
White Ribbon Ambassador, Very Rev Ray Coster

CHALLENGE THE UNSPOKEN RULES

Greetings

As we move through November – White Ribbon month – the Grace Milane and the Amber-Rose Rush court trials are headlines in our national media. Two incredibly sad stories of extreme male violence towards women

As another year passes, our society is still plagued by domestic violence. Even though it's not always as extreme as these two court cases, domestic violence remains a far-reaching social issue in New Zealand. We all need to work on reducing its prevalence and impact on families.

Join me in challenging the unspoken rules

The focus of the 2019 White Ribbon campaign is to challenge the unspoken rules that often underlie domestic violence. These rules are the expectations that boys and young men inherit from society, and are based on outdated ideas of what a man is, how he acts, and how he should express himself. These rules – like “Be the Man”, “Toughen Up” and “Boys don't Cry” - exist silently in the background for many, and reinforce unhelpful stereotypes about what it is to be a man.

Will you join me in your churches to stand-up and speak out against these unhelpful stereotypes? Please join me and take action to prevent men's violence towards women and girls. I ask that you make this a focus in your church at some time throughout the year. Please, don't leave it to others – we all have the opportunity to use our voices as parents, caregivers and influencers to speak up over the many unspoken rules that shape our boys' behaviour toward women.

One domestic violence incident every four minutes in NZ

In 2016, New Zealand Police investigated 118,926 family harm incidents. In 2017, that number increased to 121,762, and in 2018 it rose further to 133,022 – or one case every four minutes. While this increase looks alarming, it is my hope that rather than demonstrating a rise in domestic violence, these figures reflect a decrease in societal tolerance for family violence. I hope that we, as a nation, are speaking up and acting when we become aware of such incidents.

White Ribbon is a global movement of men and boys working to end male violence against women and girls. It is active in over 60 countries and seeks to promote healthy relationships, gender equality and a compassionate vision of masculinity. And while not all family harm incidents are perpetrated by men – the majority are.

White Ribbon in our Church

I am really encouraged that Alpine Presbytery is working with Presbyterian Support Upper South Island to host a White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation information morning. Organisations have been invited to learn how they can help prevent domestic violence and support its victims through White Ribbon accreditation. My challenge is for other presbyteries to consider offering something similar in their regions.

A number of parishes are also highlighting White Ribbon Sunday on 24 November – or on Sundays around that time. Well done to the many churches focusing on this far-reaching social issue.

Jesus set the standard for respectful relationships

In Jesus, we have a wonderful mentor on how a man should respectfully relate to women. Jesus was so counter-cultural in his day and age in this respect. In a very male-dominated society, Jesus often used women as the heroes of his message or parables – the woman with the lost coin when speaking of the kingdom of God; the woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee; the parable of the woman and the judge. He had women in his band of disciples...

Equality between men and women was important to Jesus. Often, when he tells a story about a man – he follows it with a story about a woman. In Matthew 24, he tells a story about a master and two male servants. This is immediately followed by a story of ten women.

It is an honour to be a White Ribbon Ambassador within our Church and in the wider community. If I can ever help, encourage or support you as you seek to address domestic violence in your community, please contact me.



Ray Coster
White Ribbon Ambassador