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Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church  
Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission



## **CONTENT SUMMARY**

# **WORKSHOPS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITH ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX *TĀWAHĒDO* CHURCH (EOTC) CLERGY**

**Workshops organised by project didi/ድልድል**

**with the support of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church –  
Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (EOC-  
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## Background

The workshops held with EOTC clergy in North Shoa Zone of Ethiopia have aimed to help the clergy develop a better understanding of: a) forms of conjugal abuse that might occur in the countryside; b) help-seeking attitudes of the predominantly female victims; c) material, socio-cultural and psychological explanatory parameters of conjugal abuse, as well as; d) community attitudes towards it as informed by the existing scholarship and detailed anthropological research conducted in Northern Ethiopia in previous years.

By completing the workshop, the clergy participants were anticipated to have a better understanding of:

- a) how their own teachings and pastoral advice can combine with socio-cultural norms to maintain, indirectly, some rigid gender norms or perceptions about marriage that are unhelpful or can be associated with some forms of conjugal conflict and abuse.
- b) theological teachings on marriage to teach the laity in ways that can reverse or discontinue some of the underlying harmful associations.
- c) Increased sensitivity of victim and perpetrator psychology to support either group appropriately and to mediate conjugal conflict without endangering the victim or other vulnerable parties.
- d) existing efforts to develop referral systems in the country and how they can be integrated in these efforts to be able to support victims and perpetrators most effectively.
- e) safeguarding protocols in domestic violence services provision developed with reference to standard international practice and the advice and knowledge of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA).

The current booklet summarises the main content of the workshop presentations with the aim of providing a useful and permanent resource for participants that they can take away to reuse after completing the workshop. The booklet is also targeted at clergy around the country more widely who have access to the online resource. The booklet is structured according to the topics and themes covered during the workshop, however, for the sake of brevity, discussion questions and group activities are omitted, while many topics are considerably simplified or abbreviated. Clergy using this booklet are advised to use their discretion and to contextualise appropriately the content they choose to use when providing spiritual support or teaching in their communities.



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## Component 1: Understanding the lived experiences of domestic violence in the countryside and the role of the clergy in the continuation and deterrence of the problem

This component included presentations and discussion on marriage problems and the types of conjugal abuse encountered in a rural Ethiopian society. This was based on research in the countryside of Aksum in Northern Ethiopia. The presentations examined understandings of domestic violence, community attitudes and how clergy taught about marriage. They also discussed the pastoral approaches of the clergy in supporting people with marital problems and spousal abuse and explored the strengths and the weaknesses of these responses.

The research findings from Aksum should not be generalised as every society in Ethiopia will experience domestic violence in slightly different ways. In the workshop participants are asked to share their own experiences with domestic violence in their communities. However, the types of understandings, attitudes and practices of both laity and clergy that were documented ethnographically in Aksum can be encountered across Ethiopia and can help to increase awareness of the problem, how it manifests and how it is sustained via the discourses and practices of the clergy, as well as what the clergy can do to reverse some pernicious trends.

### Understandings of domestic violence

- Conjugal conflict, arguments or disagreement due to men getting drunk, going to other women, or refusing to provide as breadwinners. This could escalate in physical assault by husbands against wives.
- Gender asymmetries, such as an unfair division of labour between wives and husbands and the persistence of early marriage for girls.
- Abandonment of wives by husbands, especially when this was accompanied by men's failure to provide child support in the aftermath.
- Sexual coercion in marriage was not generally talked about since the expectation was for the wife to sleep with her husband at all reasonable times (except for when husband coerced wife to sleep with him despite him having STDs).

### Conjugal abuse explanations and causes

- The blame for most conjugal abuse was unanimously attributed to men's troublesome behaviour, although women were considered partially responsible if they acted confrontational during arguments.
- Depending on the type of abuse, this could be attributed to personal character (*bahri*), relationship issues, and a 'past'/'old' unegalitarian mentality persisting among a segment of men and women in society.



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- Some women's abusiveness towards husbands was associated with 'modernity' and women's demands for more equality.
- Some women were considered 'difficult' or 'hard' women, which was associated with some cases of female-to-male abuse.

### **A combination of positive and negative aspects and practices**

- In general, the laity agreed that violence in marriage was unacceptable by both cultural and religious standards (*bahəl* and *haymanot*).
- There were strong religio-cultural standards of morality and values in the local society that condemned the use of violence in the relationship, emphasised mutual help, respect and righteousness, neighbourly interference to stop conflict and abuse and societal/church-related sanctions for perpetrators in the form of general criticism and shaming.
- But also, the society was governed by norms and expectations around the conjugal relationship that could be more harmful, such as the expectation for the husband to act as breadwinner and for the wife to be in charge of the household, or for the wife to respond to her husband's sexual needs at all reasonable times along with the expectation that the wife should always be 'timid'/non-confrontational.
- An institutionalised 'tolerance' of the problem was seen in the failure of police and social courts officers (who were predominantly male) to follow up with reported cases of conjugal abuse.
- There was widespread endurance and secretiveness when women dealt with an abusive partner.

### **The role of faith in marriage**

- Faith for women mostly served as a coping mechanism and not as a source for justifying intimate partner abuse, which the faith teaches against. However, it is also possible that some women hesitated to take formal action against their abusive husbands because of their faith and feeling compelled to forgive.
- Men were believed to be less spiritual, but male testimonies suggested that some men's faith-based conscience could serve as a buffer against pernicious behaviour, such as against committing adultery or abandoning their wives. Such men seemed to act under the influence of widely upheld standards of morality enforced through the clergy's public discourse condemning 'sin' and praising 'righteousness.'

### **Local beliefs about *bahri* that contributed to the problem**

- In general, people traced abusiveness to individual personality (*bahri*) and other personality-related causes, and did not think that the society's wider socio-cultural norms or standards were at fault. This resulted in a more subtle 'tolerance' of the problem, even if everyone affirmed that conjugal abuse is condemned within both their 'faith' and 'culture.'
- Gender standards that expected women/wives to be non-confrontational and the belief that men were generally less spiritual (and, hence, more vulnerable to evil social or spiritual



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influences) could be resulting in endurance on behalf of women with abusive husbands and some acceptance of men's misbehaviour at the level of the wider society.

### **The role of the clergy in the local society**

- Laypeople were aware of shortfalls in some priests' married lives, but they valued the clergy's discourses and generally considered that the priests taught the Word of God.
- The clergy typically served as mediators of conjugal problems and acted as the primary point of reference for religious matters among the laity.
- Most rural priests opposed pernicious culture-condoned practices. Simultaneously, some could be reinforcing socio-cultural norms by stressing the Old Testament elements of the religious tradition and neglecting New Testament theology, in line with the folklore culture of the people.
- This pattern became especially clear in the relationship between the gender-based division of labour that was strictly adhered to by the lay society and the Church's understanding of gender duality based in the Book of Genesis.
- It also became evident in the role that clergy played in maintaining cultural forms of the religious gathering, which included the problematic practice of consuming traditional beer.

### **The clergy's mediation practices in marriage**

- In mediating marital problems, many priests proactively asked the woman if she was experiencing abuse. Many clergy also tried to stop the pernicious behaviour and to correct the situation whenever they were called to mediate, which could have unexpected consequences (addressed in the third part of this booklet).
- If perpetrators refused to change, priests did not generally insist due to a theology respecting human free will and they rather let the men go.
- While priests emphasised the preservation of life-long marriage, they also taught that marriage had to be a peaceful affair and did not generally oppose divorce when the situation was irreversible and harmful to the woman.
- However, the emphasis that priests placed on peace in marriage and their advice to women to endure difficult situations in marriage (although not physically abusive husbands), could add to the socio-cultural and material pressures that women felt to stay within problematic marriages.
- In many cases priests had to judge how to respond to a situation on the basis of the account told by the spouses. It is not unlikely that some could empathise with men's side of the story given that they themselves were husbands and might have experienced frustrations in their own marriages.



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## Key messages

- In many cases religious practice and theology can and do strengthen egalitarian gender relations and healthy marriages.
- However, by remaining grounded in a rigidly upheld folklore 'culture' that has neglected New Testament theology and has been uncritical about what is tradition and what is in fact innovation, clergy and laity alike may have contributed to the preservation of pernicious folklore norms.
- An Orthodox Apostolic theology of marriage (e.g. as informed by St John Chrysostom's homilies presented here) if articulated with sensitivity to culture-specific gender expectations could counteract 'traditional' mentalities associated with the continuation of a gender-based division of labour or marital standards and expectations facilitating sexual coerciveness.
- People's attribution of abusiveness to the 'natural' personality of the perpetrator (*bahrī*), and the belief that lay people were sinful with limited prospects for sainthood suggest the need for the Church to teach the people about achieving 'likeness with God' and the possibility of improving themselves through God and overcoming sinful and problematic behaviours.



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Component 2: Theological training on Ethiopian Orthodox *Tawahado* Church teachings on marriage, divorce and domestic violence and St John Chrysostom's homilies about the same

This component presented on EOTC teachings on gender issues, marriage and domestic violence with reference to established canonical books and based on consultations with theologians in the EOTC. It also presented the teachings of St John Chrysostom on the same, highlighting important passages that clergy could employ to advise their spiritual children.

### Understanding the historical development of the Orthodox faith

- Orthodoxy has ancient roots and its fundamental dogmatic premises were established and explained over time by apostolic articulation and decision, the Ecumenical Councils of the Church and the teachings of Church Fathers and Church Mothers.
- Despite its unchanging dogmatic premises, the Church has always adapted to new conditions and new societies, which ultimately allowed the faith to spread from the Jews to the Greeks and the Ethiopians. The Apostles themselves adapted strict rules followed in the Jewish community (e.g. circumcision of boys) in order to accommodate non-Jews to enter the faith.
- Moreover, in historically Orthodox societies, the faith developed under the influence of different belief systems, political events and environmental conditions that determined, and at times, impeded the full communication and embodiment of theological teachings by clergy and laity (e.g. during the Soviet times in Russia when faith was persecuted or in the sixteenth century in Ethiopia during the invasions of Ahmed Gragn or more recently during the Derg regime).
- Thus, Orthodox clergy and laity should recognise that the faith tradition, as articulated and lived by each national Church, has not been immutable to influences outside the Church. Some of these changes may have altered or even distorted in some ways the people's understanding of what the Orthodox faith truly is and how it should be lived.

### The meaning of the Orthodox faith

- In recent years both members of the clergy and laity have been preoccupied with preserving the 'right' or 'correct' faith, which may distract them from actually living the faith in their own lives.
- The faith is the correct ('orthodox') faith as long as it is lived and embodied with the same Orthodox *phronema* (thinking; perspective; discernment) of the Apostles and the saints. The aim of the clergy is not to preserve the faith (this is God's responsibility), but to cultivate the Orthodox *phronema* in their own lives and to guide the believers in developing the same way



of thinking and living in order to improve and complete themselves as loving human beings in God as a means to achieving salvation.

- This same message needs to be emphasised within marriage. The duty of the clergy is not to tell men and women to come to church and fast only, but to help them understand the aim of marriage and how to live it in a most fulfilling way. The aim of marriage is to achieve holiness in 'oneness' and to cultivate mutual humility, self-awareness and love by understanding and accepting one's spouse.

## **EOTC teachings on Man-Woman Relations**

The Church has accepted and taught equality between men and women. In the *Book of Genesis* (አሪት ዘፍጥረት) the biblical phrase “male and female he made them” includes the following explanation: “Man and woman He created them. (Explanation) At this time Eve had not yet been created, it was later that (he) said that he (Adam) knew her. Another one says thus, that she is in Adam’s nature/make.” In Genesis the pronoun ‘them’ was used again: “He commanded them, saying, ‘Govern the fishes and also the wild animals of the earth” and “He commanded them, saying, ‘Govern the birds of heaven, and the tame animals, and all that go to and from in this world.”

## **EOTC baptismal differences and their theological justification**

The Church has preserved certain practices where gender differences exist, such as in the baptismal practice whereby girls are baptised 40 days later than boys. EOTC theologians have explained that this difference reflects the Old Testament heritage of the Church (Leviticus 12:1) that has been preserved to-date and does not intend to discriminate against females. According to this explanation, Adam was created prior to Eve and Eve came from Adam, therefore, male infants are baptised at 40 days, while female infants are baptised at 80 days.

## **EOTC teachings on the Holy Matrimony**

Marriage is recognised as one of the Seven Sacraments in the Church and must be sanctified in church to be holy, accompanied by the Holy Communion.

Non-virgins and those who marry a second time are also able to marry in the Church. These marriages have a penitential character and are allowed as Providence of God. According to this process, the couple must first undergo confession in communication with their spiritual father and must be taught the Orthodox *Tāwahədo* laws on marriage. After confessing their sins, the couple may need to commit to fasting for an amount of time, alms-giving or other works. Then, on another day, they can go into the church to take Holy Communion together which will seal their marriage.



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The prayers said in this case differ and there should be no crowning. According to *Fetha Nägästä*, this is the prayer of absolution known as *Fethät Zäwäld* (ፍትሐት ዘወልድ). (The *Fetha Nägästä*, 143).

### **EOTC teaching on the age of marriage**

In the *Book of Marriage* (መጽሐፍ ተክሊል), the Church stipulates: “[A] virgin (girl) from 15 years and above; a virgin (boy) from 18 and above,” with virginity being an ideal to be met by both. (መጽሐፍ ክርስቲያናዊ መጽሐፍ ተክሊል: መጽሐፍ ቀንዲል, 75). In the *Book of Marriage* (መጽሐፍ ተክሊል), the Church stipulates: “[A] virgin (girl) from 15 years and above; a virgin (boy) from 18 and above,” with virginity being an ideal to be met by both. (Anonymous, መጽሐፍ ክርስቲያናዊ መጽሐፍ ተክሊል: መጽሐፍ ቀንዲል, 75).

However, according to the commentary tradition of the EOTC attributed to Church Fathers, it is explained that Adam was 30 when he was created and Eve was 15. Adam and Eve only consummated their marriage after the fall from heaven, which is calculated as 7 years later in this tradition. Thus, Adam was 37 and Eve was 22 when they first consummated their marriage. Moreover, the government of Ethiopia considers the conventional marriage age of 15 for girls to be illegal and stipulates as minimum marriage age 18 years of age.

Priests should not condone early marriages, whether in the church or in the culture. When priests attend the *qal kidan* ceremony in the homes of believers involving under-age girls, they in fact support the practice even if they do not have an active role in the ceremony. Clergy should not attend such ceremonies and should advise against under-age marriages.

### **EOTC teachings on the aims of marriage**

Traditionally the aims of marriage have been defined in the Church as: (1) Preservation and growth of mankind; (2) Mutual help between husband and wife; and (3) that marriage might help to keep man and woman from the temptation of carnal lusts.

However, St John Chrysostom has explained that the aim of marriage evolved from the Old Testament emphasis on procreation to the New Testament aim of achieving holiness as a couple by avoiding sinful behaviour and growing spiritually through each other. This understanding has not been fully embedded in the EOTC tradition historically and needs to be emphasised more in public teaching.



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## **EOTC teachings on ‘Oneness’ in marriage**

In marriage, husband and wife become one, with the husband serving as the head and the wife as the body of their common soma. But what does this really mean? It means interdependence – the one cannot exist without the other.

## **EOTC teachings on gender roles and division of labour**

A strict gender-based division of labour is not condoned by the Church because it is understood that marriage needs to be a reciprocal union where spouses care for each other and share the tiredness of everyday life.

## **EOTC teachings on male headship**

The teaching of the Church may grant the husband the headship, but this is conditioned on his willingness to love unconditionally and even to sacrifice himself for his wife just as Christ loved and sacrificed for the Church. Male headship is predicated on the husband’s responsibility for the wife’s welfare.

*Fætha Nægast* cites St Paul’s teaching that husbands “owe” love to their wives, and wives owe “obedience” to their husbands. *Fætha Nægast* also cites the admonition of St Peter in Didascalia: “O men, servants of God, every man among you shall bear the weight of his woman. He must not be haughty, not deceitful, but shall be merciful and upright, one who hastens to do that which pleases his wife.” (*The Fætha Nægäst*, 80).

## **EOTC teachings on domestic violence**

The Church’s central teaching is that marriage should be a peaceful cohabitation between spouses.

According to *Fætha Nægast*, one of the reasons to end a marriage is where a spouse suffers damage, due to quarrelling. This is on the premise that the third end of marriage, mutual help, is not fulfilled. It is said: “[If there is] damage to the life of one of the couple by the other, and their quarrel results in bitter violence involving enmity [the marriage is dissolved].” In the same section it is also mentioned that adultery is prohibited “lest the killing of one of the partners or indeed of the seducer be occasioned by jealousy, or lest the killing of the one who devises the marriage of one of the adulterers happen.” (*The Fætha Nægäst*, 149).



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## EOTC teachings on sexual relations

Being ‘one in one body’ does not mean that the husband or wife can coerce their spouse into having sexual relations with them. The Church teaches that husbands should consider themselves the servants of their wives, as a counterbalance to male authority in marriage.

Coerced sex cannot be entertained as Christian behaviour. The faith holds that each individual is free and should make their own choices. Any coercion is un-Christian and a violation of the individuality of the human being made ‘in the image and likeness’ of God.

## THE TEACHINGS ON ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON GENDER RELATIONS, MARRIAGE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### - On man and woman being created alike

Chrysostom exerted important energy to establish that the woman was made of “like fashion” and “like honour” to the man. (*On Genesis, Homily 3*).

He explained that man and woman had been originally one. In his commentaries on the Ephesians he mentioned how content Adam was when he realised that he had a partner similar in all ways to him, exclaiming upon beholding her: “This now is bone of my bones” and “flesh of my flesh!” (*On the Epistle to the Ephesians, Homily 20*).

Chrysostom explained the woman’s fashioning from man was God’s Providence to ensure that under no circumstances would man look down on woman as alien to him. (*On the Epistle to the Ephesians, Homily 20*).

### - On the aim of marriage

Chrysostom explained that after the Fall, there was a necessity for humanity to secure the reproduction of their species and fulfil the divine plan for salvation so emphasis was placed on procreation as the aim of marriage (*On Virginity*).

However, the more fundamental objective of the marriage bond that God had apprehended was to alleviate humanity’s harmful desires that served as obstacles to overcoming sin in the fallen state. (*On Virginity*).

Chrysostom enforced this point by referring to the example of Abraham and Sara who had lived most of their married life childless. He observed that Abraham’s marriage to Sara had not secured him the child he had earnestly hoped for. (*On Virginity*). He observed that had God’s aim been procreation alone, He would have not needed to provide the mystery of marriage.



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## - On marriage as another way to salvation

Within Orthodox tradition, following the fall, salvation can be achieved either by living a virginal, ascetic life or by marrying. Both these pathways are equally honourable and have been protected by the Orthodox Church vehemently against multiple historical heresies.

Marriage should be understood as a mystery intended to assist men and women to overcome sin and to achieve holiness in oneness. Marriage, as a monogamous bond, can safeguard against fornication and prostitution, which are temptations that can impede the process to achieving likeness with God and a saintly life on earth.

It is important to recognise the spiritual and soteriological aims of marriage and to teach the laity about these. The majority in the countryside and cities believe that marriage is a social contract to live together, share one bed and share the work with the sole aim of having children.

## - Against family interference

Chrysostom spoke about the union of man and woman in the context of the Orthodox marriage as a mystery and explained that it was “a bond” that had been “ordained by God.” (*On the Epistle to the Colossians, Homily 12*).

Man is asked to leave his father and mother, who bore him and raised him in order to attach himself to a stranger, his wife, which evidences the depth of the mystery of marriage. (*On the Epistle to the Ephesians, Homily 20*).

According to Chrysostom, after the union wife and husband are not two people, but one person as the first-fashioned human. (*On the Epistle to the Colossians, Homily 12*).

## - What ‘to submit’ really means

Chrysostom discussed the conjugal duties in detail and explained clearly St Paul’s command: “Women submit to your own husbands, as if to the Lord, for the man is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the Church, and He is Himself the Saviour of the Body.” (*On the Epistle to the Ephesians, Homily 20*).

Regarding this verse, Chrysostom explained that the wife was asked to show to her husband the type of sacred fear and reverence that the Church is expected to show to Christ who is Her Head. By the Orthodox *phronema*, this ‘fear’ is understood not as worldly fear but as ‘piety’ in the heart of the wife for her husband. (*as explained by Saint Nektarios, Metropolitan of Pentapolis*).

## - What male headship really means

The duty of the husband was described by Chrysostom as follows:

“But now listen to what else he requires from you; he has not finished with his example. ‘Husbands’, he says, ‘love your wives, as Christ loved the Church.’ You have seen the amount of obedience necessary; now hear about the amount of love necessary. Do you want your wife to



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be obedient to you, as the Church is to Christ? Then be responsible for the same providential care of her, as Christ is for the Church. And even if it becomes necessary for you to give your life for her, yes, and even to endure and undergo suffering of any kind, do not refuse. Even though you undergo all this, you will never have done anything equal to what Christ has done.” (*On the Epistle to the Corinthians, Homily 18*).

In other words, the headship conferred to the husband in marriage cannot be fulfilled unless it is based on the husband’s loving and benign (gentle and kind) behaviour with his wife. Chrysostom explained that the husband represented the head and the wife the body of their common soma and emphatically warned his audiences that “if the head scorns the body, it will perish with it.” (*On the Epistle to the Ephesians, Homily 20*).

#### - **On spousal abuse**

Chrysostom was adamantly against abusive behaviour by either spouse toward the other. For example, Chrysostom warned wives against insulting or criticising their husbands because of poverty. On the other hand, he instructed husbands not be tempted to earn their wife’s obedience “by fear and menaces, but with love and good temper.” (*On the Epistle to the Ephesians, Homily 20*).

This was emphasised in the following excerpts from homily 20 to the Ephesians:

“But nor should the husband who hears these, because he has authority, to resort to insulting and hurting, but to encourage her to the good, to advise and counsel her, and because she is less perfect than he to try to convince her with thoughts, never [should he] raise hands [on her]. All these should be far from a free soul; [he should use] neither hubris, neither insults, neither shame, neither ridicule, but because she is more frivolous [he should] direct her.”

“As for her that shares his life, the mother of his children, the source of his every joy, she should not be ‘tied down’ with fear and threats, but rather with love and cheerful disposition. For what kind of conjugal union can there be when the woman is afraid of the man? What kind of pleasure can that man enjoy, when living with the woman as if she were a slave, and not as a free individual? And even if you do suffer something for her sake, do not reprehend her, for neither did Christ do this.”

“Because she is your own body; because if you do this, you disgrace yourself in dishonouring your own body” and “no man ever hated his own flesh.”

#### - **When separation is advised**

Chrysostom was clearly concerned not to encourage divorce, which would violate God’s divine bond that brought the two-haves into one. Nonetheless, he allowed that in cases where conjugal co-existence resulted in constant enmity, spouses could live separately. Ideally, they should not remarry so as to allow room for future reconciliation, in the case that the problematic spouse changes their behaviour and starts living by the Orthodox *phronema*.



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“Now what is that which to the married the Lord commanded? That the wife depart not from her husband; but if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled unto her husband. Here, seeing that both on the score of continence and other pretexts, and because of meanness of the spirit separations took place: it were better, he says, that such things should not be at all; but if they take place, let the wife remain with her husband, if not to cohabit with him, yet so as not to introduce any other to be her husband.” (*On the Epistle to the Corinthians, Homily 19*).

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEACHER: LEARNING FROM ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

- a) Understanding Orthodox marriage and how to teach about it
- b) Listening attentively and responding sensitively
- c) Being a good example in one's own marriages
- d) Understanding one's own limitations and working with others

### a) Understanding Orthodox marriage and how to teach about it

- Clergy must have an informed understanding of the Orthodox perspective on marriage and conjugal cohabitation to be able to teach others and to guide them in living marriage the Orthodox way.
- They need to be able to provide clear explanations and to present the theology of marriage in detail and with confidence to the laity.
- They need to teach the word of God more often in public sermons and in private to couples in order to address existing misconceptions about the aims of marriage and to help married couples to transform their lives in oneness.
- They need to understand how to adapt to the times, engage with new questions about relationships and adapt the theology of marriage to new conditions by being guided by prayer and an Orthodox *phronema*.

### b) Listening attentively and responding sensitively

- Clergy must listen attentively to the spiritual children and try to understand their questions, concerns and needs with sensitivity. When counselling on marriage-related issues (where domestic abuse is not likely to be a problem) they should first speak to intimate partners and married couples separately and then together only if both parties are comfortable. They must hear both sides of their stories with fairness.
- They need to avoid becoming judgemental, but should help them to understand how they can live their marriage in an Orthodox manner for the fulfilment of both spouses.
- They should not merely instruct people how to do things, but they should create trust with their spiritual children and encourage them to share their thoughts and concerns openly.
- They must provide advice in a considerate manner and avoid intervening in couple affairs in a way that creates risks or problems for couples, especially victims of conjugal abuse (to be discussed in detail in the third part of this booklet).



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### **c) Being a good example in their own married lives**

- Clergy should prioritise their own spiritual growth as individuals and as husbands. If they live marriage in the Orthodox way, they can inspire the laity to follow their example.
- Moreover, it is important to recognise their own limitations as individuals and as husbands, which can help them to understand better the challenges and temptations of the laity.
- However, priests should be careful not to favour men due to the fact of their gender alone. There is no difference on the basis of gender in Christ and clergy must be conscious of gender-related bias when mediating marriage-related issues.

### **d) Understanding their limitations and working with others**

- Clergy must recognise that they are servants of God and that they cannot solve other people's problems on their own. God is the only force creating change within human beings. Priests should always be guided by prayer when advising spiritual children.
- They need to recognise that addressing marital problems and abusiveness might require the mediation of other trained individuals, such as social workers, psychologists and others (discussed in the third section of this booklet).



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### Component 3: Safeguarding training to support domestic violence victims and perpetrators appropriately

This component provided clergy participants with a better understanding of the legal framework on domestic violence in Ethiopia and a picture of the available referral system for domestic violence victims in North Shoa Zone. The presentations also covered safeguarding risks and how clergy should respond to victims/survivors and perpetrators with sensitivity to their psychological states and risks of re-traumatisation or retaliation.

#### Legal framework on domestic violence in Ethiopia

The post-revolutionary Ethiopian state has taken active steps to institute women's rights and to criminalise IPV.

The first Civil Code was founded on profoundly Christian values, exemplified in the Canon book of the Church *Fəṭha Nägäşt*.

A Proclamation attached to the 1960 Civil Code led to the re-articulation of patriarchal family laws that had made the husband head and manager of the family.

The provision on headship was entirely omitted in the **Revised Family Law (2000)**, while the Management of the family was rearticulated under the principles of equality.

The provisions in the revised version are as follows: 1) “The spouses shall have equal rights in the management of the family” and

2) “The spouses shall in all cases, co-operate, to protect the security and interest of the family to bring up and ensure the good behaviour and education of the children in order to make them responsible citizens.”

The **Constitution of the country (1992)** includes regulations to redress “the historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia” through affirmative measures.

Article 35 is dedicated to the “Rights of Women” with the third provision stating that the “purpose of such measures shall be to provide special attention to women so as to enable them compete and participate on the basis of equality with men in political, social and economic life as well as in public and private institutions.

Article 35 of the Constitution refers to the state's obligation to protect women and to eliminate harmful customary practices and that “[l]aws, customs and practices that oppress or cause bodily or mental harm to women are prohibited.”

The **Criminal Code (2004)** includes in Book V dedicated to the individual and family a section on crimes that are committed through harmful practices. Article 564 reads: “The relevant provision of this Code (Arts. 555-560) shall apply to a person who, by doing violence to a marriage partner



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or a person cohabiting in an irregular union, causes grave or common injury to his/her physical or mental health.”

There is no explicit reference to sexual offences within the intimate relationship or marriage, although this seems to be implied in Article 625 against “Taking Advantage of the Distress or Dependence of a Woman.”

The Article reads: “Whoever, apart from the cases specified in the preceding Article, procures from a woman sexual intercourse or any other indecent act by taking advantage of her material or mental distress or of the authority he exercises over her by virtue of his position, function or capacity as protector, teacher, master or employer, or by virtue of any other like relationship, is punishable, upon complaint, with simple imprisonment.”

Ethiopia also ascribes to international conventions for the promotion of women’s rights, such as:

- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- Maputo protocol: The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW)
- Beijing Platform for Action, which commits to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in the country

**Domestic violence referral services to be aware of**

- Police stations at kebele, woreda and zonal level
- Association for Women’s Sanctuary and Development (AWSAD)

The Dessie Branch offers a safe house for woman and girls from the Amhara region. Its services include provision of quality and holistic care and support services, capacity building, economic empowerment and reintegration activities.

- Health Bureaus at kebele, woreda and zonal level
- Women and Child Affairs Bureaus at kebele, woreda and zonal level
- NGOs and other institutions working in the sector

Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA): represented by its committee members consisted of women police officers, public prosecutors and other prominent government offices, which can assist in giving free legal advice to women. The service includes appointing lawyers pro-bono to women victims of any type of violence or legal matters (civil or criminal).

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- Debre Birhan University Law department: offers legal aid service solely or in collaboration with other offices and organisations



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- የሴቶች ቡና ጠጠር ፕሮግራም (Women's Coffee Drinking Programme): a community-based women gathering programme where women can discuss any issues, achieve new learning and share experiences

## **How to support domestic violence victims and perpetrators with an understanding of safety risks for victims and safeguarding protocols**

Studies from industrialised societies, which have organised, nation-wide referral systems, hold that the clergy should not try to 'solve' the abusive behaviour when they encounter it, but should prioritise the safety of the victim and be prepared to refer the victim/perpetrator to the appropriate service provider. Specialists working to address domestic violence in religious communities advise that the clergy should be sensitive to the victim's situation and listen to their story with affirmation to avoid retraumatising or alienating the victim. Moreover, clergy should not try to 'reform' the perpetrator, which can lead the abusive party to become angry and to retaliate against their victimised partner or become abusive with the clergy themselves.

This is not always feasible for rural societies in Ethiopia, where institutions such as the police may not be very effective with addressing domestic violence and where shelters or women's lawyers associations to provide immediate support are not always available or within women's reach. Moreover, due to the central role that the clergy have played in married couples' lives as spiritual fathers (የነፍስ አባቶች), priests and monks advising spiritual children are often reached first and are asked to mediate conjugal conflict or other situations, which the clergy cannot refuse. Clergy have tended to mediate by interrogating both sides, trying to understand the problem and imposing sanctions to change the harmful behaviour of the perpetrator.

In such conditions, the clergy should try to discern the real situation in which the victim find themselves in and appraise the degree of risk for the victim. They should provide spiritual, material or other support with an understanding of the urgency of the situation and the psychological state of the victim and perpetrator to minimise potential risks for the victimised party.

## **Understanding the psychology of perpetrators**

- Male perpetrators (as the predominant perpetrator of domestic violence in the community, especially of physical violence), may be prone to become angry easily and may have challenges to self-regulate their emotions, including their anger. Perpetrators will also tend to be sensitive to what they perceive as judgemental language by their spouse or others.
- Engaging with perpetrators directly could trigger them to become violent with their partners or the third party trying to mediate either because they feel judged or threatened by the questions asked or as retaliation to the spouse for sharing her situation with someone else.
- Perpetrators tend to not consider themselves responsible for their abusiveness and they often minimise the problem when this is raised by a spouse or a third party.



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## Understanding the psychology of victims and survivors

- Victimized women (as the predominant victims in the community) will not always share their ordeal and if they contact a member of the clergy they may minimise the problem (e.g. not by describing it as intimate partner violence, but as her husband being 'difficult', 'hard' or 'argumentative').
- Victims of intimate partner violence may experience depression, high-levels of stress, and psychological symptoms, including posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, that need to be considered when one responds to their requests for help.

## How to mediate conjugal abuse situations

- When engaging with likely victims or perpetrators of domestic violence, these specific psychological states and tendencies need to be considered carefully.
- Clergy who act as spiritual fathers to couples affected by abuse or who are called to mediate should consider how to provide support without placing either the victim or the perpetrator under pressure that can increase the risk of them being abused or becoming abusive.
- Clergy should be cautious of victims' tendency to keep their ordeals a secret and perpetrators' tendency to not take responsibility for their abusiveness or to minimise it.

## Concrete steps to take when a victim reports intimate partner violence

- a) Speak to the victim sensitively to understand the level of risk she is in.
- b) Reassure her that regardless of the situation that led to an abusive behaviour, no abusive behaviour is acceptable within the faith and that it should not be tolerated.
- c) Ask the victim what she would like to do and if she invites your advice, provide her with a list of the available services listed in the previous slides. Caution the victim not to write this information down as it can be found by the perpetrator, angering them and putting the victim in risk of retaliation.
- d) Offer to accompany the victim to the police or health bureau or other services providers if they feel hesitant to seek help on their own. Ensure that being seen together does not betray that something is wrong and does not seem out of the ordinary.

## Concrete steps to approach a perpetrator

- a) Avoid confronting the perpetrator for their abuse, and ensure that you consult with the victim before taking any action. A victim knows best the level of risk they face and how a perpetrator might react to any situation.
- b) If the victim has asked you to mediate and there is no immediate risk of retaliation, you may speak to the perpetrator to understand their degree of awareness of the problem and their sense of accountability for their behaviour and to provide spiritual edification.
- c) If the abuse has already been revealed and the victim has taken action to address the violence, you may speak to the perpetrator to advise against the practice and steps for



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- reforming their behaviour if they show willingness (as is conventional practice by clergy currently).
- d) When you know that there are perpetrators in the congregation, ensure that you deliver regular sermons in church (without singling out the perpetrator) about the self-sacrificing attitude a husband should have with his wife, condemning abuse as un-Orthodox behaviour and encouraging husbands to avoid the 'sin' of violent behaviour and to be 'righteous' with their wives.

### **Key take-away message**

Clergy must recognise that they are servants of God and that they cannot solve other people's problems on their own. God is the only force creating change within human beings. Priests should always be guided by prayer and discernment when advising spiritual children.

Priests need to recognise that addressing marital problems and abusiveness might require the mediation of other trained individuals, such as social workers, psychologists and other professionals in the community and should seek to collaborate with these different stakeholders.