**A reading from Psalm 22**

Reader 1: I am in my thirties and so is my husband. We are both active in the church, respected and well liked. We have four children and live in a nice home with everything we need. I have everything… except life without fear.

Reader 2: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? I have cried desperately for help but still it does not come. During the day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. I call at night but get no rest.

Reader 1: For most of my married life there have been times when my husband has beaten me. What do I mean by beaten? I mean that parts of my body have been hit violently and repeatedly and that I have been left with painful bruised, swelling, bleeding wounds. I have been punched and kicked in the head, chest, face and stomach. I have been slapped for crying. I have been threatened when he has had a good day and when he has had a bad day.

Reader 2: But I am no longer a person: I am a worm, despised and scorned by everyone! All who see me make fun of me: they stick out their tongues and shake their heads.

Reader 1: Few people have ever seen my black and blue face or swollen lips, because I stayed indoors, feeling ashamed. You may ask me: ‘Why didn’t I seek help?’

Reader 2: You relied on the Lord, they say. Why doesn’t he save you? If the Lord likes you, why doesn’t he help you?

Reader 1: Early in our marriage, I went to a Pastor who told me after a few visits that my husband meant no real harm- he was just confused and insecure. I was encouraged to be more tolerant and understanding. Most important I was told to forgive him for the beatings, just as Christ had forgiven me on the cross. I did that too.

Reader 2: It was you who brought me safely through birth, and when I was a baby, you kept me safe. I have relied on you since the day I was born, and you have always been my God. Do not stay away from me? Trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Reader 1: Things continued. Next time I turned to a doctor and he gave me pills to relax me. I was stressed and nervous. I turned to a friend, and when her husband found out, he accused me of making things up. She was told to stay away from me. I turned to a professional guidance agency. I was told that my husband needed help and that I should find a way to control the incidents.

Reader 2: Many enemies surround me like bulls: they are all around me, like fierce bulls from the land of Bashan. They open their mouths like lions, roaring and tearing at me.

Reader 1: Once I called the police.. They did not respond to the call, they only called several hours later to ask if things had settled down.

Reader 2: My strength is gone, gone like water spilled on the ground. All of my bones are out of joint. My heart is like melted wax. My throat is as dry as dust, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have left me for dead in the dust.

Reader 1: If it happens again, I have nowhere to go. No one wants to take in a woman with four children.

Reader 2: O Lord, don’t stay far away from me! Come quickly to my rescue.

*(Violence against Women: A resource manual for the Church in South Africa – PACSA)*
A message to women who are abused

I am not to be blamed for being beaten and abused.  
I am not the cause of the other’s violent behaviour.  
I do not like it or want it.  
I do not have to take it.  
I am an important human being.  
I am a worthwhile woman.  
I deserve to be treated with respect.  
I do have the power over my own life.  
I can use my power to take good care of myself.  
I can make changes in my life if I want to.  
I am not alone. I can ask for help.  
I am worth working for and changing for.  
I deserve to make my own life safe and happy.  
I can talk to someone I can trust.

Suggestion – this could be written in the pew leaflet (NISAA: Institute for Women's Development, Johannesburg)

A PRACTICAL ACT FOR ONE SUNDAY DURING THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

‘HANGING OUT THE DIRTY WASHING”

Mobilise a group from the church – to prepare messages around the theme.

‘Stop abusing women’ or ‘Every woman is my sister’ etc etc.  
Turn old t-shirts inside out. With koki write these messages on the shirts.  
On a particular Sunday ask for permission to wear the shirts and lead prayers etc.  
After church these t-shirts are hung onto a line outside the church to carry the message during the week........