

TOOLKIT

BREAK THE SILENCE SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 30, 2025

*"God heals the brokenhearted
and bandages their wounds."*

— Psalm 147:3

"Pride Lights" — Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City. Photo courtesy of Cathedral staff.

Prepared by
The Episcopal Diocese of New York Task Force
on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault



The Episcopal Diocese of
NEW YORK

“Healing begins when we listen;
transformation begins when we act.”

— The Rt. Rev. Matthew Heyd, Bishop of New York

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Dear people of God in The Episcopal Church,

Our Gospel commitment calls us to stand with those who have suffered violence and to ensure that it has no place in our homes, churches, and communities. Gender-based violence is a particular epidemic, and each of us has a responsibility to become educated on its prevalence—and to play a role in healing its harms and disrupting its generational cycles.

In 2022, our General Convention called for a designation of the Sunday closest to Nov. 25 as Break the Silence Sunday, in solidarity with the global cry against gender-based violence highlighted each year by the United Nations.

I was among the bishops who supported that legislation, and I want to extend my thanks and continued support for this essential work, particularly to the Episcopal Diocese of New York's Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. The toolkit they have created is filled with excellent educational and liturgical resources, and I hope you will use them and encourage those in your circles to do the same.

Breaking the Silence Sunday, Nov. 30, is also the first Sunday of Advent, the church's season of waiting and anticipation. As we enter this often-quiet period, we are reminded of how John the Baptist entered the biblical scene. He was someone who broke silence with his clarion call for the people of his time to repent because the kingdom of heaven draws near. As in John's day, breaking silence prepares the way for God's transforming work—for truth to prevail and for justice to take root in our hearts and in our common life.

May the coming Christ dwell in our hearts and inspire us to serve and protect one another in love.

Yours in Christ,

The Most Rev. Sean Rowe
Presiding Bishop
The Episcopal Church



THE BISHOP OF NEW YORK

Beloved in Christ,

We want everyone in our congregation and our communities to be safe.

As we prepare to observe **Break the Silence Sunday** on **November 30, 2025, the First Sunday in Advent**, we do so with hearts open to the coming of Christ, who brings light into the world's deepest shadows. What better time than Advent to proclaim hope and welcome to victims and survivors of gender-based violence, and to renew our commitment to a Church where all may find safety, dignity, and healing.

Break the Silence Sunday was established by **General Convention Resolution 2022-C064**, which calls the entire Episcopal Church to name and address the reality of gender-based violence within our communities and to support survivors through prayer, advocacy, and concrete action. The **Diocese of New York Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault** continues to lead this work through the development of this year's Toolkit, now distributed across the Episcopal Church for local adaptation and use.

The 2025 Toolkit offers liturgical and educational resources, sermon helps, and again features the **Eucharist of Healing, Hope, and Liberation**, a powerful service that centers survivors' voices and invites all of us into the work of healing and renewal. We look forward to a **Diocese of New York celebration of this Eucharist** and invite dioceses and congregations across the Church to join us in this sacred observance.

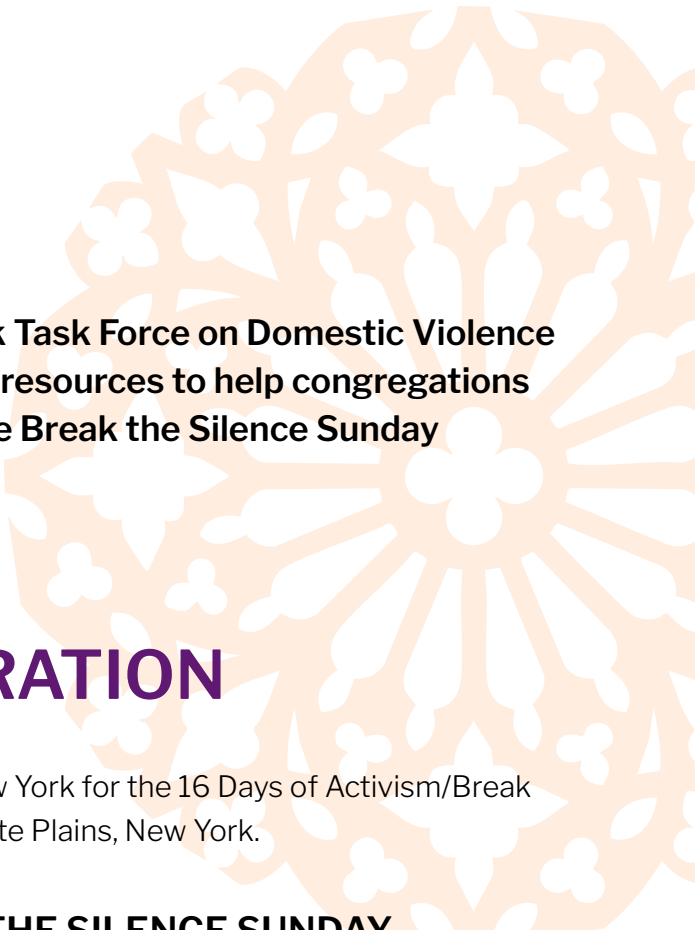
Break the Silence Sunday provides holy space to confront the pain caused by gender-based violence. As followers of Jesus, we are called to lift the veil of silence, to listen deeply, to stand beside survivors in compassion, and to act with courage in our churches and communities. Healing begins when we listen; transformation begins when we act.

I am profoundly grateful to all who continue to lead and sustain this ministry of hope and justice. May this observance strengthen our collective witness to God's reconciling love, so that the Church might ever more fully reflect the peace and liberation promised in Christ.

Grace and Peace,

The Rt. Rev. Matthew Heyd
Bishop of New York

WORSHIP RESOURCES



The Episcopal Diocese of New York Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault presents these resources to help congregations and other ministry settings observe Break the Silence Sunday throughout The Episcopal Church.

SERMON PREPARATION

Prepared for the Episcopal Diocese of New York for the 16 Days of Activism/Break the Silence Sunday by Revd Bill Baker, White Plains, New York.

TALKING POINTS FOR BREAK THE SILENCE SUNDAY

(Advent 1 – Year A)

Domestic violence affects millions of people each year, cutting across every demographic, including age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men in the United States experience severe intimate partner violence during their lifetimes. This means that in every congregation, including ours, there are people who have endured—or are enduring—this suffering in silence.

Theologian Marie Fortune, a leader in addressing domestic violence in faith communities, reminds us:

“There is no justification in Scripture for abuse, domination, or violence against another person. Instead, Scripture calls us to treat one another with love, compassion, and justice.”

Her words challenge us to confront misinterpretations of our faith that have sometimes been used to rationalize abuse, and to align ourselves with God’s vision for human dignity and protection.

1. ADVENT HOPE IN THE MIDST OF FEAR AND VIGILANCE

This first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of a season of watching and waiting. The Gospel (Matthew 24:36–44) calls believers to “stay awake,” to be alert for the coming of Christ. Yet for victims of intimate partner violence, being “on guard” is not a spiritual exercise—it is a constant state of fear and survival.

Imagine what it means to live always watching for signs of danger, always braced for harm in one’s own home. For those who suffer abuse, salvation and even safety can feel impossibly far away. Advent hope, therefore, calls the Church to more than individual spiritual vigilance—it calls us to collective awakening.

We are all summoned to wake from our sleep, as Paul writes in Romans, not only to prepare for Christ’s coming, but to see and respond to the suffering around us. Our calling is to bring light to places of hidden pain and to embody God’s promise of safety and love.

2. “THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES” (ISAIAH 2:4)

Isaiah’s vision of peace is not just about nations laying down weapons—it is about transforming instruments of harm into tools for healing. For survivors of abuse, this prophetic image speaks directly to their reality: homes meant to nurture have become battlefields; words meant to bless have been used to wound.

As followers of Christ, we are called to help re-forge our communities into places of safety. This means building systems of accountability, offering refuge and resources, and naming abuse for what it is: a violation of God’s will and human dignity.

3. THE CHURCH’S CALL TO WAKE UP

It is not enough to tell individuals, “Wake up.” The whole Church, the whole society, must awaken. We must awaken to the truth that domestic violence is not a private issue—it is a community crisis that demands our moral and spiritual response.

Our Baptismal Covenant asks, “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” Each time we answer, “I will, with God’s help,” we are pledging to stand with survivors, to listen, to believe them, and to help create a world where no one must live in fear within their own home.

4. ADVENT READINESS: PREPARING A SAFE AND JUST CHURCH

True Advent readiness means preparing our hearts and our communities for Christ's presence by building spaces of safety, compassion, and justice. We cannot welcome the Prince of Peace while ignoring violence among us.

When the Church speaks openly about domestic violence, it breaks the silence that allows abuse to thrive. When we educate ourselves, provide resources, and advocate for victims, we live out the Gospel's call to be light in the darkness.

5. ACTION STEPS FOR CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONS

- Speak openly about domestic violence in sermons, prayers, and conversations.
- Provide visible resources about local shelters, hotlines, and counseling services.
- Ensure confidentiality and safety for anyone disclosing abuse.
- Train clergy, lay leaders, and staff to recognize signs of abuse and respond with compassion and knowledge.
- Pray for survivors and for the transformation of hearts that perpetuate violence.

Advent begins with a wake-up call — not one of fear, but of love. May we stay awake not only for Christ's coming, but for our neighbors who need to know that God's love is stronger than violence, and that the Church will stand with them until they are safe, healed, and free.

A EUCHARIST OF HEALING, HOPE AND LIBERATION

A liturgy prepared for the Episcopal Diocese of New York for the 16 Days of Activism/Break the Silence Sunday by Revd Dr Carrie Pemberton Ford (EqualRites.com), 27th October 2024, Tuscany, Italy.

THE IONIAN CREED

ALL: We believe in God above us, maker and sustainer of all life, of sun and moon, of water and earth, of humanity, male and female.

We believe in God beside us, Jesus Christ, the word made flesh, born of a woman, servant of the poor, tortured and nailed to a tree. A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, he died abandoned and forsaken. Mary, alone remained beside him, her heart pierced through with the sword of a mother's grief. He descended into the earth to the place of death. On the third day he rose from the tomb. He ascended into heaven, to be everywhere present throughout all ages, and His kingdom will come on earth.

We believe in God within us, the Holy Spirit burning with Pentecostal fire, life-giving breath of the Church, Spirit of healing and forgiveness, source of all resurrection and of eternal life. Amen.¹

THE PEACE

PRIEST The risen Christ came to his disciples, hidden in the upper room, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' The Peace Christ brings is unlike any other. He told his disciples 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword'. This peace, the peace of justice, making right that which is broken, restoration for those who have been wronged, of announcing truth between us, of healing and the profound price paid for forgiveness of sins – this is the peace Christ brings to us today.

Peace be with you - let us greet one another in the name of the risen Lord.

¹ Iona Abbey Worship Book (2001) with an addition by EqualRites. The Iona Community is based off the coast of Scotland, though members also live elsewhere. It is an International Ecumenical Christian movement, working for justice and peace, rebuilding of community and the renewal of worship, with members all over the world - Members, Associate members and Friends. The island of Iona is where it all started. <https://iona.org.uk/>

THE RECEPTION OF THE GIFTS

PRIEST Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, cries out “To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power forever and ever!”

ALL For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and we acknowledge you as head over all.²

PREFACE

PRIEST Lift up your hearts

ALL Though we have been bruised, and can bruise,
We lift them to the tender healing of your grace,

PRIEST Let us give thanks unto the Lord

ALL We give thanks to our creator, redeemer, and sustainer

PRIEST For you are our creator, our Heavenly Mother and Father,
who brought your son into our world for our redemption.
Our brother, our true guide.
He lived your generous love,
your kindness,
your justice
and gave true judgment
on our wounded natures.
He held to account
those who wounded others
in thought, words and deeds.
He healed those who sought him,
in body, mind and spirit.
He taught his followers
to love generously,
work steadily,

² | Chronicles 29:11, Revelation 5:13 6

forgive prodigally.
To build space
here on earth
fit for heaven.
Spaces where all are safe
as beloved children
of one Heavenly
Amma, Abba.

ALL Your love invites us all
We are your children,
And heirs of this kin-dom.

PRIEST And so with the Holy Angels
gathered around God's throne
together with Mary our Holy Theotokos
who answered God's invitation
to bear the Christ,
nurtured
in her own body,
and accompanied to his death
even death on an Imperial cross
We share with her a Magnificat of praise.

ALL Magnificat anima mea
Magnificat Dominum

PRIEST God looks on each one of us in our lowly estate

ALL God raises the humble in heart
displaces the haughty and arrogant
and overturn all systems of injustice and coercion.

PRIEST God our liberator
You throw down rulers from their thrones.

ALL Display your awesome power through those you call,
to fill those who hunger, with good things.
Provide those in distress, with succour
and liberate all those who are oppressed.

PRIEST As we sing the song of the whole of creation
assisted by Cherubim and Seraphim

ALL Holy, Holy, Holy
Eternal One whose glory fills the Heavens,
the whole earth lives because of your life- giving breath
Hosanna in the Highest

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord
Our Passover from violation into peace
Our liberator from coercion into true freedom
Hosanna in the Highest.

PRAYER OF HUMBLE ACCESS

ALL Most merciful Lord,
your love compels us to respond,
Our hands unclean,
our hearts unprepared; we felt unfit
to eat even the crumbs fallen from your table.
But you are Eternal Love, our pain bearer, our life giver.
You are the God who is our salvation
You open the door for life, safety and full restoration.
You shared your bread with sinners.
Those declared as unworthy by others
You invited to feast with you in paradise.
You call us to come, be with you and be fed.
So free us, heal us, feed us.
For you see us completely.
And in your sight we become whole.

PRIEST The precious body and blood of the incarnate God, was surrendered,
so that this complete work of reconciliation be finished.
May Christ's spirit live in each of us, heal us, and release us into joy-filled union;
that we, with the whole company of those who follow the one,
whose body was broken, but now being healed,
may sit together as one, and feast in your kingdom.

ALL Amen

Or

Loving God,
we are homeless
and we turn to you
We are helpless
we come to you
we are hungry
and in pain
and we return to you
Called by love we come
Stand by us,
comfort each one here
feed our hunger,
tend our pain
hear our cry
and welcome us home³
Amen

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

PRIEST Eternal one, God of Justice and Peace
who asks us to be the voice of the voiceless
and to be a people who heal each other
in the name of the true word
Jesus, who came and gave his life
for each one of us, for the whole of broken humanity.
The whole of creation awaits
restoration and the revelation of
the kingdom of God, come on earth.
We offer these signs of your goodness
this bread and this wine,
offered out of the earth's bounty

³ Based on Kate Mclhagga, 'Prayer of Approach' in Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild (eds), *Human Rites: Worship Resources for an Age of Change* (London: Mowbray, 1995).

and the labour of lives.
We remember the supper of institution
of this most holy of feasts
given for our strengthening
for our journey
following in the footsteps
of Jesus, our brother,
Jesus, our saviour, protector and friend

Who on the very night that he would be betrayed,
called his friends around him.
Mary, Martha, and those who prepared the Passover meal,
James, John, Peter, those sent out
as sheep amongst wolves
to preach, teach and heal in his name.
At supper he took up signs of your creation
Gifts of bread and of wine.
he raised unleavened bread
and gave you thanks.
He tore it, as the curtain between
the sacred and profane would be torn
at his death

He gave it to his friends saying
take, eat, this is my body
surrendered,
the Passover lamb
for the sins of the whole world
do this as often as you eat it
in remembrance of me.
In the same way after supper
Jesus took the cup of blessing,
and gave thanks to God
He offered it to all his disciples assembled
around him and said
'This is my blood, the blood of the new covenant
poured out for the many,
for the forgiveness of sins.
Drink this, each of you
in remembrance of me.

ALL Is this not the cup of blessing, Is this not Berekah,
and Hallel – the cup of praise
LORD, not to us,
but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness.

PRIEST And so we pray

THE LORD'S PRAYER

ALL Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain
our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we have absorbed from one another, free us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, deliver us.
For the mystery of forgiveness is your divine gift to all
where you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever.⁴
Amen

THE INVITATION

PRIEST Come to the table for all is prepared
Come and eat, bread for the long journey
Take Wine, for remembrance and refreshment.
Christ calls you to come
to receive the power of divine love

⁴ Originally from New Zealand Prayer book, adapted by Jim Cotter from Prayer at Night; permission to use from Hymns Ancient & Modern

to be healed deep within, to be changed and change the world
with those he calls, who hear his voice,
however faint you are called by name, beloved so come.

PRAYER FOR ADMINISTRATION

PRIEST A body broken, alongside the broken, so all may be healed
The body of Christ keep you (in the safe keeping) of eternal life

PRIEST Christ's life surrendered: our salvation, drink courage, and healing.
The blood of Christ keep you (in the safe keeping) of eternal life

COMMUNION

THANKSGIVING PRAYER

ALL God of seed and growth and harvest,
Creator of all that grows and all that sustains,
Thank you for feeding us with our Soul food,
an abundance of your grace, to sustain us
for the tasks we face.

Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,
Thank you for being the bread of life,
we need never be hungry,
Our refreshment,
as we seek for peace and justice in the world.
Guiding and Empowering Spirit,
give us strength to walk in his steps
and remember deep within our hearts,
that you are our life today and every day;
Holy God; Holy One; Holy Three
Amen⁵

⁵ <https://godspace.wordpress.com/tag/celtic-prayers/> Pastor David Hodson - July 13, 2013 adapted by EqualRites.com 2024

BLESSING

PRIEST Go in peace in the encircling protection of the Triune God
Creator, Mother, Father,
Redeemer, Empowerer, Friend
Sustainer, Advocate and Breath of God

ALL AMEN

DISMISSAL

PRIEST This Holy Feast is ended, we go to fulfill our work in the world.
Singing songs of celebration and thanksgiving as we go.

ALL AMEN

FINAL HYMN

COLLECTS

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

by The Rev. Canon K. Jeanne Person

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

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

by Anne O. Weatherholt (Morehouse Publishing: 2008)

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

by The Rev. Canon K. Jeanne Person

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PRAYERS TO END VAW

<https://iawn.anglicancommunion.org/media/62987/Liturgical-resources-from-Australia.pdf>

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

PRAYER RESOURCE FROM THE MOTHERS' UNION

www.mothersunionpeterborough.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Mothers-Union-16-Days-Prayers.pdf

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

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM 2025 – EPISCOPAL RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT

www.episcopalrelief.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/16-Days-of-Activism-Toolkit-Updated-October-2025.pdf

This is a faith and community-based toolkit from Episcopal Relief and Development. “This resource is designed to inspire faith-based action and foster deep reflection on ending violence against women and girls (VAWG)—a critical issue that affects millions of lives globally.”

BREAK THE SILENCE SUNDAY – HOUSE OF SARAH, FIJI

www.houseofsarah.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/BREAK-THE-SILENCE-Booklet-2021-21st-Nov.pdf

This is a liturgical resource prepared by the House of Sarah, Diocese of Fiji for their commemoration of Break the Silence Sunday. Our thanks to the Revd Sereima Lomaloma, founder of House of Sarah, for teaching us to break the silence.

ABOUT THE TASK FORCE



REV. PAUL FEUERSTEIN



DR. VICTORIA JEANNE ROLLINS



THE REV. BILL BAKER



CHRISTINA DHANUJA



JUDITH DOUGLAS



DR. SALLY N. MACNICHOL



YVONNE O'NEAL



CRAIG RIJKAARD



ELOISE THOMAS

The Episcopal Diocese of New York Task Force on Domestic Violence began its work in fall 2013 and, in early 2019, became The Episcopal Diocese of New York Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Our mission is to elevate the urgency of addressing gender-based violence across diocesan parishes—including domestic violence and sexual assault—and to equip clergy and lay leaders to serve as informed first responders when someone seeks help. Our vision is that every congregation becomes a safe haven where survivors can find support, safety, and a path toward healing.

We build awareness through presentations, trainings, and the distribution of laminated restroom signs for every parish. We also host webinars each April for Sexual Assault Awareness Month, each October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (late November–December). Presenters from across the United States and around the world share expertise with our diocese and the wider community.

In 2025, our three webinars are presented under the banner **Proclaiming Hope in Uncertain Times:**

- **Part 1 — April 25:** Sexual Assault from Cradle to Grave: A Call to Healing Justice Across Generations, Faiths, and Genders
- **Part 2 — October 23:** Domestic Violence in Communities Under Attack: A Call to Bear Witness, Take Action, and Stand in Solidarity with Those Most Vulnerable
- **Part 3 — December 4:** Violence Against Women and Girls: From Stigma to Liberation

Links to most of our past webinars will be available [here](#). Our events are featured on the calendars of NYC's Commission on Gender Equity and the Mayor's Office to End Gender-Based Violence. As the only faith-based organization listed, we are frequently noted in the Commission's annual report. The City has also invited the Task Force to help plan New York City Denim Day events across all five boroughs.

The Task Force maintains a rich library of resources on the diocesan website. For more information, please contact the Co-Chairs: the Rev Paul Feuerstein at pbfeuerstein@gmail.com and Dr. Victoria Jeanne Rollins at rollins.revdrvictoria@gmail.com.



Acknowledgment

The Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault extends its heartfelt thanks to Bethann Carbone and Michael Heil for their generous pro bono design of the 2025 toolkit, offered in partnership and with continuing strategic support. Their creativity and commitment have been invaluable in advancing awareness of the Task Force's mission and expanding the reach of our work.

APPENDIX

- 22 | RESOLUTION 2022-C064: DESIGNATE THE OBSERVANCE OF “BREAK THE SILENCE SUNDAY”
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RESOLUTION 2022-C064: DESIGNATE THE OBSERVANCE OF “BREAK THE SILENCE SUNDAY”

FINAL TEXT

Resolved, That the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church designate as Break The Silence Sunday the Sunday closest to November 25, which is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women; and be it further

Resolved, That the common objective is to halt the epidemic of violence against women and to affirm as Christians that violence has no place within our families, our Church, and our communities; and be it further

Resolved, That The Episcopal Church encourage the education of its clergy and laity on how to support survivors of rape and sexual violence, including trauma-informed care, and advocate on behalf of those not yet ready to speak openly so that the voices of survivors do not speak alone; and be it further

Resolved, That we add our voices and prayers with those around the world seeking the elimination of gender-based violence.

Source: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church*, Baltimore, 2022, p. 859.

MEMORIAL: BREAK THE SILENCE SUNDAY

Proposed by: Yvonne O'Neal

Source: Memorial M010 to the 81st General Convention, Louisville 2024

To the Deputies and Bishops of The Episcopal Church assembled at the 81st General Convention:

As members of The Episcopal Church, we are called to live out the Gospel in ways that heal, support, and uplift the vulnerable among us.

Resolution 2022-C064, which designated Break The Silence Sunday, is an essential step in addressing and mitigating the profound impacts of sexual assault and domestic violence within our communities and beyond. Break The Silence Sunday provides a vital opportunity for our Church to bring issues of sexual violence to the forefront of our congregational dialogue. By dedicating one Sunday each year to this cause, we affirm our commitment to being a sanctuary for healing and a force against the injustices of abuse.

Break the Silence Sunday is the first Sunday during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to December 10, International Human Rights Day). In 2024, the first Sunday of the 16 Days is December 1.

By observing Break The Silence Sunday, we join with other people of faith around the world to take action to end the incessant violence against women and girls.

We observe Break The Silence Sunday so that “violence shall no longer be heard in our land.” Isaiah 60:18

Break The Silence Sunday is an effort to begin a dialogue within the church about domestic and gender-based violence and sexual assault. Within the context of our faith communities, we hope to:

- **Educate our communities** about the realities and impacts of domestic and gender-based violence and sexual assault, incorporating theological reflection and scriptural context to guide understanding and response.
- **Support survivors** by acknowledging their experiences, offering pastoral care, and connecting them with professional resources for recovery.
- **Advocate for justice** by raising awareness, challenging societal norms that perpetuate violence, and encouraging legislative action that protects and empowers survivors.
- **Commit ourselves** to the work of changing the world, creating a future where gender-based violence, such as rape and domestic violence is a memory.

Break The Silence Sunday began at the Diocese of Polynesia, in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia with a Diocesan Synod resolution in 2013, “That within the Diocese of Polynesia there be zero tolerance on violence against women and children within our homes, our schools, our communities and the church.” In this part of God’s vineyard, the people have witnessed the transformative power of the observance of Break The Silence Sunday in fostering deeper compassion, greater awareness, and proactive advocacy within the Church.

We must realize we live in a culture of sexual violence, and we need a comprehensive set of solutions within our institutions and communities to address it. This culture of sexual violence, colloquially known as “rape culture,” refers to a complex set of beliefs that encourage male aggression, sex and sexual violence against women and supports this violence against women largely by normalizing it. It’s a culture where violence is seen as sexy and where sex is seen as violent. This culture normalizes sexual violence as a fact of life and teaches us that sexual violence is inevitable.

In looking at the root causes of this behavior, we need to look at our Biblical texts and how we mishandle the prevalence of rape and sexual culture in the Bible. There are many instances of rape in scripture, of improper assertions of power: the story of Sodom and Gomorrah; Hagar being used by Abraham and Sarah; the rape of Tamar by her brother; the rape of the concubine in Judges; stories of women as spoils of war. We don’t talk about these passages enough, often because we’re scared of talking about sex in church and because we simply don’t know how to make sense of them. This is part of why Break The Silence Sunday is needed.

The Episcopal Church already believes in the importance of ending the epidemic of sexual violence worldwide. Indeed, The World Council of Churches Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) heard stories of rape as a weapon of war, gender injustice, abuse, violence, and many tragedies; it created the global campaign of Thursdays in Black– wear black on Thursdays and wear a button towards a world without rape and violence – a campaign of awareness, advocacy, and solidarity. The Episcopal Church signed on to this global campaign with Resolution 2022-C063.

We urge this 81st General Convention to:

- Reaffirm the Church’s commitment to observing Break The Silence Sunday annually.
- Encourage continued theological education and training on how to effectively support survivors in our midst.
- Preach against rape, misogyny and sexual violence.
- Strengthen our resolve to be communities of refuge and healing, standing in solidarity with those seeking justice and peace.

The Diocese of New York Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault produced a toolkit for the observance of Break The Silence Sunday on November 26, 2023. Episcopal News Service wrote an article about the toolkit, encouraging observance throughout The Episcopal Church.

In the Diocese of New York Task Force on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault webinar, Breaking Silence: Exploring the Complexities of Sexual Assault at the Intersection of Race, Caste, Class, and Ethnicity, Dr. Brittney Cooper gives a powerful message on addressing sexual assault, not only in our communities, but in our churches; it is a message that needs to be heard. We invite you to listen to the webinar found on the Vimeo channel of the Diocese of New York (<https://vimeo.com/933708474>).

Here are some statistics from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center:

- 1 in 5 women in the United States experienced completed or attempted rape during their lifetime.
- Nationwide, 81% of women reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime.

- 1 in 3 female victims of completed or attempted rape experienced it for the first time between the ages of 11 and 17.
- It is estimated that 734,630 people were raped (including threatened, attempted, or completed rape) in the U.S. in 2018.
- 40% of rapes and sexual assaults were reported to police in 2017, but only about 25% were reported to police in 2018.
- The prevalence of false reporting for sexual assault crimes is low — between 2 percent and 10%.
- Almost 1 in 4 undergraduate women experienced sexual assault or misconduct at 33 of the nation's major universities.
- About half (51.1%) of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner and 40.8% by an acquaintance.
- The estimated lifetime cost of rape is \$122,461 per victim.

And here are statistics from RAINN ([Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network](#))

- Every 68 seconds a person in the United States is sexually assaulted.
- 1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime (14.8% completed, 2.8% attempted).
- From 2009–2013, Child Protective Services agencies substantiated, or found strong evidence to indicate that, 63,000 children a year were victims of sexual abuse.
- A majority of child victims are 12–17. Of victims under the age of 18, 34% of victims of sexual assault and rape are under age 12, and 66% of victims of sexual assault and rape are age 12–17.
- 9 out of 10 victims of rape are female.
- The majority of sexual assaults occur at or near the victim's home.
- 48% of victims were sleeping or performing another activity at home when the crime occurred.
- 29% were traveling to and from work or school, or traveling to shop or run errands
- 12% were working

- 7% were attending school
- 5% were doing an unknown or other activity

Additionally, for more statistics, please see the Fact Sheet from the National Network to End Domestic Violence.

We live in a rape culture fueled by the belief that sexual violence is a fact of life. By breaking the silence, we can change the narrative and change the behavior. Let us continue to embrace the call to break the silence so that no voice is marginalized, and no story goes unheard. In doing so, we reflect the love and justice of Christ, making our Church a beacon of hope in a world in need.

Respectfully submitted,
Yvonne O’Neal
Lay Deputy, Diocese of New York

Endorsed by:

Dr. Martha Bedell Alexander
Mr. Joe McDaniel
Ms. Laura Russell
The Rev. Theodora Brooks
The Rev. Elizabeth Easton

Supported by:

The Right Reverend J. Scott Barker
The Right Reverend DeDe Duncan-Probe
The Right Reverend Mark D. W. Edington
The Right Reverend R. William Franklin
The Right Reverend Sally French
The Right Reverend Mary D. Glasspool
The Right Reverend Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez
The Right Reverend Matthew F. Heyd
The Right Reverend Carlye Hughes
The Right Reverend Stephen T. Lane
The Right Reverend Rafael Morales
The Right Reverend Lawrence C. Provenzano
The Right Reverend Catherine S. Roskam
The Right Reverend Sean Rowe
The Very Reverend Kara Wagner Sherer
The Right Reverend Allen K. Shin
The Right Reverend Robert Wright
The Diocese of New York Task Force on
Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

ADDITIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT RESOURCES

[FUTURES WITHOUT VIOLENCE](#) →

www.futureswithoutviolence.org

[NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE](#) →

www.thehotline.org

[NATIONAL NETWORK TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE](#) →

www.nnedv.org

[RAINN](#) →

www.rainn.org

[VAWNET](#) →

www.vawnet.org