

FAITH RESOURCE SHEET FOR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PROVIDERS

CHRISTIANITY

Faith Distinctions and Practices in Christianity

Here are some key points to keep in mind as you engage Christian communities and men of boys of faith in your violence prevention work:

Mainline Christianity: Mainline Christianity includes many denominations in the United States, such as American Baptist Churches USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), The Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church.

Black Churches: The oldest Black Protestant church is the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Other denominations with deep historic roots include the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), and the National Baptist Convention. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Black Pentecostal denomination Church of God in Christ (COGIC) was formed. The Progressive National Baptist Alliance was founded in support of the civil rights movement in 1961.

Evangelical Churches: Evangelical churches are newer expressions of the Christian Church, founded in the early 20th century due to theological disagreements and a desire for a more fundamentalist approach to interpreting the Bible. They are loosely affiliated or denominationally unattached, emphasizing a personal relationship with Jesus, individual faith journeys, and the centrality of the Bible and the cross. Evangelical Christians often have a born-again conversion experience or encounter with God. As of 2020, White evangelical Protestants comprise 14% of the U.S. population, with significant concentrations in counties in the South and lower Midwest.

Places of Worship: Places of worship are typically referred to as churches. Keep in mind that churches can vary in size, architectural style, and worship practices, but they all serve as places where Christians gather for religious services, prayer, worship, and community activities. Visitors are welcome to attend Sunday services or Mass. Many churches have a welcome table or ushers who can provide orientation to the church's program offerings, which can sometimes include support groups for people experiencing violence. Most churches have websites where you can find "visit us" guides that include service hours, where to park, and give you a sense of what to expect. Services usually consist of songs, prayers, and a sermon.

Faith Leaders: In Christianity, faith leaders are known by various titles. “Pastor” refers to a clergy member who leads a congregation, offering spiritual guidance, teaching, and pastoral care. “Minister” is another prevalent term, denoting a leader within a church or religious community responsible for preaching, administering sacraments, and providing spiritual support. “Reverend” shows respect for ordained ministers and their religious authority. “Preacher” designates those who deliver sermons and teachings during worship services or gatherings. Some denominations may have “Bishops” overseeing multiple churches in certain regions, while “Elders” and “Deacons” may serve in leadership and supportive capacities within individual congregations. Most mainline and historically Black denominations ordain women to ministry at the highest levels. Evangelical churches differ in this practice. Men usually hold the highest levels of leadership, and women are often offered positions as directors rather than clergy. Evangelical churches may have restrictions on whether women can teach co-ed groups, reserving that role for men.

Major Religious Holidays: Major religious holidays in Christianity are based on the liturgical calendar, which revolves around key moments in the life of Christ and is aligned with the solar calendar. Major holidays include Christmas (December 25), Good Friday, Easter (based on Jewish Passover), and Pentecost (usually in the summer). Other special days and seasons, like Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Maundy Thursday, revolve around these events.

Christian Demographics

- 16% percent of all Americans identified as Mainline Christians in 2020, the largest group of Christians in the US.
- While mainline churches are spread throughout the country, the largest concentration of mainline churches is in the Midwest.
- As of 2020, White evangelical Protestants make up 14% of the U.S. population. Considerable factions of White evangelical Protestants are spread through the country but are most heavily concentrated in counties in the South and lower Midwest.
- Diversity within Christianity:
 - » 44% identify as White Christian
 - » 8% are Hispanic Catholics
 - » 7% are Black Protestants
 - » 4% are Hispanic Protestants
 - » 4% are other Protestants of color
 - » 2% are other Catholics of color

Sources: <https://www.ppri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>

Christian Faiths and Interpersonal Violence

U.S. Protestant Christians have an important role to play in addressing interpersonal violence by actively promoting life-affirming teachings, creating safer environments, and fostering supportive communities. The concept of Imago Dei, which recognizes that every individual is made in the image of God with inherent dignity and worth, forms a foundation for respecting and valuing others. Emphasizing the abundant life concept from John 10:10, which advocates for holistic well-being and emotional security, further reinforces the importance of caring for each person’s needs. The Bible itself speaks against violence and condemns various forms of abuse. Passages like Psalm 11:5, Colossians 3:19, Proverbs 12:18, Proverbs 18:21, and Colossians 3:8 address different aspects of

interpersonal violence and call for respectful, non-harmful behavior. The ministry of Jesus is a model, demonstrating compassion, healing, and uplift of vulnerable individuals, especially women and children. Jesus emphasized non-violent conflict resolution, holding those in power accountable for their actions, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. Christians can follow this example by listening to and supporting victims and survivors of interpersonal violence when they come forward with their stories.

While Christian texts do contain complex stories of violence, they also call for acknowledging and addressing these issues. Scholars and believers alike are encouraged to speak out against violence and advocate for survivors, fostering a compassionate and supportive environment within their communities. By doing so, U.S. Protestant Christians can actively work towards undoing harmful traditions and promoting a culture of care and respect for all individuals.

Common Misconceptions or stereotypes: Unhelpful expectations of boys and men in Christian communities can include the following:

- Men must adhere to a rigid standard of emotional toughness, suppressing their emotions and vulnerability, while asserting dominance over women.
- Stereotypes depict men as players or, at worst, sexual predators, overshadowing the fact that many boys and men grapple with issues like depression, isolation, loneliness, and disproportionately high suicide rates.

To counter these misconceptions in Christian communities, it's essential to educate on gender equality, encourage emotional expression, combat stereotypes, promote positive masculinity, and foster a supportive community.

Cultural & Societal Expectations of Christian Men & Boys: Christian teachings vary on the place of men in society. Some interpretations of Scripture elevate men to a superior position over women and refer to them as providers and leaders of their family and home. Such teachings can add pressure to men seeking to provide and figure out the spiritual needs of their family. Often these teachings can lead to isolation and potentially harmful behavior. The Bible offers hope that can counter bad theologies that reinforce patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes among boys and men. Here are some key passages:

- God created all people in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Women, men, and all people possess characteristics that are distinctly human such as the ability to create and to have free will. All persons have inherent worth and dignity.
- God asks that men treat their wives as Christ treated the church with sacrificial love (Ephesians 5:25-32). When these passages were written, women held a lower status in society, and Scripture offered life by asking men to place themselves in sacrificial positions. The Bible teaches that any person with power should steward it with care and concern for those with less power.

Engaging Men and Boys: Organizations working to alleviate domestic violence can work to partner with men's and fathers' ministries, which are common in the contexts of Black and Hispanic churches. It will be important to develop a more virtuous definition of positive masculinity that helps boys and men regain a sense of purpose. This approach shouldn't vilify manhood or masculinity, but instead offer a healthier picture of what it means to be a man (i.e. away from toxic masculinity that emphasizes patriarchy and misogyny), helps boys and men be more vulnerable, and teaches them to respect and value women. Beyond this, churches and Christian leaders can help men develop more self-respect and self-love as well as teaching them the importance of respecting, affirming, and honoring equality with women.

More Resources and Information:

- How Your Church Can Help Survivors of Domestic Violence
sojo.net/articles/heres-how-your-church-can-help-survivors-domestic-violence
- One hundred sermons on sexual and domestic violence
sojo.net/sermon/series/100-sermons-violence
- What does the Bible say about abuse?
juniaproject.com/bible-say-domestic-violence

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Sojourners exists to articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world. Our community consists of hundreds of thousands of people from diverse Christian traditions, from Catholics to mainline protestants and evangelicals, we are an ecumenical Christian network. Seven out of ten Americans identified as Christian in 2020.2 In this resource, we will focus on protestant Christian denominations including mainline and evangelical traditions.

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