**SUGGESTED SERMON TOPICS
AND BIBLICAL READINGS**

*P****lease note:****If you do begin to address the issue of domestic violence from the pulpit, you will probably be approached by women in your congregation looking for counsel. It is imperative that you understand that a battering relationship can be life threatening and requires appropriate intervention and special attention to the safety of the victim. If you would like guidance or assistance in counseling victims, consult the enclosed information and referral sheet or call the Battered Women's Shelter at 733-8810.*

**Topic 1: Violence against Women and its Repercussions in the Community**

**Readings:**

2 Samuel 13: The story of Anmon's rape of Tamar and Absalom's later revenge killing of Anmon.

Judges 19: A concubine is raped and left for dead in the city of Gibeah; her master cuts her body into 12 pieces and scatters them throughout Israel.

These stories show how violence in the home had powerful repercussions in the larger community, in the story of Absalom, the rape of Tamar brought about a series of political crises, with decisive effects on the future of the nation. In the story of the concubine, all of Israel rose up against the city of Gibeah, burned the city to the ground and killed 25,000 of its inhabitants. In both cases, God condemns the violence against the woman.

**Topic 2: Suffering**

**Readings:**

1 Peter 4:12-19: Peter suggests that those who suffer will be saved.

Jeremiah 29:10-14: Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in which God says that he will care for them.

Psalm 55

Suffering is a theme that runs through the Bible and through the lives of battered women as well. Many battered women believe that they are suffering abuse because of some past sin they have committed, or because God wants them to suffer. Indeed, there are several biblical passages that suggest that suffering is good and will be rewarded in heaven. It is not God's will for women to be beaten; instead, it is their abusive husbands' will. God promises not to abandon believers in their moments of suffering. Escaping the abuse allows battered women to begin to discover God's gift of "a future and a hope".

**Topic 3: Love and Marriage**

**Readings:**

Ephesians 5:21-33: An exhortation for husbands and wives "be subject to one another" and for husbands to love their wives as their own bodies.

1 Corinthians 13: Speaks about love.

Many batterers use the Ephesians passage as justification for their abuse; they interpret the passage "let wives be subject in everything to their husbands" to mean that wives should obey husbands without question and submit to their violence. But of course, the reading goes on to instruct husbands on their role, which is to "love their wives as their own bodies." Pairing this reading with the passage used in many wedding ceremonies offers an opportunity to discuss the marriage sacrament, and the fact that abuse and violence are violations of that sacrament.

**Topic 4: Sin and Accountability**

**Readings:**

John 7:53-8:11: Double Standards

Ezekiel 18:21-32: The principle of individual responsibility

These two passages are ideal for exploring issues of sin and accountability. Batterers usually refuse to take responsibility for their actions; like the scribes and Pharisees who bring the woman to Jesus, they are outraged by her behavior, but silent on the subject of their own sins. In both passages God is quite clear that all must answer for their own sins. Ezekiel discusses the need for real and lasting behavioral change ("get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!") in order to be a part of the Reign of God.

The Peace Initiative