

B. POLICY STATEMENT

1. Statement of Beliefs

The Seventh-day Adventist Church places great importance upon family life and affirms the dignity and worth of each human being. It decries all forms of abuse, including domestic violence. Such behaviour is intimidating, hostile and/or offensive and undermines our biblical and moral values and destroys the trust between people in our community.

The BUC subscribes to the following statement issued by the General Conference on Family Violence:

“The Bible clearly indicates that the distinguishing mark of Christian believers is the quality of their human relationships in the church and in the family. It is in the spirit of Christ to love and accept, to seek to affirm and build others up, rather than to abuse or tear one another down. There is no room among Christ’s followers for tyrannical control and the abuse of power or authority. Motivated by their love for Christ, His disciples are called to show respect and concern for the welfare of others, to accept males and females as equals, and to acknowledge that every person has a right to respect and dignity. Failure to relate to others in this way violates their personhood and devalues human beings created and redeemed by God.”

The church believes that such abusive behaviour is incompatible with Christianity and any profession of commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Therefore, it is inconceivable that individuals who, despite guidance and support, continue to choose to practise such behaviour, should be allowed to continue to represent the church in any capacity.

2. Why Have a Policy?

Domestic abuse is a tragic reality in both society in general and within the Church. The Church seeks to create an environment where all can feel safe from abuse. The purpose of these guidelines is to change attitudes and practices that allow abuse to thrive. It also seeks to provide clear practical guidance and procedures for addressing disclosures of domestic abuse. All church members have a responsibility to act in a manner that minimises risk and maximises support for survivors of abuse.

While the preservation of marriage and family remain the ideal goal, the primary purpose of intervention where abuse is taking place, is the safety of the victims. A failure to appreciate the inherent evil of domestic abuse results in churches becoming complicit with perpetrators by actively encouraging survivors to remain in abusive environments, taking ineffective action, or turning a blind eye where abuse occurs. This policy calls on all churches to adopt the following Charter as its code of practice in dealing with domestic abuse. The Charter summarises the Church’s determination to end abuse in Adventist homes, and from those who used to be in an intimate relationship with those who are vulnerable. It encourages churches to become places of safety where domestic abuse is taken seriously, survivors are believed, and respected and alleged or known perpetrators are held accountable.

The Charter should be displayed in prominent places in each church so that all who enter will know where the church stands. These guidelines advocates that every church adopts a code of practice consistent with the following Safe at Home Charter:

The Safe at Home Charter **Seventh-day Adventist Church:**

- 1
holds that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and inconsistent/incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living;
- 2
holds that all abuse is spiritually damaging for both the person being abused and the person who is abusing
- 3
accepts that domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society;
- 4
undertakes to listen, support and care for those affected by domestic abuse;
- 5
urges abused persons to consider their own safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church and, as necessary, professional and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and, if possible, to the marriage relationship
- 6
will work with the support agencies, will learn from them and support them in appropriate ways, and will publicise their work;
- 7
will play its part in teaching that domestic abuse is a sin and will take appropriate measures to hold abusers accountable;
- 8
believes in a God of love, justice, mercy, and forgiveness;
- 9
will teach what it means to be male and female, equally made in God's image;
- 10
will seek to appoint advisors to encourage the use of good practice guidelines and keep the Church informed about the implementation and development it's policies on domestic violence.

(adapted from a Charter developed by Churches Together in Gloucestershire).
The Charter can be used to develop an action plan for the church in straightforward stages

Developing policy is not just about having a policy statement but is also about gaining a working knowledge of the effects of domestic abuse on all involved and using pastoral and practical strategies to assist people who are in abusive relationships. A policy helps people think through the issues. Policy documents give a structure to the work of prevention and support and are a useful reference for monitoring.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to offer a safe place for all people in its community life, where boundaries that safeguard acceptable behaviour are known and respected, and where inappropriate practices or harmful behaviours and attitudes are openly addressed.

3. The Scope of the Policy and Guidelines

These guidelines specifically apply to relationships within local churches and among members, officers and volunteers. Disclosures regarding paid employees of the church should be made to the employing organization directly in writing. Further advice on how to complain about an employee can be received by contacting the Executive Secretary of your conference/mission/union/organization. The Executive Secretary/President will then arrange for all such disclosures to be investigated and resolved in accordance with both the Church's beliefs and current employment law.