Faith and safeguarding commitment

Twelve undertakings for a congregation. Free to copy, adapt and use without crediting us.

Treasured Vessels Girls' Centre
Walukuba-Masese Road, Jinja, Uganda
treasuredvesselsuganda.org

In most of our communities the church is the institution a woman sees most often, so it is usually the first place she tells. **What is said in the first two minutes shapes what happens next.** This is a statement of how this congregation intends to answer.

WHAT WE WILL DO

- [ ] **1.** Treat every girl and woman as made in the image of God, whatever has happened to her, and whatever she has done.
- [ ] **2.** Listen before we advise. Ask one open question, then be quiet, and offer rather than instruct.
- [ ] **3.** Keep what we are told confidential. It is not a prayer request, an illustration for Sunday, or something for the elders. The exception is a child at risk, and we will say so before she tells us more.
- [ ] **4.** Give help that is never conditional on conversion, on attendance, on explaining what happened, or on giving a public testimony.
- [ ] **5.** Serve people of all beliefs or none on the same terms, with the same criteria and the same standard of care.
- [ ] **6.** Learn the local referral routes, medical, police, probation, legal aid and counselling, and keep the numbers where our people can find them.
- [ ] **7.** Name one person here as the safeguarding contact, and tell the congregation who that is.
- [ ] **8.** Provide a way for someone to complain about us, and never penalise anyone for using it.

WHAT WE WILL NOT DO

- [ ] **9.** Teach, imply, or allow it to be said from our platform that a pregnancy is proof of a girl's moral failure.
- [ ] **10.** Ask a woman to forgive on a schedule, or to return to a house that is not safe. Forgiveness, reconciliation and safety are three different things.
- [ ] **11.** Treat depression, anxiety or trauma as evidence of weak faith, or discourage anyone from seeking treatment.
- [ ] **12.** Use corporal punishment on children in any activity we run, which is also prohibited under the Children (Amendment) Act 2016, or confront an alleged abuser ourselves.

Signed on behalf of this congregation

Name and role _____

Church or fellowship _____

Our safeguarding contact (name and telephone) _____

Date _____

Said kindly, heard as a verdict

The three that do the most damage, and what to say instead.

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NOT THIS, AND WHAT IT DOES

"This is what happens to a girl who is loose."

Makes her an example instead of a member, and drives her out of the one community that could have carried her. Often it shames a victim: many pregnancies at this age follow coercion, an age gap that is itself an offence, or an exchange for school fees.

"You must forgive him and go back."

Tells her the person she just trusted has already chosen a side, and can send her back into a house that is not safe. Leaving is often the most dangerous moment in an abusive relationship. In faith settings this is the commonest failure and the most damaging, because it carries authority.

"If you had more faith you would not be like this."

Adds guilt to an illness, and can stop her seeking treatment because seeking it would feel like admitting spiritual failure.

SAY INSTEAD

"She is still one of ours. The question is what she needs now."

When a crowd brought a woman to Jesus for judgement, His first words went to the people holding the stones. (John 8:7)

"Whatever you decide, I am not going anywhere. Are you safe tonight?"

Forgiveness is hers, on her timing. Reconciliation needs repentance and changed behaviour from him. Safety is separate from both, and comes first.

"I will pray with you, and I will go with you to someone who can help."

"The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart." (Psalm 34:18) Near to, not disappointed in.

IF SHE TELLS YOU SOMETHING, IN ROUGHLY THIS ORDER

- **"I believe you."** Out loud, in those words, early.
- **"This is not your fault."** Also out loud. She has probably been told otherwise.
- **"Are you safe right now?"** The only urgent question. If she is not, stop here and act on it.
- **"Here is who I would have to tell."** Before she says more, not after. For an adult that is usually nobody, unless she asks or a child is at risk.
- **"What would you like to happen next?"** Then start from her answer rather than your plan.

THE NUMBERS

Child at risk, or anyone in immediate danger: Uganda Child Helpline 116 Free from any network, 24 hours, run by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

Mental health: Mental Health Uganda 0800 21 21 21, Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5:00pm. Outside those hours, go to a health facility and ask for the mental health worker.

For an adult experiencing violence: the Child and Family Protection Unit at the nearest police station also handles domestic violence, and the district probation and social welfare officer can advise.

After a sexual assault, go to a health facility the same day if at all possible. Drugs to prevent HIV work within 72 hours and emergency contraception within 120 hours, and the examination can be documented whether or not she has decided to report.

Supportive listening is not counselling, not an investigation and not legal advice. Being the person who takes it well the first time is what makes a second time possible.