

Domestic Violence Response Monitoring Committee: Progress Report

(A report from the Domestic Violence Response Monitoring Committee.)

Purpose

1. To provide a progress report to the Synod from the Domestic Violence Response Monitoring Committee, on behalf of the Standing Committee.

Recommendation

2. Synod receive this progress report from the Domestic Violence Response Monitoring Committee.

Background

3. On Monday 21 June 2021, Standing Committee resolved as follows:

Standing Committee –

- (a) notes the recent publication of the *National Anglican Family Violence Project Research Report Top Line Results* from the General Synod's National Anglican Family Violence Working Group,
 - (b) refers the report, including the *Ten Commitments for Prevention and Response to Domestic and Family Violence in the Anglican Church of Australia*, to the Domestic Violence Response Monitoring Committee (comprising Canon Sandy Grant and Archdeacon Kara Hartley),
 - (c) requests the Committee to provide a report to the Standing Committee to be promoted to the forthcoming session of Synod with initial observations on how the national study interacts with the work of the Diocese in this area, with a link in the Synod papers to the Top Line Results, the Ten Commitments paper, and the other research reports of the National Anglican Family Violence Working Group, and
 - (d) requests the Committee (or a subsequently appointed committee) to bring a further report –
 - (i) on how the findings of the National Anglican Family Violence Project Research Reports, and the Ten Commitments document intersect with policy and practice in Sydney,
 - (ii) identifying any gaps in current policy and practice, and
 - (iii) providing any recommendations,to the Standing Committee by March 2022, for promotion to the 2022 ordinary session of Synod.
4. The Domestic Violence Response Monitoring Committee (hereafter 'Monitoring Committee') met via teleconference to begin its work on Monday 28 June 2021.
 5. We agreed to seek advice about obtaining the earliest possible access to the full research papers foreshadowed by the National Anglican "Top Line Results" research report. This report includes the sad 'headline' finding that Anglican church attenders appear to be more likely than members of the general public to have experienced domestic violence over a lifetime, and as likely within the last year.
 6. We note these limitations to the research noted by the NCLS researchers themselves: The prevalence study methodology was a carefully weighted *non-probability* survey utilising samples drawn from online panels. However this limitation means one cannot confidently generalise about the Australian population or about Anglicans overall. Another limitation is that to get a large enough

sample size for statistically significant inferences to be drawn, the study had to define ‘church-attending Anglicans’ as those who indicated that ‘they attended religious services at least several times a year’, which includes highly irregular attenders alongside weekly attenders.

7. Dean Grant published a preliminary personal response to the research along with a ‘potted history’ of Sydney Anglican engagement with the issue, via interview with Murray Campbell, at the website of The Gospel Coalition – Australia, entitled “Responding to Family Violence – The Anglican Example”¹.
8. Archdeacon Hartley and Dean Grant, along with Mrs Belinda Burn (PSU Chaplain) and Mrs Lynda Dunstan (Anglicare Domestic Violence Advisor) attended the Anglican Church of Australia’s “Family Violence Prevention, Next Steps Working Conference” held on 10-11 August 2021 via video conference (due to COVID restrictions), where the full research papers were released, and the “Ten Commitments for Prevention and Response to Domestic and Family Violence in the Anglican Church of Australia”² were discussed.
9. The final National Anglican Family Violence Project (hereafter “NAFVP”) research releases comprised 4 papers:
 - “National Anglican Family Violence Research Report” (overview of the three studies)³,
 - “NAFVP Prevalence Study Report” (prevalence of intimate partner violence among Australians who identify as Anglican)⁴,
 - “NAFVP Experience Study Report” (the nature of experiences of family violence for those with a connection with Anglican churches, particularly victims and survivors)⁵, and
 - “NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leaders Study Report” (Anglican clergy and lay leader attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding intimate partner violence)⁶.
10. Archdeacon Hartley was able to present at the conference on progress in the area of preventing and responding to domestic violence in our Diocese, with a special focus on the Ministry Spouse Support Fund set up by our Synod. We also indicated areas requiring further work and a willingness to engage with the “Ten Commitments”.
11. We were also able to confirm with NCLS researchers at the conference that the NAFVP research did not address the question of the prevalence of *perpetrators* in our churches, let alone whether they are also over-represented. This is because the study asked about people’s experience of IPV in terms of being a victim. The NCLS researchers did note that their other regular NCLS research shows that of those who are married present in our churches, a majority say they attend with their spouse.
12. It is noteworthy that among the regularly attending Anglicans (i.e., those who attend “several times a year” or more), when asked to identify with up to two church tradition descriptors, 37% selected Anglo Catholic or Catholic, 17% selected Evangelical or Reformed, 17% selected Traditional, 15% selected Liberal or Progressive”, and 18% said they did not identify with such descriptors.
13. In addition, the research methods did not determine whether the views of respondents (or alleged perpetrators), in regard to gender roles and marriage, could be characterised as complementarian/conservative, or egalitarian/progressive, or otherwise.
14. Most Ministers would know that some victims of IPV are sadly abused by church-attenders (some of whom may attend very regularly), who conceal their misconduct, and continue to attend. But other abusers, once exposed, cease coming to church. Still other victims are married to non-Christian spouses, some of whom are abusive. And some victims come into our church fellowships to find support and healing and, hopefully, faith in Jesus, after previous abuse in entirely non-religious settings.

¹ <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/responding-family-violence-the-anglican-example/>

² <https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Ten-Commitments-April-2021.pdf>

³ <https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/1.-NAFVP-Research-Report.pdf>

⁴ <https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2.-NAFVP-Prevalence-Study-Report.pdf>

⁵ <https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/3.-NAFVP-Experience-Study-Report.pdf>

⁶ <https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/4.-NAFVP-Clergy-Lay-Leaders-Report.pdf>

15. Nevertheless, it would be both a pity and a critical mistake to focus solely on definitional or methodological debates over the prevalence studies and how they are reported in the media.
16. Perhaps a safe working assumption is that people attending Anglican churches, sadly, are as likely to experience domestic abuse as those from the general population. This should motivate our continued repentance and other further action as church members and leaders.
17. The Monitoring Committee notes that the Anglican Diocese of Sydney's response began well in advance of this research. Since 2017, we have taken the following steps (sometimes even world-first), initiatives to ensure support and care of victims, alongside expert training and equipping for our clergy –
 - Established the Domestic Violence Task Force which brought a comprehensive report to Synod
 - Listened to survivors and identified key themes and experiences
 - Issued an apology to survivors and victims (and encouraged the General Synod to do likewise)
 - Adopted a Domestic Violence Policy and Good Practice Guidelines (possibly the first of its type among Australian Anglican Dioceses)
 - Established the Domestic Violence Response Monitoring Committee to oversee the ongoing implementation of our Domestic Violence Policy and related commitments
 - Provided Domestic Violence leave for clergy
 - Established the Ministry Spouse Support Fund through Synod for the support of ministry spouses impacted by domestic violence or other serious misconduct by a clergyperson or church worker to whom they are or were married
 - Produced resources online and in print for survivors, clergy and lay contact persons, including in some languages other than English (e.g., Chinese, Korean and Arabic)
 - Provided training at the compulsory triennial *Faithfulness in Ministry* seminars for all clergy and paid lay ministry workers on identifying, assisting and referring survivors of family abuse
 - Liaised with Professional Standards Unit, Moore College, Ministry Training and Development, and Youthworks reviewing the adequacy of screening of ordinands and of the education for those currently training in ministry in regard to this matter
 - Welcomed Anglicare's appointment of a Family and Domestic Violence Advisor and encouraged clergy responding to Domestic Violence to seek advice from her
 - Produced, via the cooperation of Anglicare with our PSU, an online training course, *Know Domestic Abuse*, for clergy and church workers
 - Noted the joint effort of Anglicare and Youthworks in publishing a 4 week 'primary prevention' program, *"Before it Starts"*, involving Bible study and other activities for use in our schools and youth groups.
18. The Monitoring Committee is also able to report the following about recent engagement with diocesan resources, as at mid 2022:
 - Four people (all women) have accessed the Ministry Spouse Support Fund, since its inception. We are aware of others who may be seeking payments from the fund.
 - 150 participants have completed our online training Know Domestic Abuse, with another 95 in progress.
 - The services of Anglicare's Family and Domestic Violence Advisor been accessed for advice on approximately 150 occasions by parish ministers or other persons.
 - The Family and Domestic Violence Advisor has run training seminars regarding domestic violence for churches and ministry teams on approximately 40 occasions.
 - Information and training sessions for ministry wives have been conducted by the Archbishop's wife, the Family and Domestic Violence Advisor, the Chaplain of the PSU, and the Archdeacon for Women's Ministry.
19. We have begun reviewing our own diocesan policy "Responding to Domestic Abuse: Policy and Good Practice Guidelines" in light of the NAFVP research. We are also engaging with the national "Ten Commitments" adopted and recommended by the General Synod and its Standing Committee. We anticipate possible points of critique and also recommendations as to areas we can learn from and suggestions to adopt or adapt.

20. We adopted the following two-part approach for the review, utilising the assistance of the Diocesan Researcher at the time, Dr Laurel Moffatt:
- Invite a panel of relevant stakeholders to assist in the review
 - Request written feedback on our Policy and Guidelines document from a panel of relevant stakeholders, in light of the NAFVP research and “Ten Commitments”
 - Review feedback themes via a roundtable discussion with stakeholders.
21. The review stakeholders included the following persons:
- Anglicare’s Family and Domestic Violence Advisor
 - The PSU’s Chaplain
 - A person representing victims and survivors (located via the PSU Chaplain)
 - A parish clergy person
 - A ministry wife
 - A Christian of another Bible-believing denomination with relevant experience
 - A Christian medical practitioner with relevant experience
 - The CEO of ADM (whose Project Officer also joined us)
 - The Principal of Youthworks College
 - A representative of SDS Legal
 - (Moore College was unable to nominate a representative at the time).
22. Extensive written feedback on the existing Policy and Guidelines was received from all stakeholders and was collated by the Diocesan Researcher. We then reviewed feedback and discussed key themes emerging via roundtable video conference in November 2021, with most stakeholders in attendance.
23. Without pre-empting final recommendations, a number of wider key themes were identified, though not all will fit neatly into a policy document, for example:
- (a) Our Diocese likely needs to be more intentional about continuous professional development for ministry workers in the areas both of prevention and response.
 - (b) Our Policy and Guidelines needs to integrate concepts and language that have become more prominent in recent years, such as “coercive control”.
 - (c) Our flow chart may need improvement and even greater, hence earlier, prominence in our policy documents.
 - (d) We may need to become more “trauma informed” regarding IPV, and also to grow in awareness of the impact of IPV on children.
 - (e) We need to understand better the very non-linear, “long road out”, not only for victims and survivors, but also often for carers who walk with them.
 - (f) We may benefit from greater education or training in the areas of picking up cues related to domestic violence and in spotting “grooming” behaviour.
 - (g) We probably need to increase our efforts in primary prevention, for example with our youth and in teaching on marriage and in marriage preparation.
 - (h) We may need to better address male victims and survivors of IPV (who are a minority group).
 - (i) We have further work to do with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and among people living with disabilities.
 - (j) We could improve our cooperation with local agencies (e.g., DV services and shelters) noting that local councils and libraries can be good repositories of local service contacts. Parishes could be encouraged to appoint a ‘local champion’ to be a contact point and to research local services.
24. However, at this stage, we do not consider that the best way forward for the Diocese of Sydney is to simply adopt the national “Ten Principles” and somehow ‘bolt them on’ to our already extensive policy and guidelines. Instead as we review our policy we will give consideration as to how these “Ten Principles” might sit within our own work or inform our review.

25. However, one immediate response to the stimulus of the “Ten Commitments” has been for the Monitoring Committee to meet with members of the Sydney Anglican Indigenous People Ministry Committee (SAIPMC) in May 2022, at their ministry centre in Wedderburn. We began by making an apology to SAIPMC for not contacting them earlier in the process of either producing or reviewing diocesan domestic abuse policy. They graciously forgave this failure.
26. From a wide-ranging discussion, two themes emerged for the Monitoring Committee's consideration:
 - (a) Training in prevention and response to domestic abuse from an Indigenous perspective, would need to come via a more relaxed discussion and relational approach than an online or seminar-based delivery method approach.
 - (b) Significant cultural differences in responding to the issues of abuse and violence include the history of Indigenous Peoples' interactions with government authorities and agencies, including mistrust and concerns over the removal of children; this means finding the right places for referral is more complex.
27. Like many other ministry leaders, Indigenous ministry leaders experienced under-resourcing and were often struggling with being reactive to abuse rather than proactive in prevention. However, the Monitoring Committee observed great practical insight and attitudes present into the issues they face, such as the value of the “aunties”, the challenge of absent fathers, and courage creating churches as safe spaces even if it means the difficult step of excluding an abusive person.
28. Therefore we look forward, in liaison with SAIPMC and Anglicare's Family and Domestic Violence Advisor, in seeing guidelines and training develop in this area.
29. The Monitoring Committee notes that when the diocesan Policy and Guidelines were adopted in 2018, Synod authorised the Standing Committee to make amendments to the Policy provided any amendment made by the Standing Committee is made in consultation with the Professional Standards Unit and the Anglicare Domestic Violence Advisor (unless such proposal to amend is referred to Synod by any 3 members of the Standing Committee).
30. The Monitoring Committee also notes that at that time, Synod asked Standing Committee to review the Domestic Abuse Policy and Good Practice Guidelines after four years' operation and provide a report on the outcome of the review to the first ordinary session of the 53rd Synod in 2023.
31. The Monitoring Committee is now turning its mind towards considering both the detailed suggestions for amending of the existing policy documents and the wider themes identified by the review, with a view to bringing recommendations to Standing Committee in time for the first ordinary session of Synod in 2023.

ARCHDEACON KARA HARTLEY
DEAN SANDY GRANT

22 August 2022