living in desperate situations, whose families are coaxed into trafficking them to orphanages or to other countries for work, believing they can have a better life.
- Pray for the emergency foster carers in Cambodia providing care while families are being traced. Many are retired teachers who take traumatised children in and provide a caring family home.



### *Act:*

**Break the Cycle** - children traumatised by abuse carry that trauma into adulthood. Many enter abusive relationships, either as victims or perpetrators. Choose an organisation that works with people who are trafficked and support it with either time or money. *Examples: Tearfund Ireland; Ruhama.*

**Listen to a woman today.** You don't know her life behind closed doors. You don't know if she has gone from 'knowing nothing to believing nothing.' Believe in her, invest time in her, listen to her.

*(Lydia Monds, Bishops' Appeal)*





# Day 11: Church of Ireland Marriage Council



## Reflect:

In my first pastoral visit as a Curate I called round to a house after a woman new to the parish had requested for a member of the clergy to call.

Everything seemed perfectly normal, but over the coming months I became very aware that behind a beautiful home can lie a predator that no one else sees. The fact was that this young woman was experiencing physical, financial and emotional abuse from her partner. She felt it important, even through her private misery, to submit to her husband, no matter what the cost, because of how she understood *Ephesians 5:22*. It is a tragic irony that this verse in some examples has been used to justify violence and abuse against women.



## Pray:

- For our church leaders that they may faithfully teach God's Word and that it may not be used as a tool to damage and abuse.
- For women of abuse that they can seek refuge from our churches, signposting to places of support.



## Act:

As a parish, find out more about the counselling services available from the Church of Ireland Marriage Council. ([marriage.ireland.anglican.org](http://marriage.ireland.anglican.org))

(Revd Johnny Campbell-Smyth, Chair, Church of Ireland Marriage Council)



# Day 12: Love matters



## Reflect:

At the heart of Mothers' Union's campaign against violence against women and girls is our love for God, which motivates and challenges 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)



## Pray:

**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?
- Victims and perpetrators of violence 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.



## Act:

*"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."* 1 John 3:18. Think of one new step you can take to challenge abuse.

Consider developing a pathway to support victims of abuse. Find out about Safe Place and Safe Church training at: <https://onustraining.co.uk/playing-your-part/how-you-can-become-a-safe-church/>

## Day 13: Women in Conflict Zones



### Reflect:

In conflict zones we are appalled to hear of rape being used as a weapon of war. Yet targeted violence does not come from nowhere. There was a pre-existing inequality and social norm from which it stemmed. Violence against women is a symptom of a deeper rooted societal ailment.

*“Gender justice is achieved when women and men, girls and boys have equal enjoyment of human rights, responsibilities, life prospects and opportunities, and the power and resources to shape their own lives and contribute to society, irrespective of gender or sex.”*  
(A definition from Side by Side and Act Alliance)



### Pray:

Bishops' Appeal has funded MU Literacy Circles in Burundi and Ethiopia, in communities and refugee camps, where women are fleeing war and conflict.

- Pray for the women who lead and who attend them, that they may gain confidence and invaluable training to enhance their opportunities.
- Pray that they may realise their worth. In all circles, men and women note a reduction of violence in the home as couples see themselves as partners.



### Act:

Stigma and Silence are the bed fellows of violence and inequality. Education and empathy are the breakers of chains.

Educate yourself on one issue that is NOT violence that creates gender inequality and allows violence in our society to fester. Examples include toxic masculinity, discrimination in the workplace, the pay gap.

*(Lydia Monds, Bishops' Appeal)*

## Day 14: Child Marriage - what an impact!



### Reflect:

Each year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. That is 23 girls every minute or nearly 1 every 3 seconds! (UN)

**Child brides face huge challenges because they are married as children.**

- Girls tend to be poor, under-educated, and live in rural areas where birth and death rates are high and conflict is common.
- Isolated, and with limited freedom, they lose their childhood.
- Child brides are neither physically nor emotionally ready to become wives and mothers, risking dangerous complications in pregnancy and childbirth, and often suffering domestic violence.

**How can I deliver this promise?**

*“For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help.” Psalm 72:12 (NIV)*



### Pray:

- For children affected and for a change in religious and cultural norms that allow child marriage to take place.
- That governments will outlaw this appalling practice.



### Act:

Learn more at: <https://www.mothersunion.org/news/challenging-early-marriage-kenya> and at [www.girlsnotbrides.org](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org)

In Northern Ireland 68 children were married in 2014 and of these, 42 were girls. Contact your TD/MP/MLA demanding the increase of the minimum age for marriage with and without parental consent to 18 years, for both girls and boys.



## Day 15: Transforming Power

God's power is transformative. The arrogant will be humbled by the realisation that it is through the power of the Cross that we are who we are, not by our own efforts. It is because of the Cross that the suffering and marginalised in our communities can realise their full worth as individuals loved and valued by God.



### Reflect:

Uniquely among the saints The Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated with two festivals in the Book of Common Prayer; on the 25th of March and the 8th of September.

Often portrayed in art as a very passive figure, she gave her "yes" to the angel who told her she was to be the mother of Jesus. Mary stood at the foot of the cross as she watched her son die. Yet this same Mary sang the radical song we know as the Magnificat "throwing down the mighty from their thrones and exalting the humble and meek."

In all our lives there are times when it is right to accept what life brings and trust in God's guidance and love; there are times when our faith pushes us to take action and oppose the "mighty on their thrones."



### Pray:

- For those in positions of power in society, that they may use it for the good of all.
- For those who abuse power, that they may remember that in the end, all power comes from God.



### Act:

Read the Magnificat (*Luke 1:46-55*) or listen to it set to music - perhaps a musical version of the hymn, *My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord*.

What does the song of Mary say to the use and abuse of power in our society?

*(The Right Revd Kenneth Kearon, Chair, Church and Society Commission, CASC)*



## Day 16: International Human Rights Day



### Reflect:

In God's eyes we are created equal and at one with Christ. Today is an opportunity to rejoice in the entirety of God's creation and reflect on ways we can share God's compassion and love throughout it.

*"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 NIV



*"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. [...] Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."* Eleanor Roosevelt, UN

Is respect for women and girls everyone's responsibility? What, in your opinion, is the foundational principle for an equitable, peaceful, prosperous and sustainable society?



### Pray:

Christ has no body now but yours.  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.  
Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours. *St Teresa of Avila*



### Act:

Using this prayer as your inspiration to think and act purposefully, make a note and take steps today to be that change you want to see in this world.

Families First article: <https://www.mothersunion.org/news/gender-justice-increasing-awareness-human-rights-all>

# A Biblical *Perspective...*

**Mothers' Union's commitment to calling for an end to the scourge of domestic abuse and gender-based violence lies in 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 of 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 e.g. 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 inter-mingling 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. 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 haemorrhage 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 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 Jesus. 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. (*Mothers' Union, 16 Days Resources*)

### *A prayer for those working to end sexual and gender-based violence...*

God bless you with insight to recognise violence in all its forms, and courage to name it, speaking out for justice.

The Lord Jesus bless you with compassion for the vulnerable, and grace to stand with them, sharing his strength.

The Holy Spirit bless you with a prayerful heart, and power to breathe peace, transforming the world.

The blessing of the holy and glorious Trinity, eternal Wisdom, living Word, abiding Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

(With thanks to the Anglican Church of Australia)

## What is *Thursdays in Black?*



**Thursdays in Black** is a World Council of Churches (WCC) initiative. Mothers' Union have been promoting *Thursdays In Black*. Here All-Ireland President, June Butler, speaks of her commitment:

### *How has Thursdays in Black impacted you personally?*

*"It makes me appreciate how fortunate I am and I remember how so many in this world are subjected regularly to rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment. These are evils, they always have been, and sadly they are still present in our society. I want to use Thursdays In Black as a vehicle to raise awareness of them and encourage everyone to work towards a world which is free of them."*

### *When people ask you about your button, what is your message to them?*

*"I try to get this message from Canon Terrie Robinson across, "A commitment to wearing black one day every week means getting into a rhythm of constantly 'showing up' as a visual, challenging and urgent reminder that rape happens and must stop. It's also a commitment to being activist - in prayer and deed - against the abuse of power."*



### **Act:**

Request a *Thursdays In Black* Badge from Mothers' Union. Find a black piece of clothing and start wearing it every Thursday. The cloth will not perform miracles, but our prayers and attitudes should.

Learn more about *Thursdays In Black*:

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black>

# 'Souls of Our Shoes'

The Mothers' Union 'Souls of our Shoes' exhibition is a thought provoking, compelling, awareness raising initiative. It aims to open conversations and to let people know that there are people of faith concerned for them.

The Souls of Our Shoes Exhibition was housed in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin during the 2018 World Meeting of Families. Thousands of men, women and children stopped to pause and reflect on the plight of those who live with and those who have walked away from abuse - many declaring, "this is endemic in my country too."

'Souls of Our Shoes' is available to churches and groups who wish to highlight domestic abuse and gender-based violence in their communities.

Contact our Administrator at: [allireland.mothersunion@gmail.com](mailto:allireland.mothersunion@gmail.com) for further details.



## Moving on...

Mothers' Union wish to thank you for accompanying us on this '16 Days of Activism' journey. We acknowledge the Church of Ireland Priorities Fund and the Council for Mission for their generous assistance in making the publication of this diary possible.

On average the PSNI field a call relating to domestic abuse every 17 minutes. The issues highlighted by the 16 Days of Activism do not end on the 10th December. It is our collective responsibility to encourage and enable, to see, respond and act.

May God bless you and inspire you on that journey this coming year.

*"As the Father sent me, so I send you."* John 20 v 21-22

## What our faith leaders say...

*"Raising awareness of gender-based violence is like shining a light into the dark recesses of loneliness, fear, rejection and pain. It helps those who are suffering to realise that there are those who are listening and enables them to begin a journey into the wide open spaces of God's compassion and healing."*

*Very Rev Dr Charles McMullen, Former moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*

*"We believe that Jesus came to set the captive free, this includes those who are victims of gender-based violence. It is often our neighbour who feels imprisoned, worthless or hopeless in their abusive relationship. With Christ's grace and wisdom let us call out this injustice and offer support."*

*Rev Dr David Clements, Chair, Council on Social Responsibility of the Methodist Church in Ireland*

# Looking for help?

The following websites are operated by the PSNI and An Garda Síochána. They contain extensive lists and information which direct one to assistance in every corner of Ireland.

## Republic of Ireland

In an emergency dial 112 or 999  
The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic,  
Sexual and Gender-based Violence: 01 4768680\*  
[www.cosc.ie](http://www.cosc.ie)  
[www.whatwouldyoudo.ie](http://www.whatwouldyoudo.ie)

\*Call charges may apply

## Northern Ireland

In an emergency dial 999  
[www.psni.police.uk/crime/domestic-abuse/](http://www.psni.police.uk/crime/domestic-abuse/)  
24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline  
Tel: 0808 802 1414

Supported by:



Church of Ireland  
Council for Mission

