

On the Front Lines

Community Encouragement

SPEAKER Br Robert Wagenaar

My name is Rob Wagenaar. I'm a Senior Constable currently serving with the Emergency Operations Unit in Maylands, and I've been a police officer for about 26 years. Over those years, I've seen a great deal of brokenness. Police often meet people on the worst day of their lives. When I first started as a probationary constable in Armadale, most of our work involved burglaries, assaults, and road safety. At the time, Western Australia had some of the highest burglary rates in the country.

But today, the landscape has changed. Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) and assaults now make up a significant part of our workload. Police attend an FDV incident roughly every nine minutes. In the 2024–25 financial year alone, we responded to around 80,500 FDV callouts. About sixty-five per cent of all reported assaults are FDV-related.

Behind much of this are substance abuse, sexual abuse, and mental health struggles. These issues fuel violence, tear families apart, and contribute to road trauma and wider criminal behaviour. Mental health callouts also place enormous pressure on policing, with more than seven thousand hours each year spent ramped at hospitals waiting for assessments.

A REALITY WE CANNOT IGNORE

Brothers, FDV is fundamentally about intimidation and fear. It is the act of violent, threatening, coercive, or controlling behaviour in current or past intimate or family relationships. And it affects people across every age, culture, and postcode. Women and children carry the greatest burden, but the impact reaches far beyond the walls of the home.

Some of you here know this reality well. Among us are current and former police officers and Police Auxiliary Officers. We sit beside you in church, we worship, we serve, we raise families. But when we put on the uniform, we hold a unique position, one of legal authority and huge responsibility. We are expected to have restraint, wisdom, and integrity, on and off duty.

Like doctors, nurses, paramedics, and firefighters, as police officers we see what others don't. We witness the brokenness of humanity up close: the grief, the trauma, the consequences of sin and suffering. We see things that cannot be unseen. Yet by God's grace, we get up the next day and do it again.

CLOSER THAN WE THINK

But this brokenness is not just 'out there in the world'. As my dad used to say, "*If it rains in the world, it drips in the church.*" Sin is no respecter of Sunday services. FDV, anger, intimidation, and substance abuse can hide behind church doors just as easily as behind suburban fences.

So, brothers, I urge you, out of love for God and for one another: **BE VIGILANT.**

- › **Don't pretend** you didn't notice.
- › **Don't ignore** a mate becoming aggressive.
- › **Don't excuse** controlling behaviour.
- › **Don't laugh off** comments that cross the line.
- › **Don't dismiss** the way a man speaks about his wife, or the way she shrinks when he enters the room.

As Edmund Burke warned, *"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."*

IT'S OFTEN SAID:

- › *"I thought something wasn't right – I just didn't want to get involved."*
- › Or, *"That's just who he is."*
- › Or, *"He's a good bloke; it must've been a once off."*

Courage doesn't always look dramatic or heroic. It's often the small gestures.

IT CAN BE:

- › A quiet word
- › A phone call
- › A walk around the block
- › A hard but loving conversation
- › A sincere, *"How are you really going?"*
- › A firm, *"Brother, that's not okay."*
- › Or even, *"You need help, we can do this together."*

A WORD TO THE STRUGGLING MAN

And to the man here who may be struggling – if you're losing control, battling your temper, leaning on alcohol or drugs, or wrestling with sinful thoughts – hear this message clearly:

Asking for help is not weakness. It is wisdom. It is humility. And humility sits at the heart of our faith.

In the Reformed tradition, we acknowledge the depth of human sin, but we also proclaim the deeper grace of God. Our strength is not enough, but Christ's is. He calls us to repentance, accountability, and newness of life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

A CALL TO STEP FORWARD

Brothers, thank you for supporting my colleagues and me – we feel that support, and we're grateful.

But today, I ask you to step onto the front line within your own lives, friendships, homes, and church family.

Don't be a man of aggression or indifference.

By God's grace, be a man of compassion.

Be like your Saviour – slow to anger, rich in steadfast love, and courageous in doing what is right.

A FINAL REFLECTION

So I ask you, brothers: will you have the courage to care?