

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

a call to end domestic violence

a four-session study for United Methodists on the intersections of domestic violence



CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

Living **FAITH** Seeking **JUSTICE** Pursuing **PEACE**

INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THIS BIBLE STUDY?

1. To increase theological understanding and articulation of the rights of women and girls.
2. To foster healthy and constructive dialogue around domestic violence.
3. To address the intersectionality of domestic violence with other issues impacting our communities such as motherhood, gun violence and migration.
4. To increase awareness of domestic violence as a global issue.

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

We recommend facilitators have the following materials:

- Bibles.
- Copies of the “Hidden in Plain Sight” guide for leaders; print outs of readings.
- Reflection Journals.
- Markers and a white board, chalk board, or large poster board.
- Computer and projector to show short video clips in weeks three and four.

Facilitator’s note: In week one you will see the Power and Control Wheel. If you have the means, we suggest printing the wheel as large as possible and have it on the wall throughout the whole study. Also, leave a note about the study with information of when and where the group meets, and invite viewers to explore the wheel themselves.

WHAT WILL THIS STUDY COVER?

This study is intended to give churches, Sunday school classes, bible studies, small groups, college ministries, etc. a way to offer meaningful and faith-centered discussion around domestic violence and related issues.

We have created four one-hourlong sessions. The topics for each week are as follows:

- Week One: Domestic Violence 101
- Week Two: Domestic Violence and Mothers and Children
- Week Three: Domestic Violence and Gun Violence
- Week Four: Domestic Violence and Migration

The hope for this study is to increase awareness of domestic violence while offering practical ways participants of the study can engage in advocacy on local, state, national and global levels.

FAITH IN ACTION CHALLENGE

We encourage you to send a follow-up email after each session. Use this email to thank people for participating, and to invite them to the next session. We also hope that you’ll include a “faith in action challenge” each week. You’ll find our suggested challenges in Appendix I at the end of the study.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Contact Susan Burton, director of Women and Children’s Advocacy with your feedback on the study.
Email: sburton@umcjustice.org.

WEEK ONE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE 101

OPENING PRAYER

Open in prayer. Use this prayer or another of your choosing.

Creator and Holy God, you have created us in your image. Because of this, we believe every woman and child are all individuals of sacred worth. Open our eyes so we may see how you see, open our ears so we may hear how you hear, open our hearts so we may love how you love. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Spend a minute or two reviewing the goals for this Bible study and why your congregation has decided to take this on.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Ask the participants to write down each of their understanding of domestic violence. What is it? What happens? What are the different forms of domestic violence that occur?

Then, invite the group to share their thoughts while the leader writes these thoughts on a whiteboard (or equivalent).

Background: Domestic violence is a particular type of gender-based violence, which is any form of violence based on one's gender and can be directed toward women, men, girls and boys. Domestic violence occurs in at least four types: physical, psychological, sexual, verbal.

Activity

Divide the group into three equal groups. **Designate** one of the groups to stand up.

Read the following while one third of the group is standing:

According to the World Health Organization, "1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime."¹ Look around you. Those standing represent the number of women worldwide who have experienced gender-based violence.

Background: As a global church, we are committed to ending gender-based violence and valuing worth and dignity to women and girls.

After the participants have looked around, **ask**:

- Did you realize gender-based violence was so common?
 - How does it make you feel?
 - What do you think it says about our theology that violence against women is so common?
-

THE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Have participants look at the Power and Control Wheel.² Either print out enough copies for each participant, project it, or have a large copy printed and on a wall. A larger version is in Appendix A. The wheel highlights the cyclical pattern of domestic and sexual violence.



Ask participants:

- What actions of abuse/violence are familiar?
- What actions are new to you?

Facilitator's note: Be sure to point out that not all forms of domestic violence are physical. Tactics such as isolation, threats, gaslighting, economic control are prevalent in instances of domestic violence.

WHAT DOES THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAY?

Invite two different people to read aloud the two statements from The United Methodist Church found in Appendix B. Ask the other participants to write down words or phrases about women and children that stand out to them.

Ask the group:

- What words or phrases stood out to you in these two statements from The United Methodist Church?
- Are you surprised the church says this? Why or why not?

SCRIPTURE

Have someone read aloud **2 Samuel 13:1-22**.

Lead a discussion on the text. Some questions might include:

- Who are the main characters? What is their relationship with one another? (Draw a diagram of how the characters are related to one another.)
- What happened in this story?
- What surprises you about this text?
- A common misconception of victims in gender-based violence situation is “Why don’t they just leave?” What structures were in place that prevented Tamar from leaving? What structures exist for victims today?
- In this story, we see characters remain silent about the situation. Even Absalom tells Tamar to stay quiet. How does silence injure the victim? Why do those of us who haven’t experienced gender-based violence prefer silence?
- When King David heard what happened, he did not take action. This inaction clearly shows what happens in a patriarchal society — refusing to pursue punishment for one’s son, even if that son commits violence toward women. In what ways do these attitudes take place in society today?

Now, let’s compare the conversation of Amnon and Tamar with Jesus and the woman caught in adultery. Have someone read aloud **John 8:1-11**.

Lead a discussion on the text. Some questions might include:

- What happened in this story?
- What are some occurring themes? Are there any similarities to Tamar’s story?
- How was the woman treated? If you were in this situation, how would this make you feel?
- Who challenged society by affirming the sacred worth of the woman?
- What are some of the characteristics of Jesus’ behavior?
- Compare the actions and characteristics of Jesus with those of Amnon, Absalom and King David. Whose behavior are we asked to model?

REFLECTION AND WRAP UP

As your Bible study is coming to a close, help the group to reflect on the overall themes of the day. Some question might ask include:

- What are some tactics listed in the Power and Control Wheel that you also see in the Bible stories we read? Do you see something in the story that is not on the wheel?
- How are survivors of gender-based violence treated in your community?
- How can the church be proactive in addressing gender-based violence and stop it before it occurs?
- What information or perspectives have you heard today that you didn’t know before? What was the most challenging for you? How can you use, implement, or continue to learn from these new insights?

Ask the group what lingering questions they might have.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close in prayer. Use this prayer or another of your choosing.

Loving God, as we leave here today, help us remember the conversations that took place. We pray for those who are in violent relationships. Give them strength and hope. Give them a friend to talk to or a safe place to go.

We also pray that those who are abusers in these relationships may experience the redeeming power of your love. Help us always recognize the sacred worth of all people. Let us be a safe place for those to seek refuge. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Appendix A — Power and Control Wheel



Appendix B — Week One UMC Excerpts

Reading 1:

We recognize that family violence and abuse in all its forms — verbal, psychological, physical, sexual — is detrimental to the covenant of the human community. We encourage the Church to provide a safe environment, counsel, and support for the victim and to work with the abuser to understand the root causes and forms of abuse and to overcome such behaviors. Regardless of the cause or the abuse, both the victim and the abuser need the love of the Church. While we deplore the actions of the abuser, we affirm that person to be in need of God’s redeeming love.

United Methodist Social Principles, ¶161.H

Reading 2:

The history of our faith is the history of attempts to recover the insight of Genesis 1 that all creation is sacred in God’s sight, and all human beings are creatures of sacred worth... United Methodists have worked to eradicate the many forms of violence that destroy the integrity of individuals, families, communities, and nations. People of faith must work to change attitudes, beliefs, policies, and practices at all levels of society that dehumanize and promote the exploitation and abuse of women and girls.

United Methodist Book of Resolutions, 3427, “Eradicating Sexual and Gender-based Violence”

WEEK TWO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

OPENING PRAYER

Open in prayer. Use this prayer or another of your choosing.

Giver of Life, thank you for the mothers that bring life into the world. We pray for the mothers in relationships that threaten their emotional and physical safety. May they find strength and courage to carry on. We pray for the children who live in the midst of domestic abuse. May we provide spaces that ensure they feel loved and safe. Bless our time together and let us be open with one another. In your name, we pray. Amen.

RECAP AND REFLECTION *(optional)*

Reflect and recap the conversation from week 1.

Have someone in the group recap the discussion of Domestic Violence 101. This person can be the leader, a designated participant or volunteer.

Background: Last week we talked about the many forms of domestic violence. We looked at the Power and Control Wheel related to domestic violence and sexual assault. Then we read through the story of Tamar and the woman caught in adultery through the lens of gender-based violence.

Ask the group if they have any lingering questions about last week's discussion.

Ask if anyone participated in one of the "challenges" you emailed out after last week's study. Let this be a time of sharing thoughts, concerns, new insights, challenges and triumphs. If someone brought information on local organizations they researched or any information relevant to last week's discussion, now would be a good time to share.

THIS WEEK

This week we will look out how domestic violence affects children, motherhood, and the whole family dynamic as well as addressing the reality of reproductive coercion.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Activity

Tell participants to raise their hand when you point to them and to keep it up. Using a stopwatch, **point** at a different participant every three seconds until 20 people have raised their hands (one minute). If you have fewer than 20 participants, have them raise their other hand when you point to them. After you have 20 hands in the air, **share** with the group that this is about how many people were victims of rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner in the last minute. And, actually, that math isn't quite right. Really, on average it's 24 people every minute, which is one every 2.5 seconds.³

To be read by the facilitator:

A woman's health is often affected by domestic violence.

One way this happens is through reproductive coercion. Reproductive coercion is when one partner violently controls the reproductive decision-making of the other partner. These coercive behaviors can include refusing to wear a condom, denying birth control and forced sexual intercourse.

According to the Center for Disease Control, "Women in relationships with violence have four times the risk for contracting STIs, including HIV, than women in relationships without violence."⁴

Meanwhile, we often forget about the effect domestic violence has on children. We tend to focus on helping the mother find safety while failing to recognize the effects it might have on the children in the household.

Activity

Divide the group into four. **Designate** one of the groups to stand up.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline reports that a child witnessed violence in a quarter of every domestic violence cases filed in state courts.⁵ Those standing represent the number of children who witnessed domestic violence.

The hotline also says that 30 to 60 percent of people who commit acts of domestic violence also commit acts of child abuse.⁶

WHAT DOES THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAY?

Invite three different people to read aloud the statements from The United Methodist Church found in Appendix C. Ask the group to write down words or phrases about women and children.

Ask the group:

- What words or phrases stood out to you in these three statements from The United Methodist Church?
- Are you surprised the church says this? Why or why not?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Invite one person to read **Genesis 16:1-16** aloud.

Background: Hagar was an Egyptian slave of Abram and Sarai. Since Sarai could not have children, Hagar was raped by Abram so that Sarai could have a child. When Sarai saw she had become pregnant, however, she harshly abused Hagar, which caused Hagar to run away. Later, God finds Hagar in the wilderness. God sees the value and dignity of Hagar. Because of this, Hagar calls God El-roi, the God who sees.

Lead a discussion on the text. Some questions might include:

- What happened in this story?
- Who are the characters?
- What dangers did Hagar face by her decision to run away (Hint: Her status as a pregnant slave, shelter, security, food, etc.)? Knowing this, why was it essential for Hagar to flee?
- How can we improve our “vision” to see domestic violence survivors in the same way God saw Hagar?

Invite someone to read both **Luke 2:26-38** and **Matthew 1:18-25** aloud.

Background: In Luke 1, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would conceive a son. This caused Mary to be perplexed since she was a virgin. Matthew 1:18-25 shows us Joseph’s distress over the situation. At first, he goes along with societal norms, choosing to separate himself from her rather than acknowledging her value and dignity. He knows people will look at Mary with disgrace and even his own reputation might suffer. Yet, Joseph sees Mary’s worth as a mother and the impact their child will bring to the world. Joseph went against societal norms by remaining faithful to Mary and choosing to support and value her.

Lead a discussion on the text. Some questions might include:

- What happened?
- Who are the characters?
- How will people treat Mary as an unwed Mother?
- What was the significance of Joseph staying with Mary?
- How can both of these stories be used to encourage us to stand against gender-based violence and give value and dignity to women and children?
- Refer to the Power and Control Wheel from Week 1: what behaviors in these stories do you see that challenge the violence in the wheel?
- Where in your community can children in domestic abuse situations go to seek safety and healing?
- In what ways can your church be talking about and advocating to prevent these issues more?

CLOSING PRAYER

Close in prayer. Use this prayer or another of your choosing.

Creating and loving God, we pray for mothers who bring new life and nurture life in families and communities. We pray for children who bring curiosity and joy, promise and hope.

Help us to be mindful of the pain of all people who are caught up in violent relationships. Help us see as You see and love as you love. May we discern how our lives and love for you may make a difference for those who are broken by abuse in our community. Strengthen us to do the work of bettering our world. May we build families, communities and churches of safety and love.

In your name, we pray. Amen.

Appendix C — Week Two UMC Excerpt

Reading 1:

We recognize that family violence and abuse in all its forms—verbal, psychological, physical, sexual—is detrimental to the covenant of the human community. We encourage the Church to provide a safe environment, counsel, and support for the victim and to work with the abuser to understand the root causes and forms of abuse and to overcome such behaviors. Regardless of the cause or the abuse, both the victim and the abuser need the love of the Church. While we deplore the actions of the abuser, we affirm that person to be in need of God’s redeeming love.

United Methodist Social Principles, ¶161.H

Reading 2:

Motherhood is sacred... Tragically, stories of maternal death are commonplace today. For many women, especially those living in poverty and in developing countries, giving birth is dangerous and life-threatening. Worldwide maternal mortality is a leading cause of death for women of childbearing age. Every 90 seconds a woman dies somewhere in the world from complications during pregnancy or childbirth; for every woman who dies, another 20 suffer disability.

United Methodist Book of Resolutions, 3202, “Maternal Health: The Church’s Role”

Reading 3:

Moreover, children have the rights to food, shelter, clothing, health care, and emotional well-being as do adults, and these rights we affirm as theirs regardless of actions or inactions of their parents or guardians. In particular, children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

United Methodist Social Principles, ¶162.C

WEEK THREE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND GUN VIOLENCE

OPENING PRAYER

Open in prayer. Use this prayer or another of your choosing. This prayer, “A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed,” can be found in Appendix D for easy printing.

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace
**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day
God deplores violence in our homes and street,
Rebukes the world’s warring madness,
Humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.
And so shall we.

RECAP AND REFLECTION *(optional)*

Reflect and recap the conversation from week 2.

Have someone in the group recap the discussion of Domestic Violence: Mothers and Children. This person can be the leader, a designated participant or volunteer.

Background: Last week we looked at the effects domestic violence had on children, motherhood and women’s health. We also read through and discussed the unexpected motherhoods of both Hagar and Mary.

Ask the group if they have any lingering questions about last week’s discussion.

Ask if anyone participated in one of the “challenges” you emailed out after last week’s study. Let this be a time of sharing thoughts, concerns, new insights, challenges and triumphs. If someone brought information on local organizations they researched or any information relevant to last week’s discussion, now would be a good time to share.

THIS WEEK

This week we will look at the intersection of domestic violence and gun violence.

Activity

This exercise is designed to help each participant reflect on their identities and experiences, while also being aware of the identities and experiences of everyone else in the room.

Ask everyone to stand in a circle. Once all the participants are in a circle, **say**:

We’re about to engage in an exercise that will help each of us express our identities and experiences and help us to see the identities and experiences of those around

us. I am going to read a series of statements one at a time. If you can relate to that statement, please step into the circle. Some of these are often hidden from public view, so you might be surprised to see someone step in. I hope that we can agree that's what shared here in this room, stays in this room. I hope that everyone can feel they can be open with one another. However, if you're uncomfortable with stepping in for a particular statement, please feel free to simply remain in the circle.

During this activity, I invite you to be mindful of your own identity and experience and be aware and respectful of others in the room. Please remain silent throughout the activity.

After everyone has had a chance to step in, I'll say rejoin the circle, and we'll move on to the next statement.

Step into the circle if:

- you are an only child.
- you have siblings.
- tv shows and movies represent your age demographic in the correct proportions.
- forms already have your gender listed.
- public access to buildings, parks, restaurants, etc. is easy for you.
- people close to you when you were younger expected you to go to college.
- you funded yourself through college without your parents' or guardians' financial support.
- you have ever felt judged by someone.
- you have ever judged someone.
- you can walk alone at night without the fear of violence.
- you can use a public restroom without the fear of verbal abuse, physical intimidation or arrest.
- you have ever been asked to represent your race in a classroom, seminar, work meeting, etc.
- you ever felt like you didn't belong.
- you ever felt like you didn't have a voice.
- each time you've moved out of your home, you did so voluntarily and had another home to move into.
- you were the first in your immediate family to graduate from high school
- you see people of your race positively represented when you watch TV or open to the front page of a magazine or newspaper.
- you go into spaces where there might be guns.
- you overcame any life-threatening experience.
- you or someone you know have been a victim of gun violence.
- someone you know has lost their life to gun violence.
- you have ever asked if someone has safely locked up their gun before entering their home or business.

After the last one, have everyone return to their seats.

Lead a discussion on the activity. Some questions might include:

- What was the experience like for you?
- What did you notice about how you participated in this activity? Were there times when you were not sure you wanted to step into the circle?

- What did it feel like to move into the circle by yourself or watch other people enter by themselves?
 - How do we build relationships when people are alone in their experiences?
 - How do our experiences influence whom we see and how we interpret what's going on around us?
 - How does God call us to understand perspectives different from our own?
 - How might these statements relate to our conversations about domestic and gun violence?
-

GUN VIOLENCE

To be read by the facilitator:

In the past couple of weeks, we have talked about several forms of domestic violence and how it impacts women and children.

More than 6,400 women in the United States died between 2001 and 2012 because an intimate partner murdered them using a gun.⁷ That's greater than the number of U.S. casualties in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined during that same time. This statistic alone highlights the severity of the dangerous conditions women face in violent households.

The threat to a woman's life in situations of domestic abuse is severe. In fact, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by 500 percent.⁸

A recent bill, titled The Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act, has potentially disastrous side-effects on victims of domestic violence. Essentially, this bill requires states to recognize the concealed carry laws from other states. This requirement is especially dangerous for victims of domestic abuse because some states' laws regarding concealed carry are very lenient. Some states even allow convicted domestic abusers to carry concealed weapons.

In an article for Quartz, Sara Gorman explains how this bill affects domestic violence victims. She writes, "Here's how this act could be devastating for victims of domestic abuse: if someone with a history of domestic abuse is denied a gun after a background check in one state, he or she could simply go to another state that does not require background checks at the point of purchase or permits for concealed carry, purchase a gun, and carry it across state lines."⁹

Activity

Watch [this commercial](#) from Everytown for Gun Safety. [<https://youtu.be/SUAL6ie1ufc>]

To be read by the facilitator:

Everytown for Gun Safety released this 30-second ad showcasing the effects of guns in domestic abuse situations. We're going to watch the video, but I want you to know the video contains scenes of domestic violence.

Lead a discussion about the commercial. Some questions might include:

- How are you feeling after watching this video?
 - Who suffers in the video?
-

WHAT DOES THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAY?

Invite one person to read aloud the statement from The United Methodist Church found in Appendix E. Ask the group to write down words or phrases that stand out to them, especially about gun violence.

Ask the group:

- What words or phrases stood out to you in this statement from The United Methodist Church?
- Are you surprised the church says this? Why or why not?

SCRIPTURE READING

Invite one person to read **Micah 4:1-4** aloud.

Background: Micah describes a future where the peoples of the world will come together and live in peace. He also paints a picture in this passage of a world that does not seek violence. He writes, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Micah 4:3) The imagery Micah uses is striking. Nations shall transform their weapons of wars into tools for farming. In other words, that which used to harm is now used to feed and sustain life.

Lead a discussion on the text. Some questions might include:

- What stands out the most for you in this passage?
- As a church, what can we do to move toward the vision in Micah 4?
- How can Micah's vision end suffering?
- How would Micah's vision save the lives of women and children?
- What information or perspectives have you heard today that you didn't know before?
- What was the most challenging for you?
- How does your faith compel you to promote Micah's vision of peace?

CLOSING PRAYER

Close in prayer. Use this prayer or another of your choosing.

God of peace and love, we live in a chaotic world filled with war and violence. Often, those who suffer the most from violence are women and children. Help us remember those who live in fear. Guide us, gracious God, to build a world of peace and love, so that one day we may fulfill Micah's vision. Empower us to turn our weapons of destruction into tools for feeding and sustain life. May we be a place of safety and refuge. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Appendix D — Week Three Opening Prayer

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace

**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day
God deplores violence in our homes and street,
Rebukes the world's warring madness,
Humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.
And so shall we.

United Methodist Book of Discipline, "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed"

Appendix E — Week Three UMC Excerpt

As followers of Jesus, called to live into the reality of God’s dream of shalom as described by Micah, we must address the epidemic of gun violence so “that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in God’s paths.” Therefore, we call upon United Methodists to prayerfully address gun violence in their local context.

United Methodist Book of Resolutions, 3428, “Our Call to End Gun Violence”

WEEK FOUR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MIGRATION

OPENING PRAYER

Open in prayer. Use this prayer or another of your choosing. This prayer, “A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed,” can be found in Appendix F for easy printing.

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace
**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day
God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.
And so shall we.

RECAP AND REFLECTION *(optional)*

Reflect and recap the conversation from week 3.

Have someone in the group recap the discussion of Domestic Violence and Gun Violence. This person can be the leader, a designated participant or volunteer.

Background: Last week we looked at the relationship between domestic violence and gun violence. We learned that the presence of a gun in situations of domestic violence increases the risk of homicide by 500 percent. We also learned about the Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act, which would make it far too easy for someone convicted of domestic abuse to have and obtain a concealed carry permit.

Ask the group if they have any lingering questions about last week’s discussion.

Ask if anyone participated in one of the “challenges” you emailed out after last week’s study. Let this be a time of sharing thoughts, concerns, new insights, challenges and triumphs. If someone brought information on local organizations they researched or any information relevant to last week’s discussion, now would be a good time to share.

THIS WEEK

This week are going to look at the relationship between domestic violence and immigration. We’ll begin with an exercise that looks at the many reasons why people migrate.

Activity

For this exercise you will need a whiteboard/chalkboard/or equivalent.

Write at the top of the board “Migration” then **create** two sections: one labeled “Push” and the other “Pull” (*note: it might be helpful to use different colors for each section*).

Explain to the group that a push is the internal factors that might cause someone to migrate, and a pull is the external factors that might prompt someone to relocate. Push and pull factors may be voluntary or forced. Sometimes the push and pull factors are related. For example, a person of an oppressed religion might be *pushed* to leave because of intolerance and *pulled* to a new location because of religious liberties.

Ask the group to name some of the push and pull factors involved in one's decision to migrate.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS SEEKING ASYLUM

To be read by the facilitator:

The U.S. Department of Justice announced in June 2018 several changes to the ways the U.S. government treats immigrants and refugees seeking to live there. A lot of the coverage of these new policies focused on the practice of tearing children from their parents. Less covered, however, is the revocation of a longstanding policy that allowed survivors of domestic and gang violence to seek asylum in the U.S.

As we have seen throughout this study, domestic violence frequently occurs around the world. The decision by the Justice Department undoubtedly affects the lives of thousands of women and children, individuals of sacred worth who are fleeing life-threatening situations only to be told their lives do not matter and their claims of abuse are not believable. In many instances, fleeing one's country is the only option victims have to escape domestic abuse and potentially death. Under this new rule, the safety of these individuals is in danger.

In the announcement of these new policies, the attorney general claimed the asylum process was being "abused" and prevented "just claims" from being processed. This stark differentiation implies the safety and protection of women and children are not "just claims."

Although the issue of domestic violence is a problem for women and children within the United States, there are laws that help and protect survivors. In many countries, no such protection exists which is why many flee to the U.S. hoping to seek asylum.

However, for women and children who are undocumented, their options for safety and protection are few to none. The New York Times released a minidocumentary highlighting women's struggle to either seek help from abuse or be deported.

Let's watch [that video](https://youtu.be/dqAGMyPlfpc). [<https://youtu.be/dqAGMyPlfpc>]

Facilitator's note: This passage is an edited excerpt from an article posted on the Church and Society website. Visit [our website](#) to view the article in its entirety.

Lead a discussion about the video. Some questions might include:

- What are your initial reactions to the video?
- What are the complexities of the situation?
- What can your church do to provide support to domestic violence survivors who are undocumented?

WHAT DOES THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAY?

Invite one person to read aloud the statement from The United Methodist Church found in Appendix G. Ask the group to write down words or phrases that stand out to them, especially about migration, women and children, and violence.

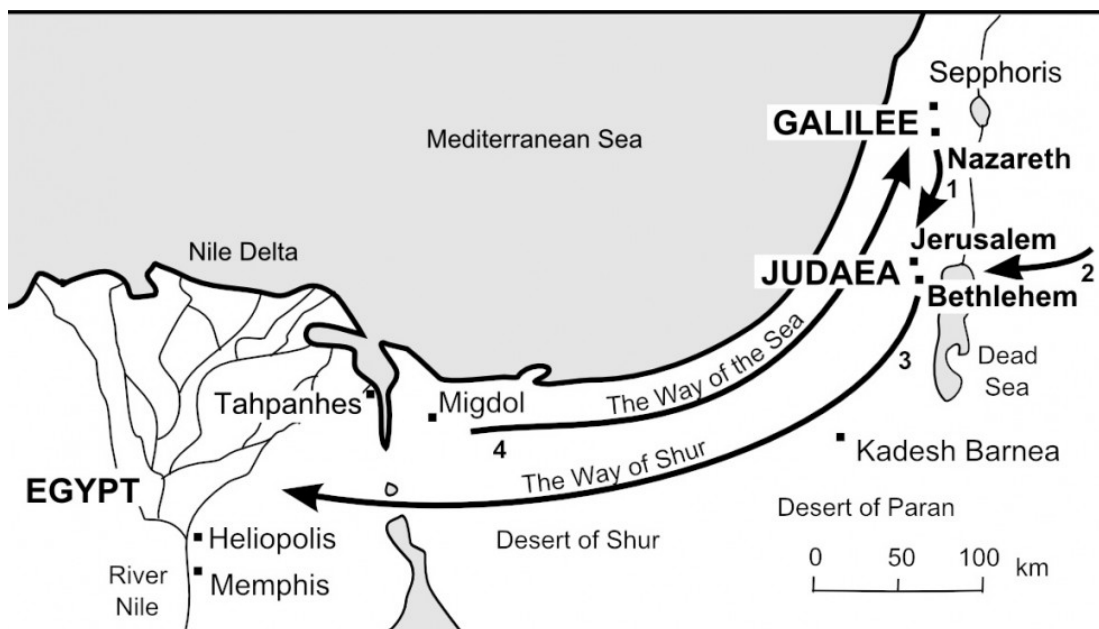
Ask the group:

- What words or phrases stood out to you in this statement from The United Methodist Church?
- Are you surprised the church says this? Why or why not?

Scripture Reading

Invite someone to read aloud **Matthew 2:16-23**.

Background: When Herod heard of Jesus' birth, he ordered the murder of every child two years or younger. This horrific order not only put Jesus' life in danger but Mary's and Joseph's as well. So, Mary and Joseph did what they had to do; they fled. The journey from Bethlehem to Egypt is over 430 miles.¹⁰ 430 miles through the dry and desert land. 430 miles with a baby. But Mary and Joseph were desperate to do whatever it took to keep their child alive. This map shows the relative distances they traveled.



Facilitator's note: A larger scale map is in Appendix H. It might be helpful to print this out for participants to see.

Lead a discussion on the text. Some questions might include:

- What happened?
- Who are the characters?
- Use the same Push/Pull exercise from earlier. What are the push and pull factors in this story?
- How might this story be different if Mary, Joseph, and Jesus could not seek asylum in Egypt?
- Put this story in the context of someone fleeing from an abusive relationship. Think of the catalysts/agents that forced them to flee. What support system(s) existed?

OVERALL REFLECTION

Lead a discussion on the overall Bible study. Some questions might include:

- What takeaways do you want to remember most about this study?
- What has been most challenging for you?
- How will you implement the material you have learned into ministry programs in your church?

Facilitator's note: Since this is the last week of the study, there will not be a designated time to reflect on the final week or the faith in action challenge. Although it is not required, feel free to set up a post-study gathering to discuss any lingering questions, concerns or reflections.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close in prayer. Use this prayer or another of your choosing.

Almighty God, creator and sustainer of all, we know you love us more than we can fathom, and more than we could ever earn. As we close this study and resume life in all its craziness and fullness, we want to remember what we have learned and shared.

We pray for those who are in violent relationships. Give them strength and fill them with hope. Help them find a friend to talk to, a safe place to go.

We pray for those who are affected by the violence. We pray for children, families and friends. Give them strength, wisdom and courage.

We pray for those who abuse. May they feel the power of your presence and experience the transforming power of your love.

We pray for the migrant. We live in a world blessed by diverse backgrounds and peoples. Although we may have different journeys, we all experience the joy, love, pain and wonder in our world. Teach us to welcome the migrant and transform us from strangers into friends.

Help us not lose sight of recognizing the sacred worth of all people. May we be a safe place for one who seeks refuge in all facets of life. In your name, we pray. Amen

Appendix F — Week Four Opening Prayer

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ,
calls us by grace

**to be renewed in the image of our Creator,
that we may be one
in divine love for the world.**

Today is the day

God embraces all hues of humanity,
delights in diversity and difference,
favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.

And so shall we.

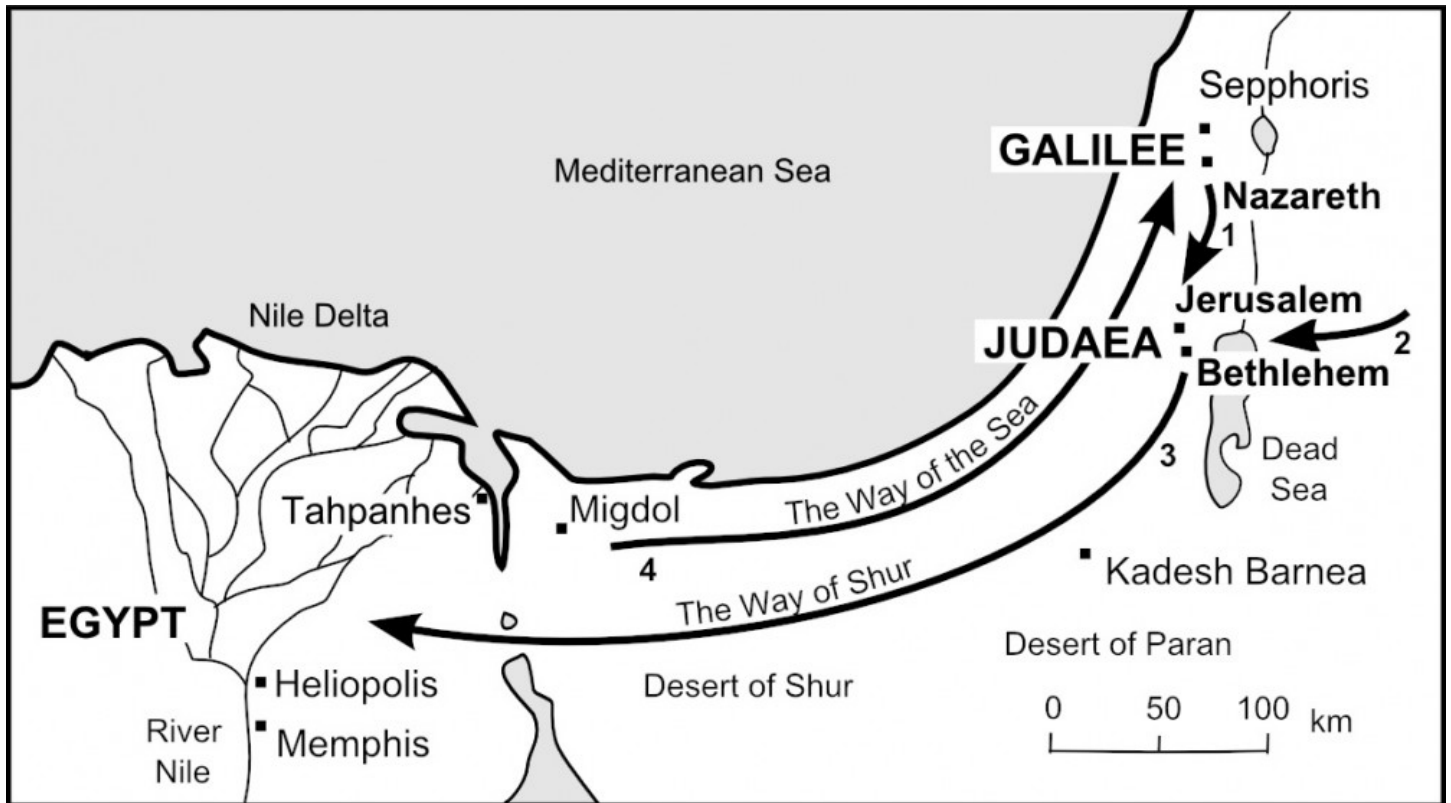
United Methodist Book of Discipline, "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed"

Appendix G — Week Four UMC Excerpt

We recognize, embrace, and affirm all persons, regardless of country of origin, as members of the family of God. We affirm the right of all persons to equal opportunities for employment, access to housing, health care, education, and freedom from social discrimination. We urge the Church and society to recognize the gifts, contributions, and struggles of those who are immigrants and to advocate for justice for all. We oppose immigration policies that separate family members from each other or that include detention of families with children, and we call on local churches to be in ministry with immigrant families.

United Methodist Social Principles ¶162.H

Appendix H — Week Four Map



"Mary & Joseph go to Bethlehem," The Bible Journey, accessed July 27, 2018, <http://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/3-jesus-childhood-journeys-b/mary-joseph-go-to-bethlehem/>

Appendix I — Faith in Action Challenge

We encourage you to send a follow up email after each session. Use this email to thank people for participating and to invite them to the next session. We also hope that you'll include a "faith in action challenge" each week. This challenge gives participants an opportunity to do something about what they've learned about the realities of domestic violence, and with what The United Methodist Church and Bible have to say on the topic.

Week One:

- Reach out to your elected officials to ask what they're doing to protect domestic violence victims. Church and Society can quickly connect you with your members of Congress. Visit <https://www.umcjustice.org/take-action>.
- Research programs in your city/county/state that assist victims.
- Invite someone from a domestic violence program to speak to your small groups or gathering of friends.

Week Two:

- Reach out to your elected officials and urge them to support legislation and funding for programs that assist women and children survivors of domestic abuse. Church and Society can quickly connect you with your members of Congress. Visit <https://www.umcjustice.org/take-action>.
- Research programs in your city/county/state that provide assistants to victims
- Invite someone from a domestic violence program to speak to your small groups or gathering of friends.
- Visit the Men Can Stop Rape website to learn more about the ways you can create spaces that promote healthy masculinity. Visit <https://www.mencanstoprape.org>.

Week Three:

- Read more about the impact of the Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act. <https://giffords.org/issue/concealed-carry-reciprocity>. Reach out to your elected officials and urge them to support laws that protect domestic abuse survivors from gun violence. Church and Society can quickly connect you with your members of Congress. Visit <https://www.umcjustice.org/take-action>.
- Research the gun laws in your city/county/state. What are the gun laws regarding domestic abusers?
- Invite someone who is a survivor of gun violence or domestic violence to speak to your small groups or gathering of friends.
- Read more on Church and Society's website about domestic abuse and gun violence. <https://www.umcjustice.org/news-and-stories/domestic-abuse-and-gun-violence-a-fatal-intersection-562>

Week Four:

- Reach out to your elected officials and urge them to support legislation and funding that protects undocumented women and children survivors of domestic abuse. Church and Society can quickly connect you with your members of Congress. Visit <https://www.umcjustice.org/take-action>.
- Research the laws in your community/county/state that deal with undocumented persons in situations of domestic abuse.
- Write a letter to the U.S. Department of Justice demanding they restore the ability of domestic violence survivors to seek asylum.

END NOTES

1. "Violence against women," World Health Organization, last modified November 29, 2017, <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>
2. Power and Control Wheel. Domestic Abuse and Intervention Programs. <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>
3. "Get the Facts & Figures," The National Domestic Violence Hotline, accessed July 27, 2018. <http://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/>
4. "Intersection of Intimate Partner Violence and HIV in Women," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified February 2014. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv/13_243567_Green_AAG-a.pdf
5. "Get the Facts & Figures," The National Domestic Violence Hotline, accessed July 27, 2018. <http://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/>
6. "Get the Facts & Figures," The National Domestic Violence Hotline, accessed July 27, 2018. <http://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/>
7. "Guns and Domestic Violence," Giffords Law Center, accessed July 27, 2018, <http://lawcenter.giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Domestic-Violence-Factsheet.pdf>
8. "Statistics," National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, accessed July 27, 2018, <https://ncadv.org/statistics>
9. Sara Gorman, "The US's latest gun bill will be devastating for victims of domestic violence," Quartz, December 1, 2017, <https://qz.com/1144247/the-concealed-carry-reciprocity-act-of-2017-will-be-devastating-for-victims-of-domestic-violence/>
10. "Mary & Joseph go to Bethlehem," The Bible Journey, accessed July 27, 2018, <http://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/3-jesus-childhood-journeys-b/mary-joseph-go-to-bethlehem/>