

MARCH 2022 MWI ARTICLE

GOD MATTERS IN OUR RESPONSE TO OTHERS

In January of this year, we have all been very shocked and saddened at the untimely death of Ashling Murphy, a beautiful, talented young lady from County Offaly. We continue to pray for her family and friends as they attempt to come to terms with Ashling's tragic death.

I am so pleased to report that the NI Executive has determined that there is a need for a new strategic, whole of government approach to tackle violence against Women and Girls; this includes crimes and unwanted behaviour in the physical and online world. Officials in the Executive Office have been tasked with bringing forward the "Equally Safe Strategy".

The ROI Government hopes in a matter of weeks to publish its new national strategy on sexual and domestic violence. Helen McEntee, Minister of Justice, says, "we will achieve our goals across every section of Government – education, social housing and justice. This new plan will set an overall goal of zero tolerance in respect of violence and abuse against women."

John 15 v 12 "My command is this:

Love each other as I have loved you."

These parallel initiatives are so timely as the new MWI President's Project, entitled 'No Excuse for Abuse' was launched in September 2021. We continue to be challenged to raise awareness of this very distressing situation for men, women and children who suffer domestic abuse and ask for prayer as we work in collaboration with the Safeguarding Board of the Methodist Church and its working party.

The Police Services of our Island made statements at the start of the New Year which make for distressing reading: The following are extracts of their reports.

i. The PSNI (in January 2022) said "The number of domestic abuse calls made to police over the Christmas period (14 December 2021 to 1 January 2022) in NI has risen to 1,959 calls, which is a 12% increase compared to the same period last year. Over 100 incidents of domestic abuse were reported to police on Christmas Day, 145 on Boxing Day and 170 on New Year's Day.

Chief Inspector Lindsay Fisher highlighted that domestic abuse is not just physical and can come in a variety of forms. "If your partner or loved one is

being threatening, controlling, violent or abusive towards you, this is a crime," she said. "You don't need to stay silent. The PSNI is here to help you, not just at Christmas, but all year round, 24 hours a day."

ii. Garda Siochana: "The Garda reports of domestic abuse in Ireland rose by 10% in 2021. Garda responded to 48,400 domestic abuse incidents last year, an increase of 10% on 2020. Charges brought for domestic abuse crimes also increased in 2021. There were 4,250 criminal charges for breaches of Domestic Violence Act Orders in 2021 – a 6% increase on 2020; there were also 8,600 charges for crimes involving an element of domestic abuse in 2021, up 13% on the previous 12 months.

Garda Detective Chief Superintendent Colm Noonan said: "Garda Siochana continues to prioritise our response to victims of domestic abuse. I would ask once again, if you are a victim of abuse or you know of a family member or friend who is a victim of such abuse, please make contact with Garda Siochana. If you require urgent assistance or support, please call 999 or 112."

As we in MWI continue to raise awareness of 'Domestic Abuse' we encourage that as many as possible of our churches become 'A Safe Place'. Safe Place Training can be accessed through the Learning and Development section of the BMLD website – <https://irishmethodist.org/bmld-learning-development>

As well as raising awareness we are proactive in raising funds for 'Women's Aid' (NI) and Women's Aid (ROI). These groups exist to challenge attitudes and beliefs which perpetuate domestic abuse. They provide many services and rely on fund raising by several organisations such as MWI so that they can give the best possible help to victims of domestic abuse.

We reflect on the words of, **John 10 v 10, 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full'. This is the kind of life that we, as Methodist Women, believe Jesus wants for each of his children.**

Joan Strong

All-Ireland MWI President