A Catholic Response to Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a hidden scourge on our families and communities. Those who are victimized often keep it a private matter for various reasons: fear, shame, well-intended efforts to preserve the family. Aggressors, if they even recognize their problem, are not likely to have it addressed. Yet it touches many, and knows no boundaries of race, social class, ethnicity, creed or age (most victims are first abused as teens). Statistics suggest one in four women experience domestic violence in their lifetime, and three in four Americans are reported to know a victim, though most episodes are not reported to the authorities. Although the majority of victims are female, an estimated 15% are males.

Domestic violence and emotional abuse are typically used together in a relationship to control the victim. Persons may be married, living together, or dating. Examples of emotional abuse include name-calling, putdowns, restricting contact with family or friends, withholding money, preventing a partner from working, actual or threatened physical harm (hitting, pushing, shoving), sexual assault, stalking, and intimidation. (SECRETARIAT OF PRO-LIFE ACTIVITIES United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).

Domestic Violence (DV) is NOT part of God’s plan for us, His children. The challenge for Catholics, particularly during the Year of Faith, is to allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us so that we can be true witnesses to our faith and promote integral human development of all our people. We are called to defend and promote the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person – made in God’s image and likeness. We can only eliminate DV if we join forces to “Do Justice” for all.

Both men and women should be united in the fight against domestic violence as an intolerable violation of human dignity...Domestic violence is not cultural, it’s criminal. “Although the bishops have urged all clergy and lay ministers to reach out to victims of domestic violence, Catholic parishes and institutions have largely ignored that call. Rarely is domestic violence mentioned in a homily, let alone addressed as the main topic... Domestic violence happens in every parish, community, and economic class, and in every ethnic group...And in times of economic or family crisis, the incidence of domestic violence increases.” (Leela Ramdeen, CCSJ)

Let us speak of it here and shed light on this problem. Do not let it grow in the darkness of shame, embarrassment and fear. Let us be the strength that someone else needs to reach out. Let us know it is not the victims fault, that it affects our children who witness and learn behavior from adults. Help us to break the cycle of violence and do as God would have us do.

For help, to answer any questions you might have, or to receive restraining order information, call one of the following:

Domestic Abuse Hotlines
- Human Options 877/854-3594
- Interval House 562/594-4555, 714/891-8121, 800/978-3600
- Laura’s House 949/498-1511
- Women Transitional Living 714/992-1931

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 | 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
Or simply call 211 in the Orange County area. If you have questions about Domestic Violence, please call Mike Shaffer at 714/282-3007 contact him at mshaffer@rcbo.org.

Michael Shaffer