**Case History**

Don earned £60,000 a year. He gave his wife Beth £30 each week to buy groceries and incidentals for herself and their 5-year-old daughter. Don believed that because he paid all the bills while his wife stayed at home, he was doing his part to take care of the family. One day when Beth told him that she needed more money to take care of household expenses, Don got angry and slapped her across her face. He told her that she was stupid and mentally unbalanced.

Over the next few months, he frequently yelled at her and called her dumb, and several times he hit her when a meal displeased him.

Finally Beth decided she could no longer tolerate her husband’s abuse. She wanted a divorce. She sought advice from her minister, asking him to keep the matter confidential. He told her that Don was one of the finest Christians he knew, and a credit to the church because he was providing funds for many church and community projects. He suggested that she seek mental health counseling. He suggested that her husband might be suffering from burnout, so she should try to be more submissive. After all, she did not want to do anything to break up the marriage. He reminded her that “God hates divorce.”

A few days later, Beth received a visit from Sister Lorene the Community Services Director and Head Deaconess of her church, who told her that she should not embarrass the church by spreading false accusations about her husband. She also told Beth not to consider divorce because she did not have Biblical grounds to do so.

When Don discovered that Beth had talked to the pastor about their relationship, he again abused her and their daughter verbally and physically. Beth decided to leave the relationship and found refuge for herself and her daughter in a secular domestic violence shelter.

She became disillusioned and disappointed with the church and its leadership. There was no confidentiality. She could not understand how her husband was able to convince some of the leaders that she was the cause of the broken relationship. So she decided that she did not want to be a part of a congregation that refused to believe her and provide safety and support for her and her daughter. Because of her love for the Lord, she did not blame Him for her suffering, but decided to join another denomination.

**Discussion Points:**

1. Define forms of abuse

2. What were the messages to Beth from the pastor?

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2. What were the underlying unspoken messages to Don?
3. What should the response to Beth have been?
4. What should the response to Don have been?
5. What is the church’s responsibility to Beth, Don and their daughter?
6. How can the church work with community agencies/services to help this family?

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