



## **Begin a conversation in your community about gender equality**

In the final days of the 2021 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, we are encouraging UCA congregations and communities to begin a conversation about how local practices, worship and ways of being community reflect our Christian belief in the equality of all people.

The Uniting Church has been long committed to gender justice, gender equality and intentional practices that encourage the full participation and empowerment of all people. These same things are key to combatting the rampant gender-based violence that poses one of the most significant social and cultural challenges we face today in Australia and beyond.

The reality and prevalence of gender-based violence is everyone's business, and it is everyone's responsibility to challenge the social norms that underpin it. Many smaller, more socially accepted practices – casual sexism and discrimination, rigid gender roles and unequal access to power and opportunities – can contribute to a culture which excuses more extreme forms of violence and inequality.

To shape church cultures that mitigate against violence, it is important to recognise where gender inequality, stereotypes and unconscious bias persist in our congregations and communities.

Research by the [National Church Life Survey](#) found 78 per cent of senior local church leaders were male, while the Australian chapter of [CBE International](#) found 41% of women say they have more opportunities to lead outside their churches than they do within.

We also know that some perpetrators of gender-based violence who are members and adherents of Christian churches have sought to theologically justify violence and reinforce their power in intimate partnerships.

A safer, more just and equal world for all people begins where we are – locally. And just as smaller and seemingly harmless practices can perpetuate the cycle of inequality and violence, small but courageous actions can create significant, positive cultural shifts.

Below are some questions you might consider and use to begin a conversation in your context.

### **Leadership equality**

Removing barriers to leadership opportunities and participation is key to facilitating the more equal distribution of power in our communities. Regularly including diverse voices and perspectives can expand horizons and develop understanding and empathy.

#### *Questions to ask:*

- Do people of all genders have equal and fair access to leadership roles, influence and resources?
- Are the voices of all genders regularly heard in our worship?
- Would we fairly say that decision-making power is evenly distributed?

- Do we have policies relating to gender balance on committees and councils?

## **Resisting gendered stereotypes and language**

Rigid gender stereotypes and roles can permit the unjust distribution of power, and limit opportunities for both women and men to offer their gifts and skills and shape their own lives.

*Questions to ask:*

- Does the way roles and responsibilities are distributed in our congregation or community perpetuate gender stereotypes? One quick way to assess this: have a look at the roster for the past month. Do people of all genders regularly appear on the morning tea roster? What about any other roles which have traditionally been tied to gender identity?
- Who in our community tends to take on responsibility for planning, organising, coordinating and volunteering?
- Have we considered the presence of gendered language in our music and preaching?

## **Preaching and teaching**

As one of the most common elements of worship, preaching is one key way to encourage reflection on the biblical and theological foundations of our commitment to equality.

*Questions to ask:*

- Does our preaching and use of the Bible include messages that challenge violence and inequality? Does our preaching ever explicitly address gender-based violence?
- Do a variety of resources (such as feminist or other contextual commentaries) inform our preaching and teaching?
- Do we address or tend to ignore more difficult biblical texts about violence?
- Is the image of God we preach and embrace here inclusive and accessible?

## **Reflect**

What does your conversation tell you about practices of equality in your congregation?

What does your conversation call you to pray about, act upon and advocate for?

What are some practical next steps you might take to increase the power and presence of all people in your congregation?

*You might like to engage with the Assembly's Beyond Violence resource or display a 'the UCA says no to violence' poster where your community gathers. If they don't exist already, you may wish to establish policies and processes for addressing sexism, harassment or discrimination in your community.*