**WHAT CAN MY LOCAL CHURCH DO TO HELP?**

What can my local church do to help prevent violence against women?

* Ask the pastor or some other qualified person to preach a sermon on violence prevention. The General Conference Authorized Calendar designates the fourth Sabbath in August as **enditnow** Emphasis Day.
* Ask those who have the pastoral prayer during the divine worship service to pray for those in the congregation who are abused.
* One small but vital principle the church must apply is that of **confidentiality**. It is imperative that any victim of gender-based violence may speak with an appropriate church leader in total confidence. If there is ever a situation in which the church leader is required to report to law enforcement or other appropriate authorities, s/he will disclose this to the person seeking counsel or assistance, and will treat the matter with utmost care and discretion. The victim’s safety is of supreme importance.
* Recognize that gender-based violence is a tremendous evil, that it is never acceptable and cannot be condoned.
* Compile complete, up-to-date information about all resources in your community available to victims of any type of gender-based violence. Make sure the information is easily available to members and others. Get acquainted with shelters and referral sources to learn what services they offer and when they are open.
* Collect funding to provide your church leaders with educational materials on gender violence.
* Create a church lending library of materials on gender-based violence issues relevant to your community so members and leaders may become educated on this vital topic.
* Organize a group to assess the needs in the local community. What is one need your group can address that may help reduce gender-based violence?
* Create one or more “safe houses” where abuse victims can find emergency shelter.
* Present sermons and workshops to the congregation and community on issues of gender-based violence relevant to your community. Offer to present age-appropriate information in local schools.
* Examine church policies and practices to be sure none foster or encourage hurtful or discriminatory attitudes towards women.
* Provide ongoing support to a local women’s shelter or other organization benefitting victims of gender-based violence.
* Care for hurting people in your church congregation. Be non-judgmental. Develop support groups.
* Help raise awareness. Share materials about gender-based violence with your community.

**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE CHURCH**

**SPEAKING OUT PUBLICALLY**

Many denominations and communities of faith recognize the urgent need to end the violence against women and to bring about justice. Many have created, or support, organizations working to create awareness, to educate the public, and to find ways to stop the violence.

For example, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches [WARC] expressed concern, especially in light of the current world economic crisis and its effect on violence against women. “We cannot continue to ignore the plight of women and girls who are attacked in their homes or are targets of war crimes. WARC calls for renewed commitment to accelerate rather than slow down the process of seeking to end violence against women and girls and to bring about justice.” Poor women in poor countries suffer the most from the impact of the economic crisis. Increased social unrest leads to rising levels of violence, with women and girls most vulnerable to attack. Yet funding for program designed to protect and empower women is being reduced, points out a spokesperson for WARC. (*From WARC statement issued March 4, 2009, to mark International Women’s Day)*

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is also speaking out about violence against women. We recognize that as believers in a heavenly Father, we must become agents of change, helping to end the evils of abuse and gender-based violence—both in society and within the church itself. The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s position is clear in the following statement:

*Seventh-day Adventists affirm the dignity and worth of each human being and decry all forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and family violence.*

*We recognize the global extent of this problem and the serious, long-term effects upon the lives of all involved. We believe that Christians must respond to abuse and family violence both within the church and in the community. We take seriously reports of abuse and violence and have highlighted these issues for discussion at this international assembly. We believe that to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and potentially extend such behavior.*

*We accept our responsibility to cooperate with other professional services, to listen and care for those suffering from abuse and family violence, to highlight the injustices, and to speak out in defense of victims. We will help persons in need to identify and access the range of available professional services.* (Voted by General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee, at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.)