

Every 68 Seconds by the Rev Moira Finley

On average, someone in the United States is sexually assaulted every 68 seconds.¹ That means someone is assaulted approximately 53 times every hour, or 1,270 times every day. This prayer uses a period of sixty-eight seconds of silence to bring attention to the scope of the problem, the number of survivors in our communities, our families, and our congregations.

This prayer can be unsettling because when we are used to words, the silence can demand we pay attention to the urgency of this work. Resist the temptation to fill the silence. Allow the unsettledness to be real, and invite the Spirit's presence to remind us of God's love for all in our most uncomfortable moments.

While this prayer uses statistics for the United States, the problem is not unique to our country, and so we stand in solidarity with our survivor siblings around the world. Almost one in three women over age fifteen, or an estimated 736 million individuals, have been victims of sexual violence.²

If the Body of Christ is going to be whole we have to speak truth to this great injustice, this great violation of God's creation.

One: Once, in every sixty-eight seconds...

a silence of 68 seconds is held, then a bell is chimed

One: Once, in every sixty-eight seconds someone in the United States is sexually assaulted.

a silence of 68 seconds is held, then a bell is chimed

¹ Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), 2019 (2020). Sourced from RAINN (Rape Abuse Incest National Network that uses a 5-year rolling average to adjust in the year to year changes of the NCVS survey data).

² World Health Organization, on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women Estimation and Data (2021)

One: Once, in every sixty-eight seconds, about 53 times while we are in worship together, and 1,280 times today someone will be sexually assaulted.

a silence of 68 seconds is held, then a bell is chimed

One: And while our siblings suffer this violence and violation, the church has been deafeningly silent. The church has shamed survivors, perpetuating a culture of victim blaming. The church has offered up pity, contempt, and harmful theologies when survivors dare to speak the truth of their experience.

a silence of 68 seconds is held, then a bell is chimed

One: The time for our silence as the church is over. Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr once said, "In the end we will remember, not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."³

a silence of 68 seconds is held, then a bell is chimed

One: It is time for us, the body of Christ broken by rape and sexual assault, to speak up. Our survivor siblings can wait no longer. We must open our hearts, our minds, and our churches to the stories of survivors, trusting in the grace and love of God that sustains us, and that can, in time, bring hope.

a silence of 68 seconds is held, then a bell is chimed

One: Now! Now is the time for us to break our silence!

a bell is chimed

³ Martin Luther King Jr. "The Trumpet of Conscience" Steeler Lecture, November 1967