

# SHINE A LIGHT

## ON VIOLENCE PREVENTION - WHITI TE RAMA



Greetings

I write to share with you this year's theme for White Ribbon Day 25 November, 'Shine a Light on Violence Prevention', and to offer resources. Resources include a [free beeswax candle](#) for parishes so you can join with Moderator Rt Rev Hamish Galloway and me to shine a light through prayer.

About three years ago, I was privileged to attend a 'Blind Date – Concert in the Dark' piano recital in Milan, Italy. The pianist was Cesare Picco, a famous Italian piano improviser, composer and writer. The striking thing about this concert was that once it started, the concert hall was in total darkness. I have never experienced such darkness in my life. The only sensorial dimension was the music. Without light it is impossible to see, or even be aware of our surrounding reality.

This year, the theme of White Ribbon is Whiti te rama - Shine a Light on Violence Prevention. Unless we shine a light on one of our nation's saddest societal malaise, it remains in the dark where it stays hidden. Many of us remain unaware, sensing nothing of the pain and heartache, sadness and sorrow of what happens behind the doors of too many of our homes.

To the victims of such violence, can I suggest that there is the hope of the One Who Sees:  
*"Even the darkness will not be dark to you, ... for darkness is as light to you."* Psalm 139: 12

As people who walk with God, our task in the Church is to give hope by shining a light, not only on the problem of domestic violence, but even more so on the hope of prevention and the things that work to prevent violence.

Firstly, the problem. When the light falls on the statistics, many of us are shocked by the size of the problem. Our New Zealand Police report the following growing statistics of family harm incidents they have dealt with since 2016. How many more are not reported to the police?

2016 - 118,926 incidents  
2017 - 121,762 incidents (+2,836)  
2018 - 133,022 incidents (+11,260)  
2019 - 151,454 incidents (+18,432)  
2020 - 171,381 incidents (+19,927)

Statistics without a human face may sound like something distant from us, but trust me that the impact on those these figures relate to is deeply concerning. In 2016, Treasury found that children brought up in environments of high risk cost the state \$270,000 over their lifetime compared to just \$33,000 for more fortunate children. Sixty-eight percent of women in our prisons have been victims of family violence, and 52 percent have post-traumatic stress disorder. Seventy-five percent were diagnosed with mental health problems in the last 12 months.

If those numbers, along with the increasing trend of domestic violence, don't convince us we have a major problem, what will? Sadly, the Covid lockdown has only exacerbated the problem of domestic violence.

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Last year the number of family harm incidents reported ranged from 345 to 645 a day, compared to between 271 and 478 in the same period in 2019. It is clear that the lockdowns have created an environment of real harm to those experiencing domestic violence. It's easy to feel despair and wonder what we can do. More than ever, we need to focus on violence prevention.

Secondly, a solution. When it comes to finding solutions, I must confess that I don't have the answer. Indeed, I don't even think I have the right questions. Answers need to be thought out according to different situations. Can I, therefore, invite you to look for ways in your context to shine a light on violence prevention. What can you do in your community to show that there is hope for those living in the darkness of domestic violence? Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." As people walking with Jesus, we have the radiance of his presence helping us bring hope to dark places.

One lesson we can learn from Jesus' method of bringing hope to people is to tell stories. Do you know people who have survived an abusive relationship who want to shine a light on their experience? Invite them, maybe anonymously, to share their story of what helped them to escape the situation they were in. Similarly, can you find a person who was a perpetrator of domestic violence. Invite them, in a safe and respectful way to victims, maybe anonymously, to share what happened that sparked a change in their beliefs and behaviour from being a violent person to having respectful relationships.

A second thing you could consider doing is lighting up your church each evening. Imagine the message we could convey to our communities if every church in the nation had a light shining on their building – shine a light on this important issue, Shine a Light on Violence Prevention.

### Free Beeswax Candles for Parishes

If you would like a [free White Ribbon 'Shine a Light' beeswax candle](#) to use with the White Ribbon prayer, we have 100 to send to our parishes on a first-in basis. Please email [angela@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:angela@presbyterian.org.nz). I have prepared worship resources for White Ribbon Day 25 November that can be downloaded below. These include a video prayer message from our Moderator Right Rev Hamish Galloway.

### RESOURCES TO DOWNLOAD

Download White Ribbon Day [prayer text](#)

Watch [video of the White Ribbon prayer](#)

Download White Ribbon [Powerpoint](#) & [PDF slides](#)

[See the Presbyterian Church website White Ribbon 2021 page](#)

[See White Ribbon NZ website resources](#)

Download Presbyterian Support New Zealand [resources for White Ribbon 2021](#) including a webinar on 25 November ([register here](#)). I encourage you to see and use these.

*Very Rev Ray Coster*

*White Ribbon New Zealand Ambassador*