



# SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

British Union Conference  
Stanborough Park  
Watford Herts  
WD25 9JZ

## LOCAL CHURCH POLICY

# **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

**MARCH 2011**

# **LOCAL CHURCH POLICY POLICY ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 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 physical, spiritual, economic, sexual, emotional and physical 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.

Domestic violence and sexual harassment are not new. There are various accounts of abuse recorded in the Scriptures and in each case we find the family and close relatives of the victim taking action in order to appease the feelings of both themselves and the wounded.

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.

### **1.2 Why Have a Policy?**

The church seeks to create an environment where we can all feel safe from any form of abuse and will take steps to prevent incidents of abuse and harassment from occurring. We are all responsible for providing Christ-like support for those affected.

The British Union Conference (BUC) aims to encourage reconciliation and restoration, including the adoption of positive behaviours, by providing loving purposeful support and direction. However, this is no excuse for not handling the situation or for showing indifference to the consequences of such behaviour. When domestic violence and sexual harassment occur within the church it affects not just the families but also the congregation. Similarly, if it occurs in a Seventh-day Adventist workplace it can affect the wider work environment.

In support of the above, this policy focuses specifically on domestic violence and sexual harassment.

In recognition of the global extent of these problems and the serious long-term effects upon the abused, the abuser, and their families, Seventh-day Adventists must respond to domestic violence and sexual harassment within the home, its places of employment and the church. To remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and potentially extend such behaviour.

### **1.3 Policy Scope**

The BUC is specifically concerned whenever these actions are carried out in Seventh-day Adventist workplaces, churches, during community activities, in the home, or within the families of pastors, ministerial employees, Bible workers, lay leaders and members.

This policy specifically applies 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 direct 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.

#### **1.4 What is Sexual Harassment?**

Sexual harassment involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours or other verbal, written or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment also involves indecent remarks or comments about one's appearance and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature affecting an individual's employment status.

Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

#### **1.5 What is Domestic Violence?**

Domestic violence is an assault of any kind committed by one or more persons against another within the home. This can be any incident of threatening behaviour between individuals within the home or between family members. The assault can be verbal, physical, emotional, spiritual, economic, social, or sexual, as well as active or passive neglect.

Whatever form it takes, domestic violence is rarely a one-off incident. More usually it is a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour through which the abuser(s) seeks power over their victim(s).

### **2. What to do when a disclosure is made**

When an individual approaches you with a disclosure of suffering any type of ill treatment including sexual harassment and domestic violence the following steps should be taken:

#### **2.1 Listen and pray**

An offer to listen to and pray with the person should be made. When some individuals complain it may be as a part of their personal relationship with another member whilst others may want support in addressing the situation. In either case the church is opposed to behaviours of this type and encourages all those affected to report any incidents to the recognised authorities and/or to seek professional support. All cases involving minors or vulnerable adults should be referred to the police immediately.

#### **2.2 Support**

The person who is confided in should consider that:

Both domestic violence and sexual harassment are incompatible with a Christian lifestyle and as such are of concern to the church.

Both domestic violence and harassment are against the law.

Both the victim and alleged perpetrator of these incidents are souls for whom Christ has died and as such should be treated with compassion and in confidence while they are encouraged to address and resolve those issues which affect them.

Although these are complex issues there are many professional agencies in the community and on the internet which can provide specialised ongoing support to affected individuals.

These issues create a great deal of distress for those affected and the support of a friend who can pray with them, keep their confidences and listen to them impartially while they work their way through the necessary processes may be invaluable.

The Pastor or an elder/leader in the church may be referred to for advice and spiritual support and the affected individual may come to a point where they wish to share, perhaps with the help of a friend, their concerns with the leadership as part of their journey towards addressing and resolving the issue.

### **2.3 Be Fair**

Care should be taken not to jump to any conclusions whilst offering prayerful support to those involved. Disclosures of this nature can be complex and at times confusing and so every effort should be made not to prejudice the issue ahead of any investigation or action by external agencies. Likewise even an unguarded comment to a friend has the potential to make matters worse or do unwarranted harm to someone's reputation. Your role is to listen and to encourage the person to refer the issue on rather than to investigate or try and manage the situation yourself.

### **2.4 Refer**

There are times when an individual may not wish to address the issue directly but for reasons of their safety or that of another the friend they have confided in may wish to consider referring the incident themselves to the appropriate external authorities.

There are also times when we need to recognise that we do not have all of the necessary skills or resources to help another and that our service to them may be that of a friend who encourages them, prays with them and/or helps them find those who do have the skills, resources or authority to provide practical help.

Church membership is a privilege that demonstrates that an individual is committed to living in accordance with the beliefs of the church. One such belief is the respectful treatment of others. Where it is proven that a member, regardless of office, is rejecting this belief through their ill treatment of others the matter should be referred to the local church board or Pastor for action. To bear the name "Christian" is to profess that we seek to follow Him who died for us and as such local churches should ensure that through the programmes of the church members are made aware of the church's beliefs in this area.

## **3. Resources**

The following agencies may provide additional specialised information for those working their way through these issues.

### **3.1 Domestic Violence**

#### **National:**

##### *Metropolitan Police Community Safety Unit*

To report Domestic Violence call 0300 123 1212. If it is an emergency always dial 999.

##### *National Domestic Violence Helpline*

08009 70 20 70

A free 24 hour national domestic violence helpline and website run in partnership by Women's Aid and Refuge.

##### *Victim Support*

0845 30 30 900

A helpline and website which gives information and support to victims of crime, whether or not they have reported the crime to the police.

##### *NSPCC*

0808 800 5000

The NSPCC specialises in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

##### *Childline*

0800 11 11

A helpline and website providing counsellors for children and young people to talk to.

*The Hideout*

[www.hideout.org.uk](http://www.hideout.org.uk)

A women's aid a website for children and young people affected by domestic violence.

*Elder Abuse*

080 8808 8141

Elder Abuse aims to prevent abuse in old age by raising awareness and promoting research.

*Men's Advice Line*

Helpline: 0808 801 0327 open Monday – Friday 10am - 1pm and 2pm - 5pm

Email: [info@mensadviceline.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk)

Website: [www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk).

The Men's Advice Line is a confidential helpline for all men experiencing domestic violence by a current or ex-partner.

*ManKind Initiative*

Helpline: 01823 334 244 Open Monday – Friday 10am – 4pm and 7pm – 9pm (except Friday evenings)

Email: [admin@mankind.org.uk](mailto:admin@mankind.org.uk)

Website: [www.mankind.org.uk](http://www.mankind.org.uk)

The ManKind Initiative is a charity offering information and support to men who are victims of domestic abuse or violence.

**Scotland**

*Scottish Women's Aid*

0800 027 1234

24 hr domestic abuse helpline which supports women and young people affected by domestic violence.

18 and Under Freephone 0800 731 40 80 [www.18u.org.uk](http://www.18u.org.uk)

A support service based in Dundee for those 18 years old and younger who have experienced, sexual physical or emotional abuse.

**Wales**

*Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline*

0808 80 10 800 24hrs

For women, children and men in Wales who are experiencing/ have experienced abuse at the hands of someone close to them. Welsh and English spoken, access to interpreters for other languages. BT Type Talk Service.

*Women's Aid Monmouthshire*

01873 859011 24 hour helpline

**Northern Ireland**

*Donegal Women's Refuge Group (D.D.V.S.)*

(074) 26267

The D.D.V.S. provides: Accommodation, 24 hour line helpline; 15 Locally-based Clinic Services where you can meet with a trained worker for information, support, court accompaniment, counselling etc.

*Aoibhneas*

01-867-0701

Provides facilities, professional help and support including counselling and a 24-hour help-line to women and men who are suffering from Violence in the Home. Based in Dublin.

## **Help for male perpetrators who want to stop their behaviour**

### *Everyman Project*

Helpline: 0207 263 8884 Open Monday 10am-2pm, Tuesday 10am-3pm, Wednesday 10am-5pm and Thursday 10am-5pm.

E-mail: [everymanproject@btopenworld.com](mailto:everymanproject@btopenworld.com)

Website: [www.everymanproject.co.uk](http://www.everymanproject.co.uk).

The Everyman Project offers counselling to men in the London area who want to change their violent or abusive behaviour. It also has a national helpline which offers advice to anyone worried about their own, or someone else's, violent or abusive behaviour.

### **3.2 Sexual Harassment**

*Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling (RASAC)* - Free, confidential listening and support service for women and men who have been raped and/or sexually abused at any time in their lives, or for anyone who wants to talk about the effects of any unwanted sexual encounter. Tel: 08451 221 331.

*Victim Support* - Support for anybody who has been affected by crime: victims, witnesses, their friends and their families. They offer free and confidential services to anyone who is experiencing direct or knock-on effects of crime.

*Survivors UK* - An advice service for male victims of rape and sexual abuse. Tel: 0845 122 1201.

*Rights of Women Sexual Violence legal advice* phone: 020 7251 8887 - Rights of Women runs a sexual violence advice line and also provides free legal advice for women and produces free leaflets which you can download from their site (including ones on sexual violence and on sexual harassment). Monday 11am-1pm; Tuesday 10am-12noon. Textphone: 020 7490 2562.

### **3.3 Adventist Support Services**

Cornerstone Counselling Services (SEC Helpline) 020 7423 8050; 0845 741 3602

Rainbow Counselling 0161 740 3602