Friday 25th November

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most frequently by an intimate partner. (UN) ‘There is one universal truth – violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable.’ (UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 2008)

‘As I have loved you, so you must love one another.’ (John 13:34)

Loving one another like Christ means caring and respecting each other. In fullness of love, we seek to serve one another, to be uplifting, gracious, supporting and encouraging. May God reveal violence, discrimination and abuse in our communities and help us to understand and speak out against all forms of violence.

Saturday 26th November

Spotlight on FGM

Worldwide, 200 million women and girls have undergone Female Genital Mutilation. (UN)

So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

Our physical bodies are an important part of the body of Christ and the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’ (1 Corinthians 6:19).

We are each beautiful and precious in his sight. We pray for women and girls living with health problems because of FGM, for effective education programmes and for those who accompany survivors on their journey of healing.

Sunday 27th November

The impact on children

‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nation.’ (Jeremiah 1:5)

Before children are even formed in the womb, they are known and loved by God. Children are often the unseen and unheard victims of domestic violence. We can only imagine what it is like for a child to see a parent experiencing abuse from their spouse or partner and being unable to prevent it.

Today we pray for every child who is a survivor of violence in the home. May they find help and support. We pray for all those services offering a listening ear to children.

Monday 28th November

The story of Tamar

Tamar’s story is a powerful, uncomfortable example of perpetuated sexual violence and God’s condemnation of it. It is a stark reminder that sexual violence is a violation of human rights.

Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22. Reflect on this biblical story and how it mirrors the experiences of many in the 21st century. Consider: in what ways does our society make it hard for those who have experienced gender-based violence to speak out about their experiences?

We pray for the healing of pain caused by sexual violence and for caring men and women who will speak out against sexual violence and endeavour to support people who have experienced it.

Tuesday 29th November

The disabled community

‘A vast crowd brought to him people who were lame, blind, crippled, those who couldn’t speak, and many others. They laid them before Jesus, and he healed them all. The crowd was amazed! Those who hadn’t been able to speak were talking, the crippled were made well, the lame were walking, and the blind could see again! And they praised the God of Israel.’ (Matthew 15:30-31)

We are all one in Christ, no matter how different we might look or how our bodies might move. The disabled community is also affected by domestic abuse. How terrifying it must be when your carer is your abuser.

We pray that the government will recognise that the disabled community is affected by domestic abuse and that laws will be changed accordingly.

Wednesday 30th November

Safe places

Where is your safe place? As Christians, we understand God to be our stronghold, our place of refuge – a God of solidarity in suffering. How can we join with God, by standing in solidarity with women and children who do not have a safe refuge from violence?

The Istanbul Convention, the gold standard framework on violence against women, recommends one woman’s refuge space per 10,000 population. A refuge is a safe haven, but every day, women and children are turned away because of lack of space.

Pray for the women who need to access the refuges, for women who are healing from trauma, for staff on the frontline and for the provision of adequate supplies of emergency refuge accommodation.

Thursday 1st December

Elder abuse

‘Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you.’ (Deuteronomy 32:7)

Often within our rural communities, many generations still live together or close by to one another. The elderly can be subject to domestic abuse from a family member. There are many women who have been brought up to stay in a marriage no matter how badly they are treated.

We remember how our Lord ensured his mother would be cared for even after his death (John 19:26-27).

Today we think of the elderly women and men who are stuck with an abusive family member. We pray that they will seek and find help.

Friday 2nd December

The Samaritan woman at the well

Read John 4:1-30

Jesus challenged many social customs. Here, Jesus chooses to demonstrate to us that this woman is created and loved by God. He does not treat her as a social outcast, or condemn her, but meets her in her need and gives her life. Reflect on this biblical story and how it mirrors the experiences of many in the 21st century. How do we respond to people who feel isolated, unworthy or excluded? Why do you think survivors of sexual violence don’t always feel able to report their experience?

We pray that we can love as Christ did and be a faithful witness in representing God and sharing God’s unconditional love.

Saturday 3rd December

Coercive control

Coercive control is the most pervasive form of domestic abuse. Not necessarily physical, it is a persistent and deliberate pattern of behaviour by an abuser over a prolonged period, designed to achieve obedience and create fear. It may include coercion, threats, stalking, intimidation, isolation, degradation and control. It may also include physical and/or sexual violence.

‘...as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people.’ (Galatians 6:10)

How can we act to change a culture that accepts coercive behaviour in a relationship?

We thank God for legislation on this issue, and we pray for effective resourcing and implementation to enable victims and families to regain their lives.

Sunday 4th December

Breaking the cycle of trafficking

Speaking of her rape as a seven-year-old child, and her subsequent five-year mutism, Maya Angelou said that cynicism in a young person is one of the worst things, because they move from knowing nothing to believing nothing. Worldwide, almost 20% of all trafficking victims are children. Children traumatised by abuse carry that trauma into adulthood. Many enter abusive relationships, either as victims or perpetrators.

How can we contribute to breaking that cycle?

We pray for children living in desperate situations, whose families are coaxed into trafficking them to orphanages or to other countries for work, believing they can have a better life.

Monday 5th December

Healthy relationships matter

Behind beautiful homes can lie a predator that no one else sees. A woman may be experiencing physical, financial and emotional abuse, yet feel it is important, despite her private misery, to submit to her husband, no matter the cost. All because of how she understands Ephesians 5:22 (‘wives, submit to your husbands’). It is a tragic irony when this verse is used to justify violence and abuse against women.

We pray that we may faithfully teach God’s Word and that it may not be used as a tool to damage and abuse. May church communities work towards being safe places where survivors will be listened to and signposted to places of support.

Tuesday 6th December

Love matters

Our love for God motivates and challenges us to keep this command: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbour as yourself.’ (Luke 10:27)

Survivors and perpetrators of violence may find it hard to love both God and themselves. Reflect on how or whether they can be helped to do this. How might this benefit them in the long term?

We give thanks that we can show our love for God and God’s people though our actions; and that these actions will have eternal as well as earthly significance.

Wednesday 7th December

Women in conflict zones

In conflict zones, rape is being used as a weapon of war. Targeted violence does not come from nowhere; there was a pre-existing inequality and social norm from which it stemmed. Violence against women is a symptom of a deeper-rooted societal ailment. Stigma and silence are the bedfellows of violence and inequality. Education and empathy are the breakers of chains.

We pray for MU Literacy and Financial Projects in communities and refugee camps, where women are fleeing war and conflict. We pray for the women who lead and who attend these projects, that they may gain confidence and invaluable training to enhance their opportunities.

Thursday 8th December

The impact of child marriage

Each year, 12 million girls marry before the age of 18. That’s 23 girls every minute. (UN)

Child brides face huge challenges because they are married as children. Girls tend to be poor, under-educated and live in rural areas, where birth and death rates are high, and conflict is common. Isolated and with limited freedom, they lose their childhood. Child brides are neither physically nor emotionally ready to become wives and mothers, risking dangerous complications in pregnancy and childbirth, and often suffering domestic violence.

‘For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who
have no one to help.’ (Psalm 72:12)

We pray for a change in religious and cultural norms and that governments will outlaw this appalling practice.

Friday 9th December

Transforming power

God’s power is transformative. Mary meekly gave her ‘yes’ to the angel who told her she was to be the mother of Jesus. She sat helpless at the foot of the cross as she watched her son die. Yet this same Mary sang the radical song – the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).

What does the song of Mary say to the use and abuse of power in our society?

Lord, in our lives there are times to accept what life brings and trust in your guidance and love. May power be used for the good of all, and may those who abuse power, remember that, in the end, all power comes from God.

Saturday 10th December

International Human Rights Day

‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ (Galatians 3:28)

Today we rejoice and reflect on ways we can share God’s compassion and love.

‘Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world.’ (Eleanor Roosevelt, UN)

We are all created equal and are together one with Christ. Respect for women and girls is the responsibility of everyone. Pray that we may bring love and respect into the small and hidden places, to those who feel unvalued and unseen.