During 2015 our BUV has been undertaking discussions and consultation around the issues of Family Violence. We have clearly discerned this is an issue Churches recognise the need to engage with, and identified the need to better equip and resource churches to become safe communities dealing appropriately with the varied and complex issues associated with Family Violence.

October Delegates Dinner will provide opportunity for table discussion and discernment around concrete steps Churches are currently taking to raise awareness and help prevent violence in relationships, support victims and journey with perpetrators. We will also consider training, awareness raising, informational, local referral and other initiatives we could work on together to help make Baptist Churches safe communities for people to disclose and journey towards healing and wholeness following experiences of Family Violence.

In Australia, domestic, family and sexual violence is found across all cultures, ages and socio-economic groups, but the majority of those who experience these forms of violence are women. While knowing the true extent of the problem is impossible as most incidents are unreported (Phillips, 2014), statistics indicate that since the age of 15:

- 1 in 5 Australian women have experienced sexual violence;
- 1 in 6 Australian women have experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partners;
- 1 in 4 Australian women have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner;
- 1 in 3 Australian women have experienced physical violence (Our Watch 2015).

In 2013 in Victoria, there were more than 68,000 reported family violence incidents, and since 2010, family violence cases had increased by 70.2% (Davey, 19 March 2013).

Faith Communities

People in Australian society are exposed to a range of messages and experiences that model how family members behave and interact with one another in relationships. Sometimes these can condone disrespect, ageism and sexism, or rigid stereotypes. Adopting these types of attitudes can lead to perpetration and tolerance of family violence (City of Casey, undated).

Moore and Dickson (2015) examine the role of the Church in family violence in Australia. They state “there is no question that domestic violence happens in church communities and in ‘Christian’ marriages”. Further, that “some biblical teachings have the potential to be abused by controlling and violent people”.

American research has found that Church leaders’ theological beliefs related to headship/submission in the marriage relationship, as well as the sanctity of marriage and the family, present challenges to dealing with family violence (Fahlberg, 2013). In Australia concern has been expressed about the role the Church “may be playing in perpetuating this kind of abuse - not simply by overlooking it, but also by upholding doctrines, practices or attitudes that allow it to persist” (Moore & Dickson, 2015).

Identified challenges for Church leaders in addressing family violence include a lack of preparation, personal difficulties in confronting secular and domestic violence; and the possibility that the church leader may himself be abusive at home or at church (Fahlberg, 2013). The tendency in the majority of churches for senior leaders to be male compounds this concern.
Family violence involves behaviour that instils fear and is repeated, controlling, threatening and coercive. It occurs between people who have had, or are having, an intimate or familial relationship. The violent behaviour can include a range of tactics used to exercise power and control over victims, and violence in relationships and families can take on a variety of forms (City of Casey, undated). These can include physical, sexual, emotional/verbal, social, financial and spiritual abuse.

There are families in our churches and communities who are experiencing Family Violence.

QUESTIONS FOR TABLE DISCUSSION

- What is your church currently doing to be a safe community for victims of family violence?
- How aware and equipped is your church to support people through programs, training, support services, information to refer people experiencing Family Violence?
- How well does your church deal with perpetrators of family violence and what could you do better?
- What could we do together and what could our BUV do to support churches to engage more confidently and effectively with people and issues of family violence?

References


Health Promotion Team Promoting Peace in Families Package, City of Casey (undated).


Our Watch Violence Against Women: Key Statistics. 2015.