Family Violence

Assembly 1994

Family violence is any form of abusive behaviour that violates the dignity and respect of the persons young and old who are part of the family unit. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, social and financial abuse or neglect. Generally, spouse abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse are the broad categories used to describe the most common aspects of family violence.

Family violence has deep-rooted and widespread social, psychological, and spiritual consequences not only for victims and offenders, but for churches and for society at large. The physical, emotional, and spiritual scars produced by family violence often affect an individual throughout life. Unresolved fear, guilt, and shame affect one's self-esteem and one's relationship with others and with God.

Family violence is a spiritual problem as well as a social problem. The family is an institution ordained by God for the care and nurturing of His children. Thus, an increase in the rate and/or severity of family violence in our society indicates increasing spiritual confusion concerning God's design for family life.

Christian denominations and local churches are becoming increasingly aware of the problem of family violence and are now recognizing the need for active and informed involvement. The role of the Christian church in the prevention, intervention, and treatment of family violence, however, needs to be clearly defined.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) challenges Christians to demonstrate their love for those who suffer by caring for their practical needs. In cases of family violence, the church and church members have, often intentionally or through ignorance, acted as the priest and Levite, passing by victims of family violence whose cries for help may be muffled or even silent.

In addition to extending direct and immediate help to individuals who are affected by family violence, the church must advocate compassion and justice on a broader scale, identifying and confronting the underlying social and spiritual conditions which foster attitudes which lead to violence within the family.

We, the members of the Family Violence Committee of the Social Action Commission, strongly feel that the churches of the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces should take a proactive role in addressing this issue. We, therefore, present the following recommendations:

1. that the United Baptist Convention acknowledge that family violence is a serious problem in our society and that there is no biblical justification for the attitudes and behaviour which cause violence within the family or for the church's silence on this

issue in the past; and that the Convention recognize the fact that misinterpretation of the Scriptures sometimes has contributed to the problem, not only within the church, but in society at large;

2. that the United Baptist Convention develop and implement initiatives (through the Social Action Commission) which will inform pastors (and their congregations) concerning the dynamics of family violence, and which will train pastors, convention staff and other interested caregivers for their role in the prevention, intervention, and treatment of family violence;

3. that the United Baptist Convention urge pastors to make ministry to families, and especially those families in which violence occurs, a priority within their churches;

4. that the United Baptist Convention encourage Acadia Divinity College and Atlantic Baptist College to sustain existing courses in family violence in their degree programs or consider introducing them;

5. that the United Baptist Convention encourage Acadia Divinity College and Atlantic Baptist College to include courses or seminars in family violence in their continuing education programs for persons already serving in the field;

6. that the United Baptist Convention designate and promote one week of each year as "Family Violence Awareness Week" during which churches would be especially encouraged to focus specifically on family violence in Sunday worship services, mid-week Bible study, and any other opportunity to discuss this issue;

7. that the United Baptist Convention develop a protocol for dealing with pastors or other church leaders who are accused of abusing their own family members or other individuals;

8. that the United Baptist Convention (through the Social Action Commission) compile and distribute a referral list of both church and community resource people throughout the Atlantic Provinces who have knowledge and experience in the area of family violence;

9. that the United Baptist Convention (through the Social Action Commission) establish and publicize family violence resources at Convention office;

10. that the United Baptist Convention (through the Social Action Commission) organize a regional conference on family violence. The purpose of this conference would be to bring church and community caregivers together to consider ways they may work together without compromising biblical principles. This conference may include social workers, transition house and crisis line workers, doctors, lawyers, police and RCMP officers, psychologists/psychiatrists, sociologists, and others involved in the prevention, intervention and treatment of family violence.