

RESOLUTION ON VIOLENCE IN RELATION TO WOMEN

Introduction

Violence and the fear of violence in American society is a fact that affects us all. But we are just beginning to recognize the widespread prevalence of violence in relation to women and children in American homes and on the streets. By the most conservative estimates, more than 1,000,000 children are abused each year; at least 2,000 of them will die annually as a result. Almost 2,000,000 American women are beaten each year, one every eighteen seconds. About one-fourth of the approximately 20,000 people murdered each year in the United States are killed by a family member, usually a spouse.

Further, incidents of rape, child neglect, marital rape, incest and psychological abuse - forms of violence that are more difficult to count because they are so infrequently reported- are phenomena which none of us can escape. Many of our friends, relatives, and acquaintances have been the victims of such violence - even though the painful story usually goes untold.

Theological Basis for Concern

Persons created in the image of God are not intended to be victimized by violence and abuse, especially as it occurs in the family. An understanding of the profound significance of the sacredness of God's creation in human persons underlies any theological response to violence in relation to women and children.

A God whose creation is called good and who promises abundance of life intends that persons live together free from the fear and the suffering of physical and sexual abuse.

Unfortunately, this fear and suffering are all too common experiences for God's people. The theological source of the suffering of such violence is the alienation from God and self which allows a person to batter a spouse or a child, to sexually abuse a family member, or to sexually assault a stranger. The consequences of the alienation are felt most painfully by the victim of the abuse; the spouse, child or parent who is beaten or abused knows the physical, emotional and spiritual pain which result from the alienated action of the one who abuses. The pain is magnified when the abuse occurs in the family; it is even more devastating than an attack by a stranger. It is a violation not only of one's body and soul but it is also a violation of a covenant, an expectation that within a family relationship, there can be peace, trust, and intimacy. These are all lost when violence and abuse occur. This is a kind of experience that the psalmist was familiar with:

"My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me and horror overwhelms me ... It is not an enemy who taunts me - then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals

insolently with me - then I could hide from him. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to hold sweet converse together; with God's house we walked in fellowship." Psalms 55:4-5 (RSV)

The place where one expects to find sanctuary from the violence on American streets is in fact for many people, another place of violence.

Rationale

Members of the United Church of Christ, its conferences, associations, local churches and national bodies can have a significant impact on both the cause and effect of violence in relation to women in American society:

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ is deeply concerned about the violence done to women and to children in American society;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ is committed to support the health and well-being of persons who live within families;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ believes that the local church can provide sanctuary from the many forms of physical and sexual violence experienced by women and others in American society through healing actions of support for victims, and public policy education and advocacy;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ recognizes that the climate of violence involving women is an urgent and present reality in our society;

THEREFORE, the Thirteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to draft a major pronouncement and proposals for action on *Violence in Relation to Women* for the consideration of the 14th General Synod, and to be in consultation with the Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society, the Office for Church In Society, and the Commission for Racial Justice in preparation of the pronouncement and proposals.

The Thirteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon local churches, associations and conferences to study the issue; to raise consciousness about it; to minister with sensitivity to victims of violence through support of existing shelters and agencies; to engage in public policy advocacy for adequate funding of such shelters and agencies.