

THE EMPTY CHAIR

*(Author: Ann Glensk 2010 amended 2011)
(Spirituality and Domestic Abuse August 2012)*

The aim of this drama is to assist faith communities to lay open the issue of domestic abuse (DA) to the grace and healing power of God and to give victims and survivors of abuse space to tell their story.

The drama will also raise awareness of the key issues of DA.

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|---------------------|--|
| Setting | A coffee table in a sitting room/faith community hall |
| Props | on stage: - 4 chairs set around a card table, teapot, mugs, newspapers, Marriage Liturgy, coloured silks and white ribbons |
| Participants | on stage 3 women (wearing white ribbons) + off 'stage' at microphone Woman / man reading from scripture/poetry |
| Audience | Given strips of cloth in rainbow colours – used at the end for laying silent prayers before God |
| NB | during the period when the noise of a key turning in a lock is heard ideally a woman and a man envelop the empty chair with the silks in the reverse order of a rainbow, signifying abuse. Later at the mention of positive aspects the silks will be removed and positioned by a woman and man creating a rainbow, signifying hope. |
| Part 2 | the sole prop is one empty chair |

PART 1

(Ann seated at table greets Esther)

Voice 1 Higood to see you. Hopefully **JUNE** and won't be too long

Voice 2 I'm looking forward to catching up with **JUNE**

Voice 1 Oh here comes

(..... arrives)

Voice 2 Hi Good to see you How are you?

Voice 3 Fine, thanks. Is **JUNE** coming?

Voice 2 I hope so, I haven't seen much of her lately, but I texted her on Monday and she said she was looking forward to meeting up with us

Voice 1 I texted her last night, but she didn't get back to me

Voice 3 I met June's Mum on Tuesday and she said she was glad we were all meeting up. She hasn't seen much of her lately. She's really worried about June and the children

PAUSE

THE SOUND OF A KEY TURNING IN A LOCK X 7 TIMES

WOMAN / MAN ENVELOP CHAIR WITH SILKS AFTER EACH SOUND

Voice 1 June saw the poster in the hall – she said she was going to speak to someone here

Voice 2 Oh I hope she does, things can't go on the way they are, but I don't know when she'll see anybody because she hardly ever comes now and anyway everyone seems to be so busy.

Voice 3 **She wants to come to worship, but she feels she can't. She says she feels dirty, unworthy, ashamed - she can't even pray.** Do you think anyone has noticed the change in her attendance? Tom's been here.

PAUSE

Voice 1 Thank goodness she was here **that day prayers were offered for families experiencing abuse. She said it was so good knowing that prayers were being offered for her and for others in the same situation.**

- Voice 2 How must she be feeling?
- Voice 3 I don't think any of us can begin to imagine what she is going through – she is a wreck – she cannot think straight – she is a shadow of herself – she is just not June.
- Voice 1 It really gets you when she says she is so sorry, so ashamed that this is happening – it's not her fault
- Voice 2 Absolutely, but she is sorry it is happening because of what this is doing to her and the children.
- Voice 3 I know it is so sad, but those prayers did bring some comfort to June and also reminded us all of the realities of life for many people,
The worship glorified God and honoured the experiences of God's people.
- Voice 2 All of us need to be reminded that abuse cuts across all areas of society and that having faith neither protects against being a victim or being a perpetrator of abuse. The stats tell us that women are the victims in 85% of cases, men 12% and same sex relationships 3%. About 1 in 5 women experience abuse in their lifetime.
- Voice 3 Mind you when you hear these it's important to remember that the abstract stats represent real people, like June who live with abuse 24/7 and on recovery are left with the legacy of abuse. Remember too on average women suffer abuse on 35 separate occasions before seeking help.

PAUSE

- Voice 1 I hope June does speak to someone here, but how can faith communities help?
- Voice 3 From what I've read the two crucial things when someone is disclosing such painful information is for them to be **LISTENED TO AND TO BE BELIEVED**
- Voice 2 Yes the person June confides in **must be willing to give some time to LISTEN to her and to BELIEVE her.**

PAUSE

- Voice 3 Listening and believing are crucial and the main thing the person has to **SAY** to June is that she and the children do

not deserve to be abused. **GOD** does not wish them to be abused

Voice 1 The person and all of us can pray for all who experience abuse, bringing them before God's grace and redeeming love

Voice from off stage –

***God of mercy, protect and enfold with your love,
those who have been abused in body mind or spirit;
especially where trust has been betrayed,
and the sanctity of home violated.***

***Hold each one as infinitely precious, and journey
With them as they face an uncertain future.***

***May they experience the love and care of others-
and the joy and peace of life within the circle of love
of the Holy Trinity.***

***Through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and your Beloved Son
Amen***

Voice 2 Women who are being abused have complex needs and therefore faith communities cannot work in isolation. **Safety of mother and children is the key issue when abuse is disclosed. A key role therefore of the person to whom the abuse is disclosed is to make the victims aware and give contact details of experts, such as Women's Aid.**

Voice 3 Do you think faith communities want anything to do with people who have been abused?

Voice 1 Abuse is a human rights issue and faith communities are strong on justice and human rights.
The gospel speaks of a God of love, mercy, compassion and justice and at the heart of the human value system is dignity.

Voice 2 Faith communities have a good record of supporting trade justice – fair trade churches and of protecting the environment-encouraging the use of sustainable energy

Voice 3 But what about social justice for individuals, like June and the children who are robbed of their dignity, self esteem and personhood as a result of domestic abuse?

PAUSE

Voice 2 The silence and the reluctance to engage is undeniable – there is a lot in the past and sadly even today evidence that

shames us all. However, there is hope with the Primates acknowledgement that domestic abuse is part of a global phenomenon and is *gender based*.. This has provided an opportunity for momentum to respond.

- Voice 1 Would it not require a huge commitment from faith communities?
- Voice 3 **That has been a major obstacle**, but it depends on how it is tackled. There are small steps that could be taken to indicate how our faith influences our thoughts on the issue.
- Voice 2 Such as?
- Voice 3 All premises could display notices indicating our faith’s condemnation of domestic abuse and display helpline numbers where women can access help.
- Voice 1 **There is also the request to develop liturgies for the 25TH NOVEMBER – THE UN INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN** – and the wearing of **WHITE RIBBONS – the campaign to end male violence to women. THE WEARERS PLEDGE NEVER TO COMMIT, CONDONE OR REMAIN SILENT ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN.**
- Voice 3 Faith communities could also strengthen their existing links with women’s refuges – offer a chaplaincy role
- Silk removed***
- Voice 2 Faith communities have the great exemplar of the ministry of Jesus who struggled against injustice and oppression
- Silk removed***
- Voice 3 That all sounds good, but as for June – you know how she feels about her marriage vows. She says that as marriage is a sacrament her faith will not allow her to break the bond
- Voice 1 It seems that a sacrament the visible form of an invisible grace has four elements – **(1) the sign** (visible and material element), **(2) the virtue** - the invisible grace conveyed by the sacrament, **(3) the words** spoken by the priest that link the sign and virtue and **(4) Jesus who is the word the agent of the sacrament.**
- Voice 2 I got my hands on the Marriage Liturgy. It reads ‘Marriage cannot exist on its own. God’s **call of husband and wife to**

live faithfully together, to love one another with respect, tenderness and delight is part of the call to love all people. This love empowers them to care for others [and to nurture children]. By this love human dignity will flourish and deepen (SEC Marriage Liturgy 2007:8).

Voice 3 It still won't be easy for June, but having this knowledge may help her to see that the sacrament is already broken. **Not only have June and the children been abused, so too has God's love.**

Voice 1 The other thing to remember in Jesus' ministry he did what needed to be done irrespective if it conformed to the rules of the time or not. He also noticed those in the background. He spoke to those others ignored or neglected. Following Jesus' example the faith community and all her friends can be there for June and the children and for all who are abused

Silk removed

Voice from off stage

Abusive relationships are abnormal situations. No one should be injured, no one should be demeaned, no one should suffer indignities, no one should be made to feel unworthy

Prayer

We pray for all those whose humanity is abused and exploited – victims of violence, trafficking, torture and rape, Children drawn into the world of prostitution, people addicted to drugs, those living under corrupt and oppressive regimes.

We pray for humankind

Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer

(Fawcett 2001:618)

Voice 2 It is important to remember that in **mutual relationships** people turn the other cheek and seek forgiveness for wrongdoing, **however, the very last thing June should be asked to do now is to forgive Tom.**

Voice 3 That is so important because **forgiveness can only happen once June and the children are safe and at the end of a long journey that involves compassion, accountability, reparation and vindication**

Voice 1 Asking someone to forgive before they are ready to do so has a damaging effect on them. **It adds to their trauma**

Silk removed

Voice 2 **June will need to be given time also to forgive herself.**

Voice1 **That will be the most challenging.**

PAUSE

Voice 3 **Psychologists tell us that for every single negative saying it takes approx seven positive ones to return a person to equilibrium**

Voice 2 It's difficult to imagine how long it will take June and the children to feel good about themselves; after all they have endured. Tatman (1998) reminds us that recovery is never complete, survivors are left with the legacy of abuse.- they end up feeling 'good enough'.

Voice 1 How ever long it takes them to feel good enough or to forgive, **both have to be on June's terms**, when June and the children are ready.....

Silk removed

Voice 3 Leaving isn't going to be easy, **it's a massive step**, but what other option has she? She now fears for the children's safety as well as her own.

Remember when people say about situations like this '**if its that bad, why don't they leave?**' **The key aspect these people fail to realise is that victims are entrapped, in a hostage-like situation. Tom and all perpetrators are doing everything they can to keep the victims ensnared by the abuse - to maintain the status quo.**

Voice 2 She'll lose her home, her clothes, belongings, income, **everything**. The children too will lose so much as they are uprooted, from their nursery, their school, their friends and even their dog Murphy. Their whole world will be turned upside down. I just can't imagine what it must be like, **BUT** the bottom line is they will be safe and free from abuse.

Voice 1 **Remember as well they will be at their most vulnerable when they are planning to leave.** Abuse dramatically increases if the perpetrators discover the plans to leave.

- Voice 3 That's right leaving has to be meticulously planned
- Voice 2 There are so many issues survivors of abuse have to face. The women I work with remind me that domestic abuse is endemic all over the world and crosses all boundaries – race, faith, culture, class, sexuality, able bodied, disabled – no group are exempt. The women come from mainly Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, but they face the same problems as those faced by women in the UK often made worse by the fact they are fleeing other forms of abuse, like social, political, religious and gender based persecution. They are cut off from their social circles, most of them do not have friends or family.
- Voice 1 So they have to deal with the trauma of separation as well as trying to adjust to their new environment?
- Voice 3 Language must be a real barrier – having to rely on interpreters, if there are any, to translate your feelings.
- Voice 2 That's right and as these women don't have access to public funds they cannot utilise the refuge services
These women, therefore are entirely dependent on their abusive husbands who even update them on their immigration status
- Voice 3 I feel so **guilty**, I honestly didn't know about how difficult it is for some women and children. **All the times we have met with June over the years and I didn't even know what was going on till recently. Now we do know, we just pray for June and the children's safety. They need our prayers and they need to leave.**

PAUSE

- Voice 1 Mind you I suppose if we were honest we were beginning to suspect something was wrong. She just hasn't been herself and she kept missing our times together.
- Voice 2 I know we all want her to leave, but we can't do a thing till June is ready. **It is her call**, not ours – **all we can do is to keep praying and telling her it is not her fault, she and the children deserve to be with others who love them and treat them with respect.**
- Voice 3 And that there is help available

Voice 1 **As her friends and as people of faith we need to be there for June and the children and we need to spread the word so that all survivors can flourish**

Silk removed

Voice 2 Too true, but we need to be careful that June is not weighed down by help, but help is given in a way that restores, empowers and ensures June is in control. The very last thing she needs is to feel controlled. She's had enough of that to last her a lifetime. With the help of the experts **June** will tell us how we can help. **Survivors of abuse do turn their lives around. There is hope – there is good news.**

Voices -

An overview of the role fulfilled by Women's Aid - Fiona

Survivor of abuse

Final silk removed – completes a rainbow

(Readers and all the props except a single chair leave the 'stage')

Part 2

All Voices from offstage

Voice 3 So what of Tom?
June's forgiven him so many times and yet the abuse continues

Voice 2 (Disbelief) Tom has always been the heart and soul of the party when we were all out together. He was really helpful when I was in hospital. I mean he picked the kids up from aftercare and gave them their meal. He is still a regular attender at worship.

Voice 1 It is the deception, the deceit I loathe. How can he behave like he does in their home – How can he destroy June and the children the way he does.

Voice 2 It's beyond me, but one thing for sure Tom needs to stop using violence to control and abuse and he needs to keep

well away from June and the children. He has to acknowledge his wrongdoing; he is accountable for his actions and needs to face the consequences. The justice system may have a role to play.

- Voice 1 Like us, Stuart and Robert initially couldn't believe how Tom behaves at home. Interestingly now they know the truth they too feel guilty for not noticing. They feel betrayed, ashamed and let down by him. Tom is their friend; they thought they shared the same values. Their home life is so precious to them and they thought Tom felt the same way
- Voice 2 I know I've never seen them look so shocked when they heard. They haven't been able to speak to Tom.
- Voice 1 They just want the abuse to stop and they want June and the children to be safe.
- Voice 3 They like us they are wearing the **White Ribbons**. Women and men can work together to end abuse, not only in this country, but across the world.
- Voice 1 Stuart and Robert were saying that the men who don't abuse, and that is the majority of men can raise their voices in the condemnation of abuse
- Voice 3 That's right we all need to end our silence about abuse. The silence hampers recognition and recovery. When we stay silent it makes it more difficult for those who are abused, because they feel they must be the only ones to suffer in this way.
- Voice 2 That's right our silence, the silence of the faith communities increases the shame felt by those who are being abused. We must speak out – domestic abuse is a human rights issue. **The shame of abuse belongs to the perpetrators**, not the victims or survivors.
- Voice 1 That is right, **the shame of abuse rests with Tom** but lets not forget that we and the faith community must be willing when Tom stops being abusive to help him address the issue of repentance and forgiveness from God
- Voice 3 We all need to ask forgiveness from God - our silence has resulted in us being complicit with Tom's abuse
- Voice 2 **We cannot be silent about this injustice – we need to put our heads above the parapet and shout from the roofs of**

all the houses, from the spires of faith communities, that all who experience abuse deserve to be noticed, deserve to be heard, deserve to be believed, deserve to be safe and deserve to live their lives in peace.

Voice 3

***'The sounds of women's silence run deep
Let us attune our ears to the sounds of women's silence
And to attend and listen to what is not said
What has never been said,
What is only now beginning to be said.....
Let it deafen our whole being with its colossal roar
(Slee 2004:29)***

Voices 1,2,3

God of love, justice, mercy and compassion be with all who live in abusive relationships. Inspire and strengthen women, men and children to work to promote the development of respectful, flourishing relationships among all your people in Jesus name. Amen

Voice 1

TO THE AUDIENCE

In the peace and security of this holy place there is now an opportunity for us all to lay our silent prayers before God, symbolised by laying the cloth strips over the Empty Chair

The End

