

BREAK THE SILENCE SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 26, 2023

A Toolkit from
The Episcopal Diocese of New York
Task Force on Domestic Violence and
Sexual Assault



**"VIOLENCE SHALL NO LONGER BE HEARD IN OUR LAND"
ISAIAH 60:18**

"If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that **human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights**, once and for all."

First Lady Hillary Clinton at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China (1995)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

RESOLUTIONS

04

BACKGROUND

05

INTRODUCTION

07

WHY BREAK THE SILENCE?

09

WORSHIP RESOURCES

12

ABOUT THE TASK FORCE

RESOLUTIONS

Passed at the 246th Diocesan Convention, November 2022

Proposer(s) of the Resolution	Yvonne O'Neal and Paul Feuerstein
Parish or Organization(s)	Diocesan Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
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Title of the Resolution	Observing Break the Silence Sunday

Text of the Resolution

[13] Resolved, that the 246th Convention of The Episcopal Diocese of New York affirm General Convention Resolution 2022-C064, Break the Silence Sunday, and calls on churches to observe the Sunday closest to November 25, which is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women; and be it further,

[14] Resolved, that within The Episcopal Diocese of New York there be zero tolerance on violence against women and children within our homes, our schools, our communities and the church.

Explanation

Churches throughout Anglican Communion, including The Episcopal Church, take part in the 16 Days Campaign against gender-based violence, which runs annually from November 25 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to December 10 (International Human Rights Day). The 16 Days period includes other significant dates, like International Human Rights Defenders Day (November 29), World Aids Day (December 1), and the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre (December 6). We think it appropriate to celebrate Break The Silence Sunday during this period.

Break The Silence Sunday is a resource for churches to actively support survivors of sexual violence, particularly in the context of worship. The goal is three-fold:

- to help congregations learn about the reality and scope of the problem of sexual violence;
- to establish congregations as communities where survivors can share their stories and be received with hope and love; and
- to provide congregations with ways to advocate for change in their communities and around the world.

BACKGROUND

Gender-based violence and violence against women and girls is pervasive in our society. One in four women in the United States are or have been victims of domestic violence. One in three women worldwide are or have been victims.

The 16 Days of Activism campaign, started by a group of activists at the inauguration of the Women's Global Leadership in 1991, continues to be coordinated each year by the Center for Women's Global Leadership. It is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

In 1993, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defined violence against women “as any act of **gender-based violence (GBV)**, which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life.” This Declaration was the first instrument explicitly addressing violence against women, providing a framework for national and global action.

In support of 16 Days civil society initiative, the United Nations Secretary-General launched in 2008 the campaign UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women, which runs parallel to the 16 Days of Activism. This year in 2023, the UNiTE campaign theme is **Invest to Prevent Violence Against Women & Girls** and will focus on the importance of financing different prevention strategies to stop violence from occurring in the first place. This year's campaign theme is also aligned to the 2024 priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) focused on *accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective*.



Picture credit: UN Women

This toolkit is an outcome of the resolution passed at the 246th Diocesan Convention, **Observing Break the Silence Sunday.**

INTRODUCTION

Building on the work of 1994-A049 – Encouraging Ministries That Respond to Violence Against Women, and other resolutions, as well as the Liturgy of Listening at GC79, Resolution C064, Break The Silence Sunday was passed at the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church held in Baltimore, Maryland, July 8-11, 2022. Subsequently, at the 246th Annual Diocesan Convention on November 11-12, 2022, the Episcopal Diocese of New York passed the resolution Observing Break The Silence Sunday, affirming the General Convention resolution. By observing Break The Silence Sunday, we join with other people of faith around the world to take action to end the incessant violence against women and girls. **Break The Silence Sunday is the first Sunday during the 16 Days of Activism. In 2023, it is November 26.**

Break The Silence Sunday is a resource for churches to support survivors of sexual violence, particularly in the context of worship. The goal is **three-fold**:



Help congregations learn about the reality and scope of the problem of sexual violence



Establish congregations as communities where survivors can share their stories and be received with hope and love



Provide congregations with ways to advocate for change in their communities and around the world

Did you know?

During the 16 Days of Activism, landmark buildings like the Empire State Building are lit in orange, a bright and optimistic color that symbolizes a brighter future, free from violence against women and girls.

The UNiTE campaign has proclaimed the 25th of each month as "Orange Day," a day to raise awareness and take action to end violence against women and girls.

Break The Silence Sunday will enable church leadership to display a clear knowledge of and ability to engage people on issues of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and promote key messages against violence. **Our church leaders will be in a better position to support individuals and families** in claiming their roles and responsibilities in preventing violence against women and children. By breaking the silence about the violence happening in people's homes, people of faith will realize that the levels of violence are neither normal, nor acceptable. **Our clergy, in particular, can have a powerful impact on people's attitudes and beliefs**, by speaking out and using their influence to communicate intolerance for violence against women and girls in all forms. It is worth noting that Resolution 2022-C063, **Participate in Thursdays in Black**, was passed at the 80th General Convention, and a resulting resolution was affirmed at the 246th Diocesan Convention. Thursdays in Black is a World Council of Churches global movement for a world without rape and violence. The idea behind Thursdays in Black is to encourage people to wear black clothing on Thursdays as a reminder of the need to act against sexual violence in all its forms. At the 247th Diocesan Convention, the Task Force will distribute pins to wear so the Diocese of New York is part of the global movement resisting attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence.

**68
secs**

Every 68 seconds, an American is assaulted.

1/6

1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime

3%

About 3% of American men have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime.

12-17

A majority of child victims are between 12 and 17 years of age.

9/10

9 out of 10 victims of rape are female.

63k

From 2009–2013, about 63,000 children a year were victims of sexual abuse.

Majority of sexual assaults occur at or near the victim's home

48%

48% of victims were sleeping or performing another activity at home when the crime occurred.

29%

29% were traveling to and from work or school, or traveling to shop or run errands



Picture credit: Yvonne O'Neal

WHY BREAK THE SILENCE?

The Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, instrumental in proposing the Break The Silence Sunday resolution to General Convention, believes that our Diocese and the wider church must address the root causes of violence against women and girls. We can no longer be silent.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminds us time and time again that if anything is not about love, it is not about Jesus.

“We can build a church in the spirit of Jesus and his way of love, where all are welcome, and **all are safe**. I am personally committed to that and will do all that I can to help our church to truly reflect the spirit of Jesus and his way of love, where all are welcome, and all are safe.”

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry in response to a recent sexual impropriety allegation.

Break The Silence Sunday gives us an opportunity to talk about ending gender violence and bring awareness about it in our churches. The reality is most church goers have never heard a sermon on the topic of gender-based violence, nor are churches adequately equipped to address domestic abuse. Break The Silence Sunday can change this. By sermons and prayers, more of us can be learn to be advocates to stem the tide of ever-increasing violence against women and girls.

Break The Silence Sunday will also confront the patriarchy of the Church, in structures of leadership and decision-making, biblical interpretation, and personal attitudes towards women, which underpins the psychological, emotional, physical, sexual, and economic violence women around the world endure. We must continue to acknowledge the abuses of power and trust experienced by women and children in our churches, even as we strive to build communities where the gospel of love, inclusion, preference for the least in society, peace, and abundant life is both preached and made real.



Picture credit: UN Women

The Center for Women’s Global Leadership has noted that the 16 Days Campaign has been used as an organizing strategy by individuals and groups around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women by:

<p>Raising awareness about gender-based violence as a human rights issue at the local, national, regional and international levels.</p>	<p>Strengthening local work around violence against women</p>	<p>Establishing a clear link between local and international work to end violence against women</p>
<p>Providing a forum in which organizers can develop and share new and effective strategies</p>	<p>Demonstrating the solidarity of women around the world organizing against violence against women</p>	<p>Creating tools to pressure governments to implement promises made to eliminate violence against women.</p>

Let us all in solidarity do all we can to raise awareness during these 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Let us work towards a just and peaceful society where love reigns supreme. **Let us start with Break The Silence Sunday on November 26, 2023.**

WORSHIP RESOURCES

To help the congregations and other ministry settings of the Episcopal Diocese of New York observing Break The Silence Sunday, the Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault offers the follow resources for use in worship. The materials include litanies and prayers drawn from across the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Prayer Resource from the Mothers' Union

This resource from the Mothers' Union has a range of reflections and prayer templates for use during the 16 Days. You should find appropriate prayers for use on Break The Silence Sunday.

Prayers to End VAW

This resource from the Liturgy Commission of the Anglican Church in Australia. It contains litanies and prayers for ending violence against women. Also included is a list of suggested Bible readings.



Picture credit: UN Women

Litany from the Pacific Conference of Churches, 2022

God of heaven and earth before you we confess our sin

(All) God of transformation hear our prayer

We confess the terrible physical and sexual violence that so many women/men/boys and girls across the globe are subjected to.

(All) God of transformation hear our prayer

We confess how even into our own time scripture has been used to justify Violence against Women and their exclusion from a full role in society.

(All) God of Transformation hear our prayer

We confess a violent culture which turns women's bodies into sexualised commodities and sees women as part of the spoils of war and commerce.

(All) God of Transformation hear our prayer

We confess the structural violence of our institutions including the church which too often exclude women from decision making, power or authority.

(All) God of Transformation hear our prayer

Great God we give you thanks that you call us out of silence to name hidden and domestic violence

(All) Today we pray for all those women who despite suffering from violence, continue to care for family and children, to grow and prepare food, carry water, earn a living and offer support to others.

We pray for women who are trafficked as domestic or sex workers; for women who are raped and do not know how to find words to name their pain or a way into future.

(All) We pray for transformation of our societies which often find it easier to judge the victims of violence than to solve the problems of injustice.

We pray that women's voices may be heard and take into account in all peace and reconciliation work.

(All) We pray for a transformation in the violent way many men act towards and think about women.

We pray for right and just relations between and men that together we may transform and overcome violence in all forms and learn to celebrate our diversity and independence.

(All) We look forward to the age of peace, when violence is banished, both women and men are able to love and to be loved, and the work and the wealth of our world is justly shared. Amen



A Collect

O God of peace and promise, you call forth prophets in every age to offer visions of your in-breaking reign and to press those who harm others to change their hearts and ways: Pour your Spirit mightily upon us, that we, in our day, may boldly condemn all violence against women and girls, and effectively work for the safety, dignity and healing of all peoples; in Jesus' name, Amen.

by The Rev. Canon K. Jeanne Person

A Collect

Gracious God, like a mother hen you shelter us under your wings: Bring your truth and love into homes where domestic violence has shattered the peace. Provide sustenance for the victims and accountability for the abusers. Send wise and courageous friends who can offer alternatives, and bring your healing power into broken relationships. May your church provide a haven of safety and peace for the abused and reach out to support all who serve the needs of the abused in our communities; Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

From **Breaking the Silence: The Church responds to Domestic Violence**

By **Anne O. Weatherholt (Morehouse Publishing: 2008)**

A Collect

O God, by your Holy Spirit you anointed Jesus Christ to open the eyes of the blind and give voice to those who are silent: Inspire us, by the power of that same Spirit, to see and recognize gender violence in its myriad forms, and to speak boldly and work effectively for its eradication, that, in your reign at hand, all women and men, and girls and boys, may blossom abundantly and rejoice to see your glory; in Jesus' name, Amen.

by The Rev. Canon K. Jeanne Person

ABOUT THE TASK FORCE



REV. PAUL FEUERSTEIN

The Domestic Violence Task of the Episcopal Diocese of New York started its work in the fall of 2013. The name changed to the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Task Force in early 2019. The mission is to raise the importance of addressing gender violence in the parishes of our diocese, whether domestic violence or sexual assault and equip clergy and lay leadership to be first responders if a victim asks for help. **Our vision is that all congregations will become safe havens for individuals who have been victimized, where victims can receive the support they need to escape violence and begin their healing journey.**



REV. DR. VICTORIA JEANNE ROLLINS

The Task Force raises the consciousness of the clergy and laity of the diocese through presentations, trainings, and the distribution of laminated signs to be posted in the bathrooms of every parish in the diocese. Also, the Task Force organizes webinars in April for Sexual Assault Awareness Month, October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month and November/December during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. Presenters from other parts of the U.S. and other countries have joined us to offer their expertise to the diocese and the wider community.



CHRISTINA DHANUJA

Our events are featured in the calendar of events of NYC's Commission on Gender Equity and the Mayor's Office to End Gender Based Violence. As the only faith-based organization listed on the calendar, we get mentions in the annual report of the Commission on Gender Equity. As a valued partner of the City, the Task Force was invited to participate in the planning of this year's New York City Denim Day, events organized in the five boroughs to promote awareness around the issue of sexual assault.



YVONNE O'NEAL

Our November 30, 2023, webinar, GBV Spotlight: The Race to End Child Marriage by 2030, is co-sponsored with Episcopal Relief and Development. The conversation is led by Ms. Fraidy Reiss, Founder/Executive Director, Unchained at Last. She will be joined by Mr. Ernest Cajuste, Senior Program Officer, Trauma & Resilience, Episcopal Relief & Development; Mr. José-Roberto Luna, Technical Specialist Adolescents and Youth, Child Marriage, UNFPA; Dr. Lopita Nath, Professor and Department Chair, University of the Incarnate Word; and Ms. Navya Shah, Advocacy and Resettlement Fellow, Too Young to Wed.



CRAIG RIJKAARD

The Task Force has a treasure trove of informational resources on the [Diocesan website](#). For further information contact the Episcopal Diocesan Mission Office 212-316-7484 and the Co-Chairs The Rev. Paul Feuerstein at paulbfeuerstein@gmail.com and The Rev. Dr. Victoria Jeanne Rollins at domagetouslemonde@yahoo.com.



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