Domestic Abuse Policy

Domestic Abuse Defined

Domestic abuse is the desecration of the image of God in the abuser's victim(s) through a pattern of intentionally misusing power, overtly or covertly, in words or actions, to gratify self.

- Abuse is an assault upon the image of God in another human being.
- Abuse usually occurs in a pattern that is typically increasing in frequency and/or intensity.
- Abuse is intentional, though the abuser may not be self-aware enough to recognize the intentions of his or her heart. Abuse is never perpetrated by accident.
- Abuse is about the misuse of power to control or manipulate another for selfish gain. It is an act of oppression.
- Abuse can involve physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, economic, spiritual and/or psychological means.
- The goal of abuse is self-gratification -- to get what one wants at the expense of another.

Domestic abuse, which can be used interchangeably with the term "domestic violence," is pervasive in our culture. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime. Domestic abuse is underreported, so those statistics are conservative. Domestic abuse is just as likely to exist in Mt. Zion Church as it is in the culture outside the church, and we have abused persons of abuse present in the church, so we must be on alert.

Domestic violence in any form -- physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, or spiritual -- is an assault upon the image of God in a fellow human being and is therefore an assault upon God Himself. When it is between a husband and a wife, it further violates the one-flesh covenantal relationship that God established. Under no circumstance is abuse ever justified. Neither is it ever the fault of the abused person. Domestic abuse severely damages the relationship and often destroys the relationship beyond repair. An act of abuse is never an act of Christian love. Christ's self-giving love encourages flourishing, while domestic abuse seeks to stifle the abused person's autonomy through dominance, replacing love with fear.

Domestic Abuse Policy

Mt. Zion's Position

Given this acknowledgment, Mt. Zion Church affirms the following:

- Domestic abuse in all its forms is sinful and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living. (Mark 7:20-23, Eph 5:28-30, 1 Pet 3:7-9)
- All abuse is spiritually damaging for both the abused person and the abuser and has collateral damage that extends to children, extended family, and close friendships.
- Domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society.
- Domestic abuse is not primarily an anger problem, a marriage/relationship problem, the abused person's problem, or even a legal problem, but rather a sin problem. (James 4:1-3, Eph 5:11-14)
- Statistically, domestic abuse is primarily perpetrated by men against the very people whom God has given them to protect and shepherd -- women and children. (Eph 5:15- 6:4)

Mt. Zion's Policy

- We will listen to, believe, support, and care for those affected by domestic abuse. (Judges 2:18, Ps 9:9, 18:16-19, 103:6, 146)
- We will urge abused persons to consider their own safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church, professional counseling, and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and, if possible, to the marriage/relationship in which the abuse occurs.
- We do not have the legal authority or the ability to investigate charges of abuse but will consult with competent professional counselors, legal counsel and, if necessary, law enforcement, to determine the best course of action regarding both the abused person(s) and the perpetrator of the abuse.
- We will stand with abused persons in seeking legal remedies should that be their decision.
- We will discipline members who are abusers, including by removing them from the church if they are unrepentant. (Matt 18:15-17, Rom 16:17, Titus 3:10-11)
- We will work with local domestic violence support agencies, will learn from them, and will support them in appropriate ways.
- We will teach that domestic abuse is a sin. (Mark 7:20-23, Rom 1:29-31, Eph 5:25-33)
- We will teach what it means to be male and female image-bearers of God, equal in value, dignity, and worth. (Gen 1:26-27, 9:6, Matt 19:3-6, Gal 3:28)

- We will train all pastors/elders, staff, deacons, and lay leaders in domestic abuse awareness.
- We will seek to utilize trained professionals to encourage best practices and keep church members and leadership trained on and informed about the implementation of this domestic abuse policy.

Responding to Domestic Abuse

In cases of domestic abuse, we will seek first to care for and protect the abused person(s). We will discipline the perpetrator and, if appropriate and desirable to the abused person(s), seek to reconcile the marriage/relationship. We also will notify law enforcement when necessary for the protection of the abused person(s) and when required by law, as in the case of domestic violence involving a minor, elderly persons, or disabled persons.

Domestic Abuse Protocol

Abused Person Care

- The safety of the abused person(s) is paramount.
- Listen to and believe the abused person(s).
- Recognize the signs and ask questions.
- Escalate to appropriate personnel.
- Reporting to law enforcement is required by law if abuse involves children under 18, elderly persons, or disabled persons. Otherwise, consider the abused persons' wishes regarding reporting.
- Assure the abused person(s) it's not their fault.
- Assist practically as desired by the abused person(s).
- Professional counseling as desired by the abused person(s).
- Counseling should be individualized, aimed at trauma/abuse recovery (not marriage/relationship counseling or marriage/relationship reconciliation).

Abuser Discipline

- Confronting the abuser should only occur at the request of the abused person, after safety has been established, and after consideration of whether to involve law enforcement. If law enforcement is or becomes involved, consult with

and defer to law enforcement's instructions regarding confronting the abuser.

- Provide education/accountability if the abuser is open to it.
- Professional counseling should be individual counseling aimed at heart issues underlying abusive behaviors, such as power/control, entitlement, previous abuse, etc., not marriage/relationship counseling or marriage/relationship reconciliation.
- Repentance is the goal. It will take time to discern, and in the short-term, worldly sorrow can sometimes appear to be godly sorrow. Over time, genuine repentance always becomes evident. We move faster with care and slower with confrontation and discipline.

Marriage/Relationship Reconciliation

- Reconciliation to God is a necessary step before the Church can support reconciliation of the marriage/relationship.
- Reconciliation of the marriage/relationship is only recommended when both parties and their counselors agree