

Interfaith Sermon Notes: Engaging our Congregations

How Are You Living Your Faith?

Every Religion Calls for Non-Violent Relationships!

16 Days of Activism Campaign 2010

Preventing Violence Against Women Present Across Faiths

Faith is one of the most fundamental and influential cornerstones in the lives of many people. Religious leaders and communities of faith have an enormous impact on how people live their lives - what they believe, how they work, how they establish and maintain relationships, how they raise children, and what decisions they make. What is said in the church or the mosque or other places of worship carries significant weight for believers. Because religion is the spiritual and moral center of many peoples' lives, what they hear in worship can leave a more profound impression than what they hear in the marketplace, home, media or workplace. Therefore, the efforts of our religious leaders are essential in order to prevent domestic violence in our communities.

Religious leaders are compelled by the central tenets of Christianity and Islam the most popular faiths in our region to set the example of God's and Allah's love by exploring with their communities of faith the ideas of support, care, acceptance, mercy, patience, and compassion. There is support for these themes in the religious doctrine of all major faiths, including the Bible and Holy Qur'an. Preventing violence against women, therefore, is a common interest for many religions. Faith leaders, either independently or in partnership with leaders in other religions, can rise to this responsibility through their roles as educators and leaders of prayer.

Below are notes for what Christian and Muslim leaders could include when leading their communities in thought and prayer to prevent violence against women.

Khutbah notes for Islamic Religious Leaders

Today's topic for reflection in worship is essential in how we define ourselves as Muslims. There are many misperceptions held by others about how our faith views women. As Muslims, it is our duty to acknowledge to each other and to people of other faiths that our sacred texts are clear about the equality and rights of women. Two excerpts from the Qur'an are particularly illustrative of the Islamic viewpoint on how women are viewed in relationships:

... Live with [women] on a footing of kindness and equity.

(Qur'an 4:19)

And among His signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves so that you may dwell in tranquility with them. He has put love and mercy between your hearts; in that are signs for those who reflect.

(Qur'an 30:21)

The Qur'an tells us that Allah wants husbands and wives should live peacefully together. Thoughtful Muslims are those who ponder the meaning of the gift he has given us by asking us to join one another in the sacrament of marriage. The Qur'an instructs that the miracle of this relationship is the love peace between husband and wife. Therefore, violence and inequality in this relationship is a corruption of one of the great creations he gave to humankind.



The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) was also very explicit about women's status in relationships. He said:

"I recommend that you treat women with goodness. The best of you are those who treat their wives the best." (Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith)

"The strong man is not the one who can use the force of physical strength, but the one who controls his anger." (Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith)

In these Hadiths, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) illuminates interrelated and central truths in Islam: faithful Muslims treat others well, and, in fact, the character of a Muslim man is measured by how well he treats his wife and how often he chooses expressions of love over expressions of anger. To live up to our responsibilities as Muslims, we must create and sustain peaceful, respectful, and equal relationships between husbands and wives.

In light of these holy truths, it is clear that our faith calls on all of us as believers to share the message of mutual respect and non-violence in relationships with our fellow believers and others who labor under the false belief that Islam supports violence in relationships. We must also live up to this standard set by our sacred texts. May Allah instill in our hearts the commitment to practice the proper rights for the women in our community.

Homily notes for Christian Religious Leaders

I call you to worship today and ask you to turn your attention to some of the most basic tenets of Christian faith - peace and love. We sit here together in reflection and reverence as a community of faith, eager to live well in the eyes of God. Living as a Christian means having relationships that are mutually respectful and free of violence, particularly in the family, as this is the foundation of Christian life.

The Bible is explicit in its instruction of this:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.
(Colossians 3:15)

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.
(Colossians 3:19)

We look to God and our faith to provide guidance about how to live our lives on earth. God loves us in perfect peace and we should seek to follow this path by treating and loving one another as God loves us. God created us in love and we should treat all his creations with respect; an act of violence against one of God's children is an act against God.

Relationships between husbands and wives should be built on love, mutual respect, and harmony, not violence. Violence in relationships corrupts the sanctity of Christian love between men and women. It also damages our ability to love ourselves as God wants. "...He who loves his wife loves himself" (Ephesians 5:28) instructs us to consider how the way we treat others reflects back on ourselves. Acting in violence against another is also an act of violence against oneself. Thus, wives and husbands should base their treatment of each other on Christian love and tenderness.

Just as the love God has for Christians is the foundation for the relationship between husbands and wives, it is this relationship between mother and father that is the model for how our children learn to live and treat others with Christian kindness. Violence in these relationships distorts the children's view of how to live in God's love.

Therefore, may God instill in our hearts the desire and will to live up to his call for peace in our families. Let us honor women as God wants, so that there is mutual respect, non-violence, and understanding between husband and wife and a positive model for the children.

Ask God to make you his agent in preventing violence against women and creating harmony and love in our community. Let us each have non-violence in our own homes so that, together, our whole community can live free from violence as God desires.

