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where love comes to life NOVEMBER 2017

HIDDEN HURTS HEALING HEARTS

LCA campaigns to prevent
domestic and family violence

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GRAND OCCASION



Pastor Peter Ghalayini showed his true colours on AFL Grand Final day in Melbourne. Adorned with his Richmond scarf and armed with his copy of *The Lutheran*, Peter cheered his beloved Tigers home to their first premiership in 37 years with a win over the Adelaide Crows. Peter is pastor at Victoria's Ringwood-Knox Parish. His wife Sharon took the photo among more than 100,000 fans at the MCG.

Send us a photograph featuring a recent copy of *The Lutheran* and you might see it here on page 2 of a future issue.

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Enjoys gardening and travelling

Fav text: Philippians 4:8



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EDITOR'S *Letter*



Domestic and family violence is a big issue for our society – and, though we don't like to think so, it is a big issue for our church.

Of course, we'd like to believe it doesn't happen in any Christian homes and families. But then we'd be kidding ourselves. And we'd also be letting down people within our communities and congregations.

The statistics are shocking. In Australia one in six females aged 15 or older has experienced violence from a current or former partner. For males, it's one in 20.

On average, one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner. In New Zealand, police data reveals that in 2016 alone there were 118,910 family violence investigations. Merge that with the *New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey: 2014's* finding that 76 per cent of family violence incidents are not even reported, and you start to see a frightening picture emerge.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed, helpless and guilty in the face of such weighty numbers.

It is not surprising then that there are people within our church who have suffered or seen firsthand the trauma and tragedy of abuse. Two of them share their personal journeys in this edition in order to raise our collective awareness.

I have been blessed to never have experienced domestic violence, but have I missed the signs of the physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, spiritual, social or financial suffering of others close to me?

Indeed, we all may have failed the victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in our congregations, schools and aged-care facilities through ignorance or fear. We may also have failed those who use violence by not recognising what was going on or by looking the other way.

As 18th-century Irish orator, author, philosopher and politician Edmund Burke famously said, 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing'. Now we may not, of ourselves, be 'good' men and women, but we generally would have good intentions for the welfare of others.

So, while we need to seek the forgiveness of those we've let down, our church certainly does care. At the 2015 LCA General Convention, Synod authorised the General Church Council to commit resources to a church-wide campaign to address family violence 'among us'. The result, the Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts campaign, is being launched this month, and you can learn more inside this issue.

According to Campaign Coordinator Ian Rentsch, the ultimate prayer behind this campaign is that 'all forms of violence and abuse in and among families will cease'.

That may seem like a far-off dream, but if everyone of us does something, rather than nothing, we might get to see for ourselves that, with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

Lisa



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JESUS IS GOD'S LOVE.
HE GIVES US NEW HEARTS –
TO LAY ASIDE OUR OLD WAYS,
TO BELIEVE AND FOLLOW HIM,
TO LIVE WITH HIM EVERY DAY.

heartland

REV JOHN HENDERSON
Bishop Lutheran Church of Australia

HOPE IN HIM OUR SHINING LIGHT

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God (Romans 5:1,2 NRSV).

Since being installed as bishop in 2013 I have written 49 Heartland columns for *The Lutheran*, 38 Heartland eNews, and five pastoral letters to the church. When I looked through them recently I found that one of their constant themes is hope.

Hope is what keeps us going – knowing our future is in Jesus' care. That's what gets us up in the morning, sets us about our daily tasks, and helps us sleep peacefully at night. Such hope directs us to Sunday worship to receive the Word of Life. It leads us in compassionate living. It inspires us to pray and it cures us of all sorts of hypocrisies.

If we allow the world to rob us of hope, we become the most empty of people, living in fear, close to death, consumed by anxiety, waiting for the next catastrophe to overtake us.

But hope floods the world with light. In the dark of night colours disappear, shadows multiply and we can't see clearly. We are easily afraid, don't know where to go and frequently trip up. In the light of day we see clearly, imaginary dangers dissolve and we know which way to go.

Every month leaders of our national ministries have lunch together for mutual support and to catch up on what each is doing. Recently 13 of us were around

the fellowship table, and each gave a short summary of her or his work. I wish you could have been there to listen. The breadth of the LCA's ministries across Australia and New Zealand is astounding, but this represents only the tip of the iceberg. The work we do simply supports local ministry and mission. That's where most things happen.

What drives us to make such efforts? Why, when so many in our world live in fear of the future and some are even giving up on it, do we Christians continue to step forward so confidently? You, the people of the LCA, continue to be incredibly generous with your time, money and abilities. I am humbled to see the wealth of gifts of all kinds you are pouring into our districts, congregations, schools, aged and community care centres and ministries like Lutheran Media, which now has an audience of millions.

You don't have to look far to find the reason for such confident commitment.

As this issue of *The Lutheran* arrives you will be preparing for the coming of Christ through the end of the church year and the beginning of Advent (literally 'he comes'). When he comes in his glory, just as when he came as the baby Jesus, he will be our Immanuel, 'God with us'. Hope is ours because of God's eternal 'yes' in Jesus Christ. Who, then, can be against us? What can separate us from God's love? (Romans 8:31-39)

So let's never give up on hope. Christ our hope is light in a darkening world. He is the way. We know which way we are to go. It's the way home to him, our life and our salvation.

*Christ our
HOPE is
LIGHT in
a darkening
world.*



'GRANNY, I'M SCARED *to go home*'

Living with family or domestic violence can have a profound and traumatic effect on children – and some even bear the brunt of the abuse themselves. Jane and her husband Mal were shocked to discover that their grandchildren were being abused at home. She shares the heartache and feelings of helplessness they experienced and also her belief that God's love can bring hope for healing and a happier future.*

'I don't want to go home.'

Those words still haunt me today. I can still hear them as our two grandchildren went out the door of our 'safe' house to return home to a house of abuse.

Our daughter Sarah married an alcoholic. Michael, her husband and the children's father, was abusive particularly to our grandson. After 10 years of living dominated by physical abuse of both Sarah and the children, the marriage ended.

We were not aware how much trauma occurred during those years, as our daughter worked really hard at

projecting to us that everything was okay at home.

I remember one Christmas Eve service at our church. Our entire family always attended. This particular year they turned up and I thought the children looked rather scruffy and unkempt. Only later did I realise Sarah had been working and Michael was supposed to organise the children. It would have been so much easier for her to just say they were not coming, but they came only because of her determination and perseverance to keep up a normal life.

All this makes what happened in the following years so much harder to comprehend.



David moved in soon after Michael moved out. We were not aware of this until some months later. At this stage our grandson Jack was 8 years old and our granddaughter Sophie was 6. David attended all our family get-togethers and was accepted as part of the family. At no time did our grandchildren even hint to us that there was a problem and, of course, our daughter didn't suggest there was anything untoward going on.

Thinking back I realise that often when I rang Sarah our conversation had to be suspended because of crying and screaming in the background. That was when David attacked Jack and Sophie. Whenever Sarah had a shower or wasn't nearby, the 'hero' went for the children. They were warned not to say anything or worse would follow.

About two years after David moved in, we arranged to pick up the grandchildren from school each Wednesday. We helped them with homework and stayed until Sarah came home from work. This was when we realised something was wrong. Once David arrived home before Sarah, and Sophie, with a frightened look on her face, asked 'Could you please stay a while?'. On another occasion Jack asked the same thing.

It was a mind-numbing shock to find out what was really happening in that house. Jack was repeatedly hit and forced into his room. Most of the time it was when Sarah was not there. Jack would break down and cry. Sophie's way of coping was to keep out of David's way and not stick up for Jack who was constantly receiving all the abuse. They were such sad, unhappy little children.

My husband and I decided to discuss the situation with Sarah. We told her what the children had told us, how David was hitting them, how he had such a violent temper, used foul language, and how he loved to frighten them. We also told her we thought he had

mental health problems which needed checking by a doctor. It was the worst thing we could have done.

Sarah told David and the situation got much worse for Jack and Sophie. It became obvious then that for Sarah, David staying was the priority over the needs of the children. From then on, if we asked whether we should say something to their mother, they begged us not to. Such was the fear he generated in them.

We started having the children stay with us more often. Not only did they stay during all the holidays, they also came for 'respite care' at least three times during the term. They needed to get away from the home situation. At one stage things got so bad they came to us on Thursday after school and went back to their mother Monday after school. Each time they went

home the words 'I don't want to go home' echoed in my head and I just sat and cried, feeling so desperately sad and helpless.

Apparently, each time they stayed here, David would really go for them when they arrived home. He had never been married or had children of his own and he didn't want them or like them being around.

I took notes of what the children told us in case these were ever needed. Both Sarah and David used emotional blackmail to keep the children. Reading through my notes, I see they were told after

a particularly harrowing time that if David left they would end up in an orphanage, be separated and never see each other again, or that they would end up in the gutter with nowhere to live. We assured them they always have a home at our place, where they are loved and appreciated, listened to and respected.

Jack looks after his personal property and does not like his 'stuff' being damaged. At one stage he desperately wanted a Nintendo 3DS game console. David didn't want him to have it so, when it was new, he threw it across the floor. It was scratched and this upset Jack. He was told not to tell his mum what had happened. Another 'trick' of David's was to take a special toy of Jack's and hide it. Jack would spend hours looking for it and then, after months of searching, it would suddenly appear again.

David would say things to Jack and Sophie like 'tell anyone and I will rip your head off', 'I will rip out your throat' or 'if I had my way I would throw you under a bus'. David has an uncontrollable temper. He is mean, nasty, aggressive and violent. He has at times turned on our daughter, too – not physically yet, but he has certainly been verbally abusive. The children become so scared for their mother they ring us and we head to their house wondering what we will find when we get there.

*It was a mind-
numbing
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in that house.*





Generally Sarah is furious that the children have rung us and so, once again, the problems are all their fault. Unfortunately she is in total denial. It is so hard for us as her parents to try to understand what is going on in her head, let alone why she stays with David.

We contacted legal aid to get advice about taking the children away from the home situation. At the time they were 16 and 14 years old. Because of their age, we were told, we might be able to gain custody. It is quite obvious it is almost impossible as grandparents to obtain custody, as has been often reported.

All this heartbreak, tears, anxiety and desperation came to a head one day in 2015 when we received a call from the school counsellor asking us to come to the school as the grandchildren were too frightened to go home. We were asked whether we would take care of them. We picked up their clothes and over the next few days collected most of their personal property. Not once did their mother ring either the children or us. They were totally abandoned by her. They stayed with us for eight months. It was time of adjustment for us all, but much more relaxing, too. No longer did we have to worry about how they were being treated, whether they were safe, stressed or unhappy.

After some months our granddaughter missed her mother and decided it was time to return home. I'm not sure Jack felt the same way. Their mother didn't welcome them back straight away. David would not have wanted this and so it took a while before they left. I warned them David would not have changed and that he would still be nasty, mean and vicious. It didn't take too long for those words to become reality.

There are times when it is almost impossible to believe this has happened to our family. We are no longer a family unit. There is a divide which at this stage appears to be impossible to bridge. We make sure our grandchildren are involved in all family occasions and that they regularly see their cousins. It is important

that they still feel part of our family, even if their mother is no longer interested.

Abuse is not only physical either. Because the state department for child protection eventually became involved in our situation, David is now careful not to touch the children. But the abuse continues in more subtle ways. They are constantly harassed. He never leaves them alone and if he can't think of something current to annoy them about, he will dredge something up from months before. They are constantly reminded how little they mean to him and how he wants them out of his life. He demands total control. There is also the social abuse. He is not interested in going anywhere or doing anything for the children. So before the children were old enough to meet friends and go out themselves, they did nothing, except when we took them on holidays or to other various activities.

We still see them regularly and spend our time with them building them up. They are amazing young people, now 18 and 16. There is no sign of the anger, hatred, violence and lack of respect they have experienced for so much of their lives. We try to fill their lives with love and encouragement to always stay strong and not ever come to think that the home they grew up in is the norm.

We pray for their safety every day. We pray they will not be influenced by what they have experienced. We pray they will have happy, well-adjusted, sharing and caring lives. And, above all, we thank God for his guidance through this traumatic and stressful period of our lives.

** Names have been changed, however this story is a true account by a member of the LCA.*

Domestic and family violence support

Call 000 if you, a child or another person is in immediate danger.

1800RESPECT – family violence & sexual assault counselling 1800 737 732

Lifeline – crisis support for domestic abuse and family violence 131 114

See also the following pages for more ways to access support.



My wife was my abuser

Neil* was a victim of domestic and family violence and abuse perpetrated by his wife for many years. He felt embarrassed and at times when he reached out for help, he wasn't taken seriously because he was a man. He is grateful to God he now has a life without abuse and can focus on blessings rather than bitterness.

I went to my first domestic violence seminar. They showed a video, and I was shocked. My wife did worse things to me at home.

We went into small groups and we were supposed to share. So I tried to talk about what was happening to me. The group leader pointed her finger at me, and said, 'If you treated your wife right, she wouldn't have to hit you!'. It was as though, because I'm a man, my wife couldn't really hurt me – that domestic and family violence is only perpetrated by men. That was not my experience. I felt like I didn't exist.

Not long after that, my wife tried to stab me with a butcher's knife. I grabbed her wrist and squeezed until she dropped the knife. She held up her hand and said, 'I could go to a shelter, and tell them you are abusing me! You'll never see your children again'. I thought, 'She's right. No one at a shelter is going to ask if she is the violent one. If I want to protect our children, I am going to have to be very careful what I do'.

When I met Andrea, it was love at first sight. I knew she had pain in her life from broken family relationships, but I was committed to loving and protecting her.

We had our first big fight packing up after the wedding and, when we unpacked our things at our new house, Andrea got angry, said she hated me and stormed out.

I was stunned. We'd only just been married. A few days later, she threw plates at me, which broke against the wall.

I soon learnt to walk on eggshells. When I was very careful, Andrea didn't yell.

We started a family. Andrea enjoyed the attention she received while she was pregnant and she was happy taking care of the children while they were babies. Once they were no longer babies, she wanted another child. We had a large family.

Domestic and family violence FACTS

While there are more men like Neil in Australia and New Zealand, the official figures on women and children experiencing domestic and family violence are staggering.

- Over 12 months, on average, one woman is killed every week in Australia by a current or former partner.
- One in three women in Australia has experienced physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by someone known to them.
- In Australia, one in four children is exposed to domestic violence.
- Domestic and family violence is the principal cause of homelessness in Australia for women and their children.
- Domestic violence can include emotional abuse, physical assault, sexual assault, verbal abuse, financial abuse, psychological abuse, isolating a person from friends and family, or stopping a woman or man from practising their religion.



Source: www.whiteribbon.com.au

As the children grew up, they also felt the brunt of their mother's angry outbursts.

Andrea threatened to leave me repeatedly and sex was used as a bargaining chip to get what she wanted. She verbally abused me and criticised my every attempt to help around the house.

She controlled me physically, emotionally, socially and financially. She knew my old wounds and how to hurt me.

She demanded that we move house – even interstate – a number of times because she wasn't happy with either the house, the neighbourhood or the city.

We went to counselling and I tried many things to see whether we could restore the love and happiness to our relationship. But nothing worked – not romantic notes, special dinners, picnics, weekends away, nothing.

Andrea's boss changed her job description at work – which was stressful. She got angry and quit her job. I was worried we would lose the house.

One day she started hitting me and cursing me. She did not really hurt me physically, but I shook inwardly for days. I decided I would never let her hit me again, which was an important step in my journey. And she never did.

We went to a marriage renewal retreat and apologised to each other for hurts we had caused. But things didn't improve.

Andrea inherited a substantial sum of money, but instead of investing it in our future, it was soon spent. Our debt continued to build. She always wanted things we couldn't afford. But buying them didn't improve her happiness.

I was tired of walking on eggshells. I was tired of having to be vigilant to protect my children from their mother's tirades. I was tired of being in a relationship with no love.

It got to the point where if I had stayed with my wife, my children would refuse to see me. I was not willing to pay that price.

But when, after more than 30 years of marriage, my wife and I separated and ultimately divorced, I found I was attracted to other controlling women. I decided I needed to change, so I could get into a healthy relationship.

By God's grace I have remarried – to a woman who does not seek to control my every move. She looked at me like I was crazy when I asked permission to go to the toilet. I had a lot of unlearning to do!

I understand that I must take responsibility for being in an abusive relationship. I am not responsible for the negative things my ex-wife did, but I take responsibility

She controlled me
**PHYSICALLY,
EMOTIONALLY,
SOCIALY and
FINANCIALLY.**
*She knew my old
wounds and how to*
HURT ME.

for choosing an abusive partner and remaining in an abusive relationship.

This is one of the most important decisions a victim of domestic abuse can make, because if I am responsible for the choice and remaining, then I have the power to stop choosing and stop remaining.

I cannot change other people, but I can change me.

I recognise that I had been in other abusive relationships, with my parents, at school and at work.

I had to realise that, while I have many faults, I am a worthwhile person, loved and forgiven by God, and should be treated with respect like anyone else.

I refuse to hate my ex-wife. She is the mother of my children. But I will not defend her behaviour. However, I will encourage my children to visit their mother, in ways that are safe, and remind them they will make themselves sick if they choose to hate her.

I refuse to live in bitterness. I am often tempted to dwell on the past, but if I choose to live in bitterness, that pain will control the rest of my life.

Instead, I focus on my many blessings. One is that I know God promises everything works together for good to those who love him.

*** Names and other identifying details have been changed, however this story is a true account by a member of the LCA.**

One bite isn't enough, is it?

Here's
how to
get the
whole
apple.



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