



ONE IN THREE

PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

A Guide to Help Faith Leaders
Educate Congregations and
Communities about Sexual and
Gender Based Violence



HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT
Sermon Guide

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More than **one in three women** in the US have reportedly experienced sexual assault, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime.

The same is true for more than **one in four men**.

— *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010*

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A special thank you to our partners who helped to make this guide possible:



Educating your congregation about SGBV is critical to the well-being of your community.

WHAT IS A SERMON GUIDE?

How Spiritual Leaders Can Help Communities

The topic of gender violence is not an easy one to discuss, to preach about, or to counsel. However, it is real, widespread, and prevalent in our society and in all cultures. The objective of this Sermon Guide is to help Christian and other spiritual leaders become aware of this very important issue and to help them have the basic tools to discuss it with their churches and communities.

For the purpose of this Sermon Guide, the definition we are using for “Sexual and Gender Based Violence” is derived from a combination of sources, including the World Health Organization and the United Nations:

Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. SGBV also includes any gender-motivated act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychosocial harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

This purposely broad and encompassing definition includes rape (including rape by a marital or dating partner), domestic and intimate partner violence, female genital mutilation, human trafficking, forced marriage, obligatory inspections for virginity, child molestation, and many other terrible acts.

Sermon Guide as a Source of Information

The purpose of this guide is to help you learn more about sexual and gender based violence and provide information, developed by health experts, you can share with your

congregation. The guide begins with an introduction on SGBV and why the church must take action, followed by three chapters each addressing a specific SGBV issue. The chapters include an introduction explaining the health issue, a sample suggested sermon incorporating a message, and guiding questions to help you discuss this issue with your congregation. You may choose to use the suggested sermon as it is written or use it as a resource to develop your own. Since this topic can evoke very strong responses, we have also included a list of resources to help navigate some of the deep issues that may arise.

Ways to Share SGBV Messages

There are a number of ways you can share these messages with your community:

- Include SGBV-related messages in your sermons as demonstrated in this guide
- Host special sessions on the topic in small group meetings
- Develop a Sunday School lesson based on a chapter in the guide
- Discuss the topics during counseling sessions
- Partner with other organizations in your community, such as a police benevolence foundation, local hospital, shelter, etc. to share the messages at their meetings
- Develop your own ways to share the messages with your community

As a church leader, the spiritual and physical health of your congregation is most likely very important to you. Fortunately, you are in an ideal position to share information to give your community members the knowledge they need to improve their well-being.

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Attending church
doesn't make
anyone less
susceptible to
sexual violence.

WHY IS THIS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR THE CHURCH?

By Rick Santos, President & CEO of IMA World Health

Introduction

"A dead rat is worth more than the body of a woman." - Margot Wallstrom, the UN's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, in an address to the UN Security Council in October 2010.¹

Last summer, I traveled to the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), near the city of Goma, which a UN official once called the "rape capital of the world." In eastern DRC the mass rape of women, children and men is a weapon of war and conflict used by violent rebel militias to scatter, torture, and shame individuals and communities. In the heart of this beautiful part of Africa, my organization, IMA World Health, runs a U.S. government-funded program to support survivors of these mass rapes and other forms of "Sexual and Gender

Based Violence" or SGBV. In the DRC, I saw the shocking realities of SGBV as they applied to real people with real bodies and souls, instead of just numbers in a report. It made me think of 1 Corinthians 6:19 (NIV), which says, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit," and it made me deeply depressed to know how sharply this violence strays from God's plan.

When I returned to the United States, I challenged my Board of Directors and my staff to learn more about this issue, and as we did, I realized that this incredibly unsettling issue was far bigger than I thought. I, like many people, thought of SGBV as

something that only happens in *other* parts of the world; but the problem of SGBV is far larger than the extremes of mass rape in distant lands. The problem is found in all parts of society, in homes, in schools, in communities, in governments, and even in churches. If there's any hope of stopping the atrocities of rape in conflict, we have to deal with the problems of SGBV in daily life. And not only in DRC, thousands of miles from where you're sitting right now. It happens everywhere—I'm talking about in *your* community, in *your* school, and even in *your* church.

A quiet curse in our own communities

After my experience in the DRC, and after we began to look more deeply at this issue, I was saddened but not surprised to read a report that the United Church of Christ here in the U.S. released in 2009 called "Sexual and Domestic Violence: A sampling of experience and opinion in the United Church of Christ." Though the sampling was small at 371 participants, this statement is huge:

What will strike some as remarkable is that the data we gathered contains nothing remarkable. The numbers of persons who have experienced sexual and domestic violence in this sample are very consistent with the national averages.

In other words, among this sampling of normal American people, attending church didn't make anyone less susceptible to sexual or domestic violence

In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention teamed up with the National Institute of Justice and the Department of Defense to conduct the "National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey" among 16,500 American adults. The report was painful to read, because the survey found that **more than one in three women**



WHY IS THIS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR THE CHURCH?

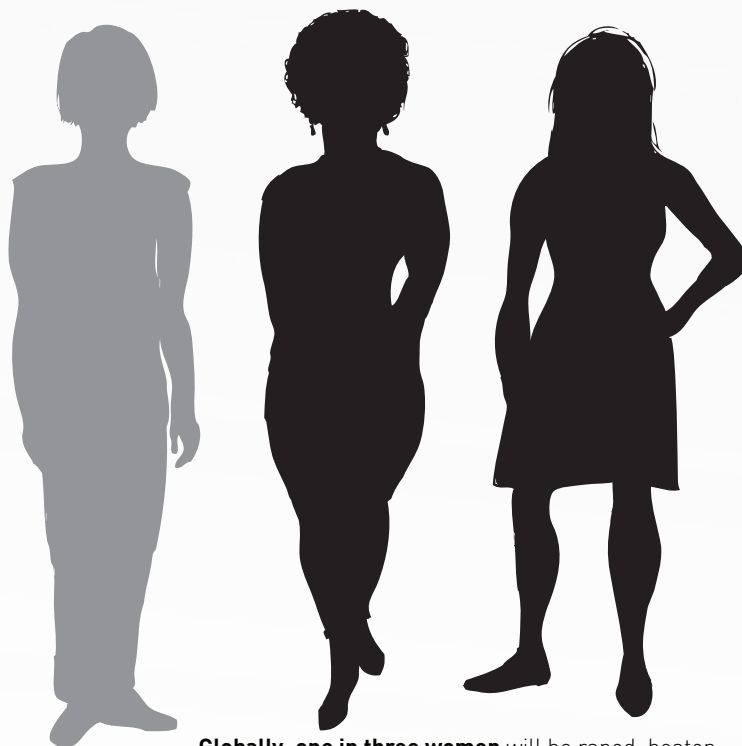
in the US have reportedly experienced sexual assault, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime. The same is true for **more than one in four men.**²

With numbers that high, we simply cannot afford to assume this isn't happening in our churches.

Some of us don't need statistics to tell us that our church pews contain past and current victims of abuse—people of all ages and backgrounds, of both sexes, whether they were molested as children or recently abused by their spouses. Maybe you've even comforted them, counseled them, or directed them where to get the help they need. Perhaps slightly more difficult to process is the fact that we may be sharing those same pews with some perpetrators of abuse. Though you may not be able to tell who they are, the statistics tell us there is a high probability that spousal abuse, date rape, child abuse, or some other terrible act of violence is occurring at the hands of someone in your congregation.

If the church won't speak out, who will?

In our travels, our team at IMA World Health has talked to dozens of people who say, "My pastor would never talk about this!" My first reaction to this comment is, why not? My second reaction is a conviction that the Church



Globally, one in three women will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime.

2003 UNIFEM report "Not a Minute More: Ending Violence Against Women"

**Ignite your
passion as a
leader in the
Christian Faith**

WHY IS THIS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR THE CHURCH?

and our religious leaders have failed on the most basic issues of love, compassion and justice. We cannot fail our flocks (and ourselves) by ignoring the problem, because ignoring the problem is the same as giving quiet consent. As members of a faith built on love, we should be *shouting* about it! **Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** These are the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22 (NIV), and these are the character traits we need to cultivate among the body of believers. But clearly, judging by the persistence of SGBV all around and even among us, we are all falling short.

This guide was created by ministers, for ministers. Our goal for this Sermon Guide is to help faith leaders, regardless of their personality or preaching style, confidently speak out against SGBV and open the doors to communication in their churches. We know some people you minister may be uncomfortable with this topic, but you

can't let that stop you from talking about it. SGBV is not only a perfectly acceptable topic to talk about in church; it is also a very important one. Our hope is that this guide can help you overcome any obstacles that keep this issue under the cover of silence, whether it's embarrassment, fear of the congregation's reaction, or just not knowing how to begin.

This is a sensitive topic. As you read through the guide and plan your sermon(s), I encourage you to embark on this journey prayerfully and approach the subject with love and sensitivity. Do your research to know the proper way to respond if a victim comes forward. Take steps to ensure your youth and children's ministry staff and volunteers have proper background checks and training on responding to abuse. Link up with trained counselors and community resources who are well equipped to help. Learn to recognize the signs of abuse.

Mobilizing the faith community—starting with you—to work together to end SGBV, both here in the U.S. and around the world, is a key part of the effort to end this epidemic. To accomplish this, everyone must do his or her part; from the organizations working in DRC to those working in our local neighborhoods; from the pastor speaking out from the pulpit to the men, women, and children who must choose to act in love rather than in violence. This SGBV Sermon Guide is a start; the work we all do each day to cultivate peace and love is how the effort will continue. Thank you for *speaking out* against sexual and gender based violence. Peace be with you.

WE
ARE **NOT**
POWERLESS

MESSAGE 1: WHY WE MUST CHOOSE LOVE

Introduction

The statistics regarding global SGBV are staggering and sobering. Here's a sampling:

- In Mexico, over 6,000 girls, teenagers, and women were murdered for gender-related reasons between 1999 and 2005.³
- In Peru, 70% of women reported physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner.⁴
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the North Kivu Province (Eastern Congo, which the UN has called the rape capital of the world), a woman is more than 100 times more likely to be raped than a woman in the United States.⁵
- In Bangladesh, 30% of women in rural regions say their first sexual experience was forced.⁶
- Globally, one in three women will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime.⁷

In the United States:

- 232,960 women in the U.S. were raped or sexually assaulted in 2006. That's more than 600 women every day.⁸
- Women ages 20-24 are at greatest risk of nonfatal domestic violence.⁹
- Women age 24 and under suffer from the highest rates of rape.¹⁰
- The cost of domestic violence in 2003 was more than \$8.3 billion. This cost includes medical care, mental health services, and lost productivity.¹¹

Cultural norms and traditions often perpetuate this violence, and even magistrates do not always know the laws about rape and other forms of sexual and gender based violence. When women are oppressed, entire communities suffer; children (both male and female) who

are abused often inflict abuse on others. Society cannot withstand this violence.

The church cannot sit idly by and act as if nothing is happening. The church cannot escape into so-called "spiritual" concerns and ignore the needs of women, men, and children who are the victims of such violence. The church must have the courage to open its eyes to the issues around the world, to the needs of its neighbors, and it must stand in unity and support organizations that are working to end violence and promote equality and opportunity for women. The church can be an agent of liberation, by graciously raising awareness around these issues and providing healing and hope for people. The church is well equipped to offer support to the victims of SGBV and help prevent further acts of violence. Our most effective resource is love.

Sermon

Scripture Readings

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34 (NRSV)

Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." John 15:12

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it

***"LOVE ONE
ANOTHER AS
I HAVE LOVED
YOU"
JOHN 15:12***

The church
must teach
love and
understanding
every day.

MESSAGE 1: WHY WE MUST CHOOSE LOVE

does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:2-7

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for He makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?...Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:43-46a, 48

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it unto me....Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it unto me.” Matthew 25:40, 45

“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action...Beloved, let us love one another, be-

cause love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love....Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.” 1 John 3:18, 4:7-8, 11

This is just a small sampling

of the many New Testament texts that speak about the importance of love—for God, for the church, and for the Christian. Jesus is emphatic: A new commandment, a new mandate I give you. *Love one another*. It doesn’t get any clearer than this. *Love one another*. It couldn’t be any simpler, yet we still struggle to follow where Jesus leads. Since the time of Jesus, Christians have struggled with the meaning of the word “love” and then embodying it in the way we live.

What do we mean by love?

In the language of the Bible, *Koine* or Common Greek had at least three different words for love. There was the love expressed through friendship (*philos*); there was the love expressed through intimate desire (*eros*); and, there was a third kind of love called *agape*—a word rarely used in the Greek world until adopted by the early Christian community to express the transforming power of Jesus Christ. This kind of love is sacrificial or self-giving. There’s still a place for friendship and intimate desire in the Christian experience, but these are now informed and shaped by the power of *agape*, of a self-giving, other-focused kind of love. Most of the times love is mentioned in the New Testament, especially 1 Corinthians 13 and 1 John, the Greek reads *agape*.

So what exactly is love as *agape*? Love is not primarily a feeling. In many ways, feelings have little to do with it. *Love is a choice*. What kind of choice? By the grace of God, and on a daily basis, we choose (again and again) to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37). We can’t say we love God when we fail to love our neighbors and ourselves. How can we really love God if we hate our neighbors and hate ourselves? That’s why love



MESSAGE 1: WHY WE MUST CHOOSE LOVE

is more than a romantic or sentimental feeling toward someone. This kind of love is not preference. God doesn't prefer one over the other. That's not love. And love is not a synonym for "like"—Jesus didn't say, *like* your enemies, *like* your neighbors, but to *love* them. You might not like neighbors, but you're still called to love them. And who is your neighbor? The person before and beside you—*everyone*.

So the Christian chooses to love the same way God chooses to love humanity. What does this look like? This love is powerful. It's a love that is creative and life-giving. *It calls people to life and it fights and struggles against anything or anyone that tries to destroy or dehumanize one of God's beloved children.* It wants people to live and to grow and to thrive. It wants the best for God's children. It takes delight in the uniqueness and joy of the *other*—whoever he or she might be, created in the image of God.

Putting Love into Practice

This is the core message of the Gospel and God calls the church to embody this way of being in the world. Not only is the church called to *teach* love, it is called to put it into *practice*—especially for those who have never known this kind of love, those who have never been on the receiving end of such love and respect.

In the United States, more than 1 in 3 women have reportedly experienced sexual assault, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime. The same is true for 1 in 4 men.¹²

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence¹³, boys who witness domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own partners and children when

they become adults.

To teach love, we need to demonstrate love. We need our children to understand that turning to violence is not acceptable behavior. As adults we need to practice what we preach – we need to treat people the way we would like to be treated – with respect and love.

Related to the experience of love in the Christian tradition is *empathy*, which means to suffer with someone else. It means to put yourself into the "skin" of the *other*, of your neighbor, and imagine what it might be like for that person, to imagine his/her joys and feelings, hurts and concerns. And if we find that our neighbor is in pain or suffering, or under threat, then it is incumbent upon us to do everything in our power to alleviate that pain, bring an end to that suffering, and provide a place, a community where the threat is alleviated. In this way the church becomes a sanctuary, a holy space, a safe space for God's children to live and grow. We suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice (1 Corinthians 12:26). It's only in safe communities grounded in love that physical, emotional, and even spiritual healing can take place. The church has an obligation to offer this on behalf of God's love for all God's children.

The early church father, Irenaeus (2nd century c. 202), Bishop of Lyon, France, claimed, "The glory of God is the human being fully alive." We glorify God by helping people come alive, to be the people they were created by God to be. Love not only allows people to come alive, love also creates the space for it to happen, in safe, loving communities, families, and churches where people are loved, respected, and honored. Love creates caring spaces for people to grow and develop, spaces that are safe,

**WE NEED TO
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**The church
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MESSAGE 1: WHY WE MUST CHOOSE LOVE

spaces that allow deep healing to take place so that men, women and children can grow into being the people they were created by God to be.

Reverend Kenneth E. Kovacs, Ph.D.

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you were completely loved and accepted for who you are? What did that feel like?
2. Share a time when you witnessed God's love (agape).
3. What are the greatest obstacles to love in yourself and in your community?
4. How can you put love into practice in your faith community? What would it look like? What would it feel like?



PHILOS
AGAPE
EROS

MESSAGE 2: CONSIDER IT, TAKE COUNSEL, AND SPEAK OUT

Introduction:

Reading: Judges 19:16-30, NRSV

"Then at evening there was an old man coming from his work in the field. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was residing in Gibeah. (The people of the place were Benjaminites.) When the old man looked up and saw the wayfarer in the open square of the city, he said, 'Where are you going and where do you come from?' He answered him, 'We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; and I am going to my home. Nobody has offered to take me in. We your servants have straw and fodder for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and the woman and the young man along with us. We need nothing more.' The old man said, 'Peace be to you. I will care for all your wants; only do not spend the night in the square.' So he brought him into his house, and fed the donkeys; they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a depraved lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, 'Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him.' And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, 'No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile thing. Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing.' But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine, and put her out to them. They wantonly raped her, and abused her all through the night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. As morning ap-

peared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light.

In the morning her master got up, opened the doors of the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. 'Get up,' he said to her, 'we are going.' But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey; and the man set out for his home. When he had entered his house, he took a knife, and grasping his concubine he cut her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. Then he commanded the men whom he sent, saying, 'Thus shall you say to all the Israelites, "Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out."

Sermon: There are certain images that haunt.

Aruna¹⁴ lives in Madurai, India at the "House for Discarded Women." One of the many battered bodies there, she had been tied up, soaked with gasoline and set on fire by her husband and mother-in-law. She miraculously survived and was taken to the house for unwanted women where she learned to weave. Disfigured and disabled, she smiled as her hands slow-danced through the threads and her feet played a percussive tune on the loom. The house is a sanctuary for women who have been victims of bridal burnings, acid attacks, domestic abuse, or other forms of gender discrimination and violence. Aruna and the other women at the house are lucky—they have found a safe place to live and heal—there are so many in the world who aren't as blessed.

Like us, Indian women are struggling to make ends meet, love their partners, bring up their children, and

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MESSAGE 2: CONSIDER IT, TAKE COUNSEL, AND SPEAK OUT

take care of their own bodies and health. They're trying to live life the best they can. Yet violence is anything but life giving, and it has been afflicting girls and women in India and elsewhere for far too long. It robs women of their dignity, sense of self-worth, autonomy, and quality of life. Sexual and gender based violence pervades our world and disproportionately affects women in impoverished communities. It is "ubiquitous in much of the developing world, inflicting far more casualties than any war. Surveys suggest that about one-third of all women worldwide face beatings in the home. Women aged 15 through 44 are more likely to be maimed or die from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined."¹⁵

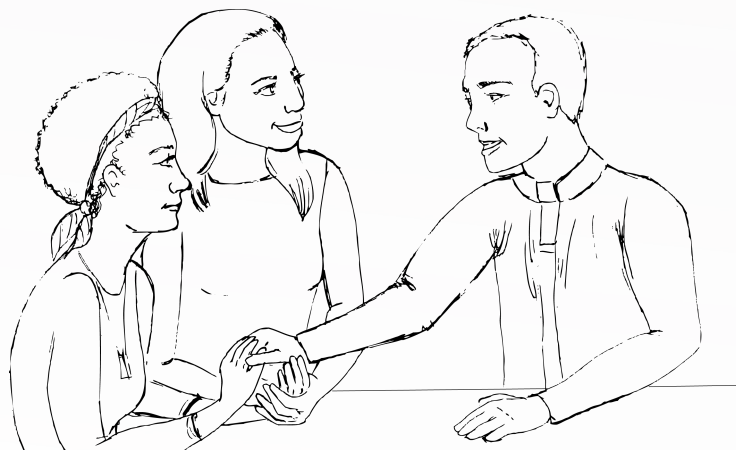
We would be foolish to believe that it is not also a grave problem in North America; sadly, in the U.S. more than one in three women have reportedly experienced sexual assault, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetimes. The same is true for one in four men.¹⁶ Victims of sexual and gender-based violence

are human beings, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). To experience the sheer terror, humiliation, and trauma of sexual violence is unfathomable—inhuman, even. Such violence, which is not life-giving, but instead life-threatening and life-taking, is certainly not of God.

Playwright Eve Ensler claims, "The mechanism of violence is what destroys women, controls women, diminishes women and keeps women in their so-called place."¹⁷ Violence breeds violence. The cycles of sexual and gender based violence are insidious, and oftentimes culturally entrenched. Entire communities are greatly affected. Unchallenged, sexual and gender based violent acts run the risk of becoming the norm, the way to treat females who are considered mere second-class citizens.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that violence is inflicted upon girls and women precisely *because* they are girls and women. "Behind the rapes and other abuse heaped on women in much of the world, it's hard not to see something more sinister than just libido and prurient opportunism. Namely: sexism and misogyny. How else to explain why so many more witches were burned than wizards? Why is acid thrown in women's faces, but not in men's? Why are women so much more likely to be stripped naked and sexually humiliated than men?"¹⁸ Forty-eight women are raped every hour in the DRC, according to a recent study highlighted in the Guardian.¹⁹ A weapon of war, sexual and gender based violence is used to intimidate and expel individuals and communities.

It is difficult to comprehend how it is possible that the world has allowed this to occur. In more danger in eastern Congo than soldiers, women are targeted as pawns of war, their bodies violated, tortured, and their innocence and self-value stolen. This has also happened in Rwanda, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, in Bosnia and Croatia. The



MESSAGE 2: CONSIDER IT, TAKE COUNSEL, AND SPEAK OUT

horrific acts of violence against women and girls continue, even though the Geneva Convention named rape a form of torture as long ago as 1949.²⁰ Why does this happen?

A part of the issue is the battle over natural and thus economic resources. The DRC is full of natural resources: gold, diamonds, copper, oil, lumber, and coltan—a rich country! And yet the people do not benefit from their own resources. A woman can go to the river to get gold but can't even buy golden earrings from her own country; she can't afford them.

Are our bodies and lives worth any more than those of Congolese women? As key a role as economics play in the violence against women in the Congo and around the world, including North America, it is critical to understand that the violence is perpetrated against girls and women in particular because of their gender. Just as it was for the Levite woman in Judges 19—one of the most shockingly horrific and difficult biblical texts to read because of its graphic details and appalling violence toward the woman.

Disturbing enough is that the man who took in the Levite and his concubine offered his own virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine in place of the Levite himself. Further disturbing is how the woman is brutally murdered by her own partner after having been gang raped all night long. He cuts her up into 12 pieces and sends the body parts across Israel. It is important to point to the wide cultural gap that we as modern readers have with ancient readers, who would have been more outraged by the lack of hospitality shown by the men of the village than by the woman's rape and dismemberment. As theologian Danna Nowel Fewell points out, the woman in the story is never allowed to speak for herself; we never hear her in her own voice. Fewell claims that the violence toward

The church must
act together
to **stop** global sexual violence.

women in all of Judges “maps the moral and theological deterioration of Israel in the text.”¹² At this juncture in history, the Israelites had completely lost sight of all that the Lord had promised them. This account of the woman who was trapped and brutalized by men—including her own father and partner—is an allegory for how far Israel had wandered away from their covenantal relationship with God. But it is still deeply disturbing that once again violence towards women is used to teach a lesson.

Nonetheless, the most important and life-giving lesson to be learned is found in the last lines of the chapter: “Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out.” (Judges 19:30b)

Consider the millions of lives forever impacted by sexual and gender based violence. Consider the voices muffled, the voices unheard, the voices of all those who, if they could, would scream out so that the rest of the world might finally hear and take heed. Speak out by putting pressure on companies to boycott goods that are manufactured or mined in countries that are in conflict. This pressure can be as simple as not purchasing goods or petitioning them for change.

The Church has the potential to be the most powerful social agency on the planet. Yet we have not raised our

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MESSAGE 2: CONSIDER IT, TAKE COUNSEL, AND SPEAK OUT



collective voice loudly or powerfully enough to cry out against violence toward women. We have the power to end sexual and gender-based violence.

Indeed, we have an unrivaled opportunity as the Church—starting in our local congregations—to love our

neighbors as ourselves and to stand with the millions of girls and women across our world who are victims of sexual violence. Soberly stated, society simply cannot sustain this violence any longer. It is destroying the very fabric of our communities, our homes, our families, our mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, lovers, and best friends. We can no longer allow the sin of SGBV to occur—in any time, in any place, or to anyone. For if we truly believe that we have all been created in the image of God, then we are all beautiful, creative beings. If we take seriously that we are indeed one body in Christ, then we are exploiting and dehumanizing ourselves and *we are defaming God* when we allow this kind of violence to continue. It is our moral obligation and spiritual task to reach out into our congregations, our community, and beyond to ensure that women have a safe haven where they can experience our love and the grace of God.

One million rapes is one million too many. It is already one rape too many.

Consider it, take counsel, and speak out.

Reverend Amy Gopp

Discussion Questions

1. What social and economic factors can contribute to violence against women and men?
2. What does the shocking story in the Book of Judges lead us to believe about the value of women in the society at the time? How does this differ from how God intends His children to treat one another?
3. What can the church do to address violence against women here at home and around the world?
4. How can we as individuals confront violence in our communities?

MESSAGE 3: A DEEPER LOOK AT THE BOOK OF RUTH

Introduction

Consider the following figures:

- It is estimated that as many as 27 million men, women, and children around the world are currently victims of what is now often described with the umbrella term “human trafficking.”²²
- As many as 2 million women are trafficked across international borders into horrific exploitative situations each year. Adding domestic trafficking would bring the total much higher, to perhaps 4 million persons per year.²³
- UNICEF reports that approximately 30 million children have lost their childhood through sexual exploitation over the past 30 years.²⁴
- The International Labor Organization estimates that 55% of forced labor victims are women and girls, as are 98% of sex trafficking victims.²⁵

Trafficking has been defined by the UN as:

“...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

“Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”²⁶

Human trafficking is a major symptom of a truly global culture that has commodified, marginalized, abused, and

exploited women for literally thousands of years. The church must look these problems straight on and use its power to care for the vulnerable and change the culture of violence and slavery.

Reading:

The Book of Ruth, Chapters 1-4

Sermon:

Naomi and Ruth were widows, facing starvation due to widespread famine. Because they had no opportunity to obtain work or find food where they lived, they were forced to take a long and dangerous journey across the desert, hoping for a better life in Bethlehem. However, the situation on the other side was not expected to be much more hopeful. Naomi was so distraught that she changed her name to Mara (which means bitterness) and she tried to persuade her daughters-in-law to return to live with their parents rather than to share in this bitter situation. The first, Orpah, quickly takes her advice and seeks better fortune; Ruth, however, resigns herself to whatever situations Mara will face during the long journey and during her struggle to survive as a single woman. She responds to Mara with the words, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall* be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if *anything but* death parts you and me” (Ruth 1:16-17, NASB). And so begins Ruth and Mara’s epic quest for survival.

Extraordinary horrors awaited these two women at every turn. From start to finish, Naomi and Ruth faced both physically and potentially sexually dangerous conditions.

Teach your children to love one another and stand up for the oppressed.

In 2005, as many
as 17,500 people
were trafficked
into the U.S.

MESSAGE 3: A DEEPER LOOK AT THE BOOK OF RUTH

Walking alone in the desert, probably weak from hunger, made them easy prey. To make matters worse, they didn't know who or what awaited them on the other side.

Theirs was a journey of desperation. Once in Bethlehem, Ruth was repeatedly at the mercy of others for even the most basic of needs. Jewish law commanded farmers to leave the corners of their fields unharvested to supply food to the poor; but competition for this food could be fierce, and foreigners and women could face severe op-

position and even physical harm when entering into the seclusion of the fields. But the eyes of the Lord were on Ruth and her good deeds did not go unnoticed; Boaz, the owner of the field and a powerful relative of Mara's, spoke out and commanded that Ruth not be touched or molested, and he warned Ruth to stay near to his protection rather than seeking food elsewhere where she would be in greater danger.

In the end, Ruth's story is a happy one and a picture of Christ's love. Boaz redeems Mara's land and makes Ruth his wife, thereby removing her from her life of poverty and placing her into his family and ultimately into the lineage of Christ.

For many, the account of Ruth is a familiar one. However, because it occurs during a different time, place, and covenant

we often find difficulty applying this story to our lives—other than perhaps by being thankful for how Christ has redeemed us from sin and placed us into the family of God. But this story could easily be recast with the names of women who, like Ruth, are crying out for a kinsman redeemer today. Many, like Ruth, because of their social, political, and economic situations, are faced with desperate and life-threatening decisions and scenarios to preserve their lives and the lives of those they love. Sometimes it's at the threat of violence or death, and other times it's because—like Mara and Ruth—they have no other options.

According to the PBS Series *Dying to Leave*, it has been estimated that every year, 2 to 4 million people are shipped in containers, shepherded through sewage pipes, secreted in car chassis, and ferried across frigid waters. Others travel on legitimate carriers but with forged documents. An alarming number of these migrants do not find freedom, but end up in bondage, forced to work as prostitutes, thieves, or as laborers in any number of for-profit industries.²⁷ While some willingly put themselves at risk, poverty has a way of making people vulnerable to exploitation. People are promised a new life, the chance to attend college, or a job that could help provide for their families, but find when they come ashore that they have unknowingly sold themselves into bondage. And there are no kinsman redeemers (and seemingly few Christians) who are stepping in.

Human trafficking happens all around us, possibly even among us in our community. Human trafficking of both men and women is a lucrative business with a market value estimated in excess of \$32 billion per year.²⁸ One study has estimated nearly 300,000 American youth—mostly runaways or “throwaways”—are at risk of being



MESSAGE 3: A DEEPER LOOK AT THE BOOK OF RUTH

sexually exploited for commercial uses. In 2005, the U.S. State Department estimated that as many as 17,500 people were trafficked into the U.S., mostly for forced labor or sex work.³⁰ We know the problem is growing, but real numbers are hard to estimate due to the hidden nature of these crimes. There could be more victims than we can even imagine.

The difference between this reality and the dangers which faced Mara and Ruth is that, presently, there are few “Boazes” to speak out and command the wicked to keep their hands off of these women and children, and to offer protection from the dangers associated with seeking food and shelter elsewhere. However, we as God’s children are called to protect the widow and the fatherless and to give to those in need.

Conclusion:

Church, I ask you—is the Body of Christ compassionate and bold enough to tackle and transform these issues? Isaiah 1:17 says, “Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.” And James 1:27 says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

Let us come together to be a Boaz, a kinsman redeemer, to those who seek freedom only to find bondage. Join with me in praying for the modern-day Naomis—those who think of their lives as bitter, who have lost all hope in their journey for survival. Pray for the Ruths who are without a Boaz. Pray for those in our high schools, middle schools—and yes, our elementary schools—who are being sexually abused by those that should be protecting

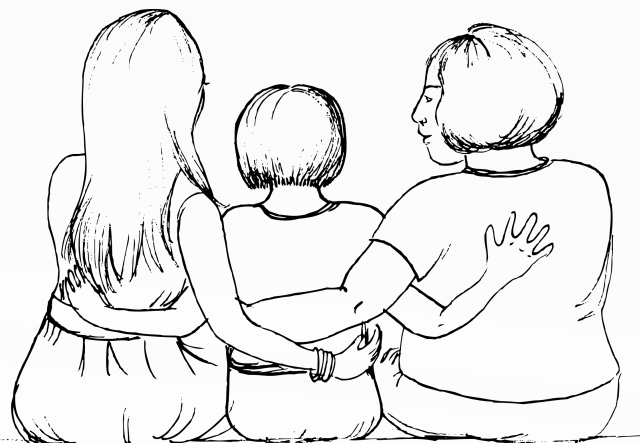
them. Pray for those in the DRC who are raped on the same day as their sisters, mothers, and neighbors because there is no kinsman redeemer to protect them from wicked and greedy men trying to control the minerals that power our cell phones.

And when you pray, do not be surprised if God asks you to be a Boaz to speak out and take action. Consider:

- Teaching your children to love one another and stand up for the oppressed by supporting shelters and organizations that care for survivors of trafficking.
- In your communities, supporting the leadership and capacity of women to change oppressive situations and claim their rights.
- Challenging U.S. policies that impoverish people around the world:
 - » Supporting legislation affirming women’s human rights, including economic, health, and social rights
 - » Fighting for just immigration policies rather than the criminalization of migrant laborers

The Church has both the calling and the ability to help those who are vulnerable or oppressed, as well as to influence the world to prevent future exploitation from occurring. We *can* challenge the social, economic, political, and cultural conditions that force women to sell and endanger themselves for survival. We

The Church has both the calling and the ability to help those who are vulnerable or oppressed.



MESSAGE 3: A DEEPER LOOK AT THE BOOK OF RUTH

can help the Ruths and Naomis of today get safely across their deserts and find hope on the other side.

Co-written by Donald Love, MAR, MDiv, ThM, and Emily Love Esworthy

Discussion Questions

1. What surprised you about this sermon? Have you ever thought of the story of Ruth and Naomi in this way?
2. What questions are raised by the fact that the situation facing Ruth and Naomi is continuing today in so many places?
3. How might the church manifest the power it has to change the conditions which lead to human trafficking?
4. What is your dream for the Body of Christ made real for women around the world?
5. Is there a way to organize the Body of Christ to truly manifest the social, political, economic, and ethical Kingdom of God for the world? How can we influence the world around us?



FAITH
ACTION

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HELPFUL HOTLINES AND RESOURCES

In addition to studying Scripture and learning the facts to teach your congregation about SGBV, you also need practical knowledge for where to go and how to react when abusive situations are brought to your attention or a survivor comes to you for help. There are many resources available; here are a few to get you started. We also recommend linking with your local police department, counseling centers and shelters to learn about resources in your own community.

Know Your Legal Responsibilities

As a pastor, Sunday School teacher, faith leader, or just a regular citizen, do you know what you are legally obligated to do if you become aware of an abusive or violent situation? Find out your legal responsibilities here:

http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state/index.cfm

<http://www.rainn.org/public-policy/laws-in-your-state>

Hotlines and Info:

National Domestic Violence Hotline: Available 24/7 and staff by trained counselors who can provide crisis assistance and information about shelters, legal advocacy, health care centers, and counseling. Translators available.

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

<http://www.thehotline.org/>

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN): Available 24/7, RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization. Their nationwide partnership with more than 1,100 local rape crisis centers provides victims of sexual assault with free, confidential services.

1-800-656-HOPE

Access the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline at www.rainn.org for help via live chat.

<http://www.rainn.org/>

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline: Available 24/7 to connect victims and caregivers to counselors, resources, and information about child abuse and neglect.

1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

<http://www.childhelp.org/>

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children:

1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)

<http://www.missingkids.com/>

OUR WRITERS



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Kenneth E. Kovacs is pastor of the Catonsville Presbyterian Church and in 2011, joined IMA on a trip to Tanzania and Democratic Republic of Congo, where he witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of sexual- and gender-based violence. His church supports Presbyterian hospitals and churches in DRC, fully knowing the church can be a voice of liberation and hope. Ken also wrote “The Relational Theology of James E. Loder: Encounter and Conviction” (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).



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Rick Santos, President & CEO IMA World Health:

Rick Santos has over two decades of experience in faith-based and relief and development work. Prior to joining IMA World Health, Rick was most recently involved in developing strategic planning, prioritization and concrete steps for both Church World Service and International Relief and Development’s respective governance bodies, senior management and staff. Rick holds a Master of Business Administration degree from Johns Hopkins University, a Master of Theological Studies degree from Harvard University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from George Washington University.



Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is endemic in many societies around the world. While exact statistics are difficult to come by due to incomplete reporting, what we do know is concerning...

