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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

Purpose

This policy, and associated documents, is designed to provide an increased understanding of the issues surrounding domestic abuse and a greater awareness of how we, as a church, need to respond appropriately.

This policy takes into account the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse in our society and, also, sadly recognizes that such issues can and do take place in Christian homes and relationships.

The purpose of this policy is to help us to be a community of faith that:

- is safe and secure, where the voices and experiences of women, children, elderly and other vulnerable people are valued
- provides practical help for people experiencing family violence
- empowers women to speak, serve and lead in response to God's call on their lives
- understands the broader influences in society that lead to violence, and act to bring about change
- proactively provides encouragement, training and opportunities for our members to not only avoid being abusive or violent in their own relationships, but to also be positive influencers in our community.

Preamble

This policy is predicated on the belief that all people are created in God's image, loved and valued by their Creator, and should be treated with equal regard. There is no place for physical violence or other controlling or abusive behaviour in any relationship, particularly in Christian relationships or Church@TheGabba.

We believe that the Christian faith, as exemplified by Jesus Christ, and demonstrated by His church, should be leading the way in the dignified and respectful treatment amongst people and within relationships.

We are sorry for any times in the past when this has not been the case, but we affirm our commitment to accept the responsibilities incumbent upon us as a Christian community when confronting this issue.

The Gospel message invites the nurturing of respectful relationships between men, women and children. It is important to understand that this means to be physically, emotionally and spiritually safe and free from threats, intimidation and injury.

When this policy (and other material referred to therein) speaks of "domestic violence" it must be understood as extending much further than only physical abuse, as domestic violence includes many forms of abuse. Indeed, this policy includes in its scope seven types of domestic violence: **Sexual abuse, Spiritual abuse, Verbal abuse, Economic abuse, Emotional abuse, Social abuse, Physical abuse.**

The Bible speaks out strongly against the misuse of power in all forms.

The following verses are but a few of many that provide the biblical framework and context for Church@TheGabba to be a place and a people of safety, respect and responsibility....

Psalms 9:9; Isaiah 60:18; Proverbs 14:31; Jeremiah 9:24; Ephesians 4:1-3, 29-32; Colossians 3:12-17; Psalm 82:3-4; Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:19-26; Psalm 12:5; Isaiah 1:17; Psalm 31:9-15.

Policy

An act of abuse is never an act of Christian love. Christ's self-giving love encourages the full growth of the individual, while domestic abuse seeks to stifle the victim's autonomy through dominance, replacing love with violence and fear.

Given this acknowledgement, Church@TheGabba:

- holds that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable, inconsistent and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living;
- holds that all abuse is spiritually damaging for both the person being abused and the person who is abusing;
- accepts that domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society;
- undertakes to listen, support and care for those affected by domestic violence;
- 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;
- will work with the support agencies, will learn from them and support them in appropriate ways;
- will play its part in teaching that domestic abuse is a sin;
- will teach what it means to be male and female, equally made in God's image;
- will seek to utilize advisors to encourage the use of good practice guidelines and keep the Church informed about the implementation and development of our Domestic Abuse Ministry;
- believes in a God of love, justice, mercy, and forgiveness.

Church@TheGabba is committed to raising awareness through teaching and worship. Some of the ways we will be doing this are that:

- Pastors and leaders will speak out against domestic abuse in preaching, teaching and prayers.
- Ministers, deacons and ministry leaders are offered resources and training so that they can give clear statements that domestic abuse is wrong, and tackle the myths that perpetuate disregard of abuse.
- As all males and females are made in the image of God, unequal treatment due to gender will continually be challenged in all aspects of the life of the Church. This is not to imply an egalitarian or complementarian view of roles or functions. Rather, as individuals made in His image each is deserving of respect and dignity in all communications and interactions.
- All of our language will reflect our beliefs in equality, dignity, and all persons being made in the image of God. We are committed to not marginalising those who may already feel of little value.
- We will take seriously the way we use the Bible, and how theological emphases can be affirming or damaging to those caught up in abusive situations.

The church leadership wants the congregation to know that when any of them or someone they know is faced with domestic abuse, being faithful to Christ's ministry of love and justice means the following for this congregation:

- We are called to oppose family abuse in all its forms and to break the cycle of family abuse whenever it occurs.
- Regardless of the identity, age or gender of either the person who is committing abuse or the victim of family abuse, every situation that arises will be treated with confidentiality (except when otherwise legally required), respect and care for each of the parties involved.
- This church will respect the autonomy of able adults who are suffering abuse by acknowledging their right to control their own lives; by offering information, resources and support; and by honouring their decisions. The ultimate decision of an adult abused by a family member resides with that person; there will be no efforts to tell the person what she or he should do. (This is as long as it does not conflict with mandated reporting laws regarding children, the elderly and vulnerable adults, which will always be followed.) However, as ones who care deeply for the welfare of those being oppressed, we will help them by exploring options with them and by providing assistance whenever we can for the safety of those concerned.
- This church takes seriously our mandate to help the oppressed and abused children, elderly and vulnerable adults and will offer assistance to family caretakers who use abuse in the home. We also understand our legal responsibilities to report such abuse as the law mandates us to do so.

- Pastors, leaders and select members of the congregation will be encouraged to undertake training that will enable and enhance their ability to provide suitable support and referral services to those caught up in domestic violence and abuse situations.
 - Those being abused or using abuse, as well as their families, are encouraged to look to the church leaders for help. Abuse is not a secret to be kept within the family. The pastors and the educators in the church will maintain confidentiality within the congregational community and will help the family access the resources that are essential to the safety and healing of all involved.
 - The church will support all members of the family in crisis. For the victim this means providing a safe haven; helping with needed emergency resources; making referrals for counselling; and providing ongoing spiritual and emotional support. For the perpetrator this means maintaining a pastoral relationship of care while simultaneously holding the person accountable for his or her actions, including the reporting of such incidences of abuse/DV to the relevant authorities when required by law.
- It also includes making referrals for counselling. Other family members, especially children, must know they did not cause the abuse, that they are deeply loved and will be spiritually supported by this congregation at all times.
- The church staff also realizes that it will not always be possible to minister effectively to all members of a family where domestic abuse is occurring. There are times when the person abusing is not desirous of change, or accountability, or misuses the pastoral relationship in order to manipulate the situation to their advantage. In those cases that both abuser and abused cannot be supported in the same church community, the abuser will be referred elsewhere for support. Mutual support (not couples counselling) will only occur when it is the express, independent wish of each party. We also realize that both cannot be supported pastorally by the same person and every effort will be made to appoint separate pastoral support.

Principles

The fundamental principles behind these guidelines and policies on domestic abuse:

- ◆ Belief in God as love expressed in relationships.
- ◆ Understanding of humanity (female and male) as made in God's image, and possessing equal worth.
- ◆ Belief in dignified and respectful treatment amongst people and within relationships because of this equality of worth.
- ◆ Refusal to condone any form of abuse or violence.
- ◆ Recognition that domestic abuse is prevalent among Christians, as among other groups.
- ◆ Acceptance that survivors may choose anyone they trust to talk to, and not necessarily those with pastoral responsibilities.
- ◆ Awareness that training for all is essential.
- ◆ Partnership with other agencies is the best way to provide informed pastoral care to any child, young person or adult suffering abuse.
- ◆ Support, supervision, appraisal and ongoing training for those with pastoral responsibilities is essential.

Process (the Seven 'Rs'):

Whilst it is acknowledged that this is a very delicate and sensitive issue, Church@TheGabba believes that there are several process steps to follow, each with appropriate discretion, confidentiality and care.

RESPECT

This is a fundamental necessity for any relationship. We at C@G will model respect for each other regardless of gender, age, stage, ethnicity, or any other qualification.

When respect is not evident in a relationship it could lead to inequality and, sadly, abuse of some sort.

RECOGNISE

Whilst not all abusive behaviours are obvious by some physical evidence, we need to be sensitive to other indicators that someone might be experiencing domestic, or family, abuse.

Such things as unexplained (or numerous) injuries, depression or withdrawal, confusion and poor concentration, decrease in self-esteem and confidence, need for approval from a partner, public shaming from a partner, etc, can all be signs that something is not right.

RESPOND

Sometimes it is very difficult and awkward to broach the subject with someone who may be experiencing domestic violence or abuse. Often times, because of a fear of further abuse, there will be denials of anything untoward happening. In such instances, the (suspected) abuse victim needs to be assured of support and safety, should the need arise. The (suspected) victim needs to know that there is someone

who cares that they can, in confidence, talk with. Preferably, a pastor (or pastoral carer) is able to be enlisted at this stage of concern.

There will, of course, be differing types of response to victims and perpetrators of abuse and, also, to other members of the family affected by it.

However, the role of the church will normally be in the initial stages of response and with basic pastoral care. Other agencies will most likely be enlisted to help with counselling and potential legal aspects.

RECORD

Wherever there is a suspicion of, or confirmed incidence of, domestic violence and abuse, there needs to be an appropriate record kept (for future reference) by law. Such records will be stored securely and the church's privacy policy for the protection of personal data will be strictly adhered to.

REPORT

Of course, the abuse victim should be encouraged to contact the police directly (or via calling 000) herself/himself. However, that is not always possible, or safe, to do.

If you are not a pastor, you should report any known DV or abuse situation to one of the C@G pastors so that they can follow it up directly and report it as required.

There are mandatory reporting requirements relating to domestic violence and abuse, particularly if involving children and youths.

Details of reporting requirements for a variety of abusive issues can be found at:

www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/support-victims-abuse/reporting-abuse.

REFER

There are many support services available for victims, and even perpetrators.

C@G pastors and staff will have a list of available and appropriate support services and resources.

Whilst these services are a good way of getting professional assistance, we at C@G are committed to continuing to provide non-judgemental, encouraging, open and honest support.

RESTORE

C@G is committed to reconciliation and restoration within relationships, although we recognize that this is not always possible. However, we do commit to prayerfully seeking the best outcomes for all who have been affected as victims and as perpetrators through the healing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Definitions

<i>Church / C@G</i>	means Church@TheGabba and also includes the associated ministries and activities of the church and The Mustard Seed.
<i>Church Leadership</i>	means primary governing group of the church such as the Church Council, elders or deacons.
<i>Volunteer</i>	means someone who is working in an unpaid capacity as part of a planned program of activity at the Church. This includes any Church members, adherents, friends or others who may offer their services at Church@TheGabba, The Mustard Seed and other Church activities and ministries from time to time.
<i>Domestic Violence</i>	means any form of violent or abusive behaviour that seeks to enforce the control of one person over another. Such behaviour can take many different forms, including physical, psychological, social and spiritual.
<i>Mandatory Reporting</i>	The reporting of various types of behaviour and activity to the police and/or other authority as prescribed by the laws of the State and organizational guidelines.

REFERENCE:

- Statement on Domestic and Family Violence (National Council of Australian Baptist Ministries).
- Domestic Violence and the Culture of Your Church (Australian Baptist Ministries)
- Domestic Violence (More than Skin Deep) (Baptist Care Australia)
- Domestic Abuse (Baptist Union of Great Britain)
- Domestic Violence Handbook for Clergy and Pastoral Workers (Christian Churches of South Australia)
- The Church's Response to Domestic Abuse (CCADA- Christian Coalition Against Domestic Violence)
- Responding to Domestic Abuse (Anglican Diocese of Sydney)
- CommonGrace.org.au – "Safer" Dealing with Domestic Violence