

# Prayer List for the Unity Women's Desk

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## October 2019: FOCUS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

“I believe in God, who created men and women in his image, who created the world and entrusted to men and women reproduction, care of the earth and everything else created by his hands.” Verse 1 in *A Unity Creed*.  
(See Genesis 1: 27-29)

This Prayer List invites us to lift up in prayer - and in conversation - one of the UWD's primary focus areas: violence against women. At every Unity Women's Consultation, Moravian Sisters from around the world have named this a top priority. Violence against women hurts individual women, their children, families, workplaces and entire communities.

The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” Globally, more than one-third (30,000) of all women intentionally killed in 2017 were murdered by their current or former intimate partner. Women are most at risk of being killed by intimate partners in Africa (1.7 per 100,000 female population) and the Americas (1.2 per 100,000).

### Pray for awareness and understanding of issues that often remain hidden.

In many communities, cultural norms and religious beliefs are still used to justify harmful practices such as genital mutilation, child marriage and preference for sons. These practices reduce the power of girls and women to make their own choices. They increase their susceptibility to violence and death (from UNICEF website).

Pray that we develop the courage to talk about painful issues and provide comfort, refuge, and bring about change. The statistics can be overwhelming. The pain many women suffer seems too private and too horrifying to talk about in public. But we cannot remain silent. Talking alone will not fix the problems or take away the pain, but it is an important step. 1) Talking can encourage those who are suffering to seek support and help. 2) Talking can encourage those who are able to provide refuge, shelter, health care. 3) Talking makes clear to all that violence is never acceptable - in private or in public. Neither culture nor religion can excuse the sin of violence. 4) Talking can help change laws and strengthen enforcement.

Finally, talking helps us to name the sin and to deal with victim and aggressor in a Christian framework.

“The church as a hope-sharing, care-giving instrument of God needs to offer hope and options for new life to victims, and opportunities for violators to repent, reform, and make amends,” (Priscilla Singh in *Churches say 'No' to Violence against Women* p. 9. The Lutheran World Federation). Throughout the New Testament, Jesus models treating women with love, respect, trust, and compassion. In January 2019, Pastors Alay and Obed from Cuba shared with us “A Unity Creed” that the UWD has published in 9 languages - available on our website or as a booklet at the UWD office. This creed was developed in preparation for a series of workshops about how congregations can help stop violence against women, using biblical examples to show how Jesus honored and cared for women. Pray that this resource will touch hearts throughout the Unity and help us talk about God calls men and women to serve together.

Violence against women is not a “women's issue.” It is a human rights issue that affects all society. Talking about it this way helps us develop new strategies for addressing violence. Mission 21, Moravian partner in Switzerland, co-sponsors an annual Women's Human Rights Advocacy Training for women from around the world to learn how faith informs gender justice in churches and communities. Several Sisters from Tanzania and South Africa have attended, and a Tanzanian Brother will attend next summer. Pray these annual trainings enable participants to help heal their own communities.

The last Unity Synod passed a resolution addressing violence against women that is now part of the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum. Pray that Provinces find ways to address each of these points from the resolution, one step at a time:

- Provinces should raise awareness of violence against women in all congregations.
- support education and resource centers and shelters for victims of such violence.
- form study groups and provide counselling and support to victims and perpetrators of violence
- pressure governments to pass legislation to control violence in movies and on television.
- pressure governments to pass legislation penalizing violence against women and children;
- educate its congregations and members of their rights under existing legislation.
- provide pastoral care training for pastors to address issues of domestic violence.

The Moravian Church in North America has designated October 27, 2019 as Violence Against Women Awareness Day. Pray that congregations find ways to participate and learn about relevant issues and resources. The problem is significant throughout North America. “One in four women in the USA experiences physical violence by a partner and on average, three women a day are murdered in the USA by a current or former partner. Guns were used in two-thirds of those murders.” (see National Network to End Domestic Violence).

European communities also suffer from violence against women. Pray for the Council of Europe and other organizations whose steps in the past year include: Establishing services such as telephone hotlines and crises and advice centres in the Czech Republic. Opening 15 new counselling centres and 200 new places in women’s shelters in Slovakia. Increasing shelters and providing more training for police officers to handle violence against women. Pray for governments and churches to work together to solve the underlying problems.

Pray for (and join) Thursdays in Black, a campaign that Sisters in Tanzania, Nicaragua, and some USA congregations have joined. From the WCC: “Wear black on Thursdays to declare you are part of the global movement resisting attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence.” 180 Moravian women pastors marched in Tanzania to say: “Enough is enough: no more rape and violence against women.”

In Suriname, illegal goldmining the interior increases child labor and human trafficking (women for unwilling prostitution). Pray for adequate actions to stop these. Pray for victims of human trafficking everywhere. Sexual abuse in sports is an issue in many countries, including the USA and Suriname, where the olympic committee (SOC) recently launched a campaign to combat sexual molestation in sport. Also in Suriname at the 11th Moravian Teacher’s Day, more than 800 teachers learned practical tools to recognize symptoms of kids who are sexually abused. Pray for increased efforts to educate teachers, parents, and others.

Pray for the many organizations working to combat violence against women - including Moravian partner organization Mission 21, the Lutheran World Federation, World Council of Churches and UN-Women. UNICEF confirms education is the best weapon against violence, especially in rural areas where women are less likely to report acts of violence committed against them. Remember our Sisters in Central America, where gang violence and lack of police response compound the situation, as in many other countries of the Unity.

*Continue to pray for the Unity Women’s Desk as we seek to connect Sisters across the Unity. Pray for our coordinators and grant recipients who empower Moravian women to serve the Lord and our communities and churches. Please check our website for further information about programs past and present!*

A Benediction for hope as you pray for those impacted by violence against women:

*Adapted from a worship created by Jane Stranz for the World Council of Churches*

May the God of Eve teach you to dance.

May the God of Hagar bring you comfort in the desert.

May the God of Miriam bring companions to you when you struggle.

May the God of Deborah teach you courage for your battles.

May the Christ who knew Mary and Martha show you the way of balance.

May the Christ who healed the bent-over woman heal your pain.

May the Christ of Mary Magdala send you out to proclaim your story.

In the name of Christ who is the memory, hope and authority of the future.

