

DR. CHRISTAURIA WELLAND

# How can we help to end violence in Catholic families?

A Guide for Clergy, Religious and Laity



Violence can be  
overcome only  
by changing  
human hearts.

POPE FRANCIS,  
*Brazil, 2013*

3rd Edition  
with quotations from  
*Amoris Laetitia*

# How can we help to end violence in Catholic families?

A Guide for Clergy, Religious and Laity

**NIHIL OBSTAT**

*I have concluded that the materials presented in this work are free of doctrinal or moral errors.*

Bernadeane M. Carr, STL  
15 May 2015

**IMPRIMATUR**

*In accordance with 1983 CIC 827 § 3, permission to publish this work is hereby granted.*

+Robert W. McElroy  
Bishop of San Diego  
15 May 2015

Third edition, updated with quotations from  
H.H. Pope Francis  
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**Art**

Courtesy of Catherine Clark, Rome, Italy

**Design**

Montenegro Editores, Guadalajara, México

**Biblical quotations**

Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition

DR. CHRISTAURIA WELLAND

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A Guide for Clergy, Religious and Laity



3rd Edition  
with quotations from  
*Amoris Laetitia*



I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

*Ephesians 3: 14-19*

Since mothers bestow life, and women "keep" the world, let us all make greater efforts to promote mothers and to protect women. How much violence is directed against women! Enough! To hurt a woman is to insult God, who from a woman took on our humanity.

POPE FRANCIS, Jan. 1, 2022



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# Acknowledgements

- ❖ H. E. Cardinal Kevin Joseph Farrell, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life
- ❖ H.E. Bishop Jean Laffitte, Former Secretary, Pontifical Council for the Family, Vatican City
- ❖ H.E. Bishop Robert McElroy, Diocese of San Diego
- ❖ H.E. Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, Archdiocese of San Francisco
- ❖ H.E. Bishop Cirilo Flores, deceased Bishop of San Diego
- ❖ Sharon O'Brien, Ph.D., President, Catholics For Family Peace, Washington, DC
- ❖ María Elena Aguilar, Montenegro Editores, México
- ❖ Freydis Jane Welland, Editing



## Dedication

*To the Catholic women and men I have had the privilege to work with as they sought healing from violence, pain and shame, with gratitude for all they have taught me about love, courage and faith.*

Christauria Welland



## Preface by H. E. Bishop Jean Laffitte, Secretary, Pontifical Council for the Family

For many in society, the real and sad problem of domestic violence remains an enigma throughout most of one's life. Yet despite this, it can be said that while domestic violence does feel, on the one hand, quite remote to most, on the other hand, it really never seems to completely fade from one's mind, as disquieting feelings continually warn us that somewhere, someone —one who is not too far— is crying out for help, be they victim or perpetrator.

Research in fact reveals that in many countries around the world, domestic violence can affect as much as one out of every three persons —mainly women— at least once in their lifetime, while in some regions and areas, root factors, such as environment, culture and poverty, may raise these already alarming figures to levels well beyond our imagination.

This scenario is revealed to us in this scientific work of Dr. Christauria Welland, entitled “How can we help to end violence in Catholic families?” As the title of this booklet already suggests, the purpose of Dr. Welland's work is not merely to unfold the mystery of domestic violence, be it in number, kind or cause, but most of all, to provide the reader with positive insights that may help curb the scourge of this widespread malady, both in the short and the long term.

Indeed, violence within marriage and the family contravenes the very communal essence of the natural institution of the family, rendering it powerless to both experience its unitive vocation and reflect thereby, especially in Christian families, the actual image of the Divine Trinity.

As we are reminded by the author that all men and women of every age and culture “thirst to love and be loved”,



every single person affected by domestic violence hopes for a bright future where the existence of painful episodes, which now violate the delicate balance of affection, emotions and human dignity, will one day give way to a new dawn that will satisfy, at last, their yearning for peace, rest and love.

Inspired by the light of the Gospel of Mathew, Chapter 25, the disciple of Christ should always seek to serve Our Lord in fraternal assistance to all the needy, including where pain, poverty, solitude, or illness reveal their origin as sad consequences of domestic aggression.

Yet when it comes to helping those distressed by this plague, experience shows that it is not easy to identify the need. Furthermore, in those rare occasions when domestic violence is detected, the humiliation of such inflictions soon camouflages all the ugly facts well away from human or social perception, so that dark episodes of assaults, concealed as they are, by denial or disgrace, fear or destitution, weakness, feeling lost, or subjugation, remain unchallenged, and wounds menacingly forever uncured.

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As one who has dedicated much of her professional life to combating the scourge of home aggression, Dr. Welland's book offers to help confront the formidable taboo of domestic violence head-on. In addition therefore, to unveiling the mystery of this profound human problem, the author provides unique insights into family abuse. Drawing from her rich experience of treating both victims and abusers, she unfolds violence's effect upon sufferers (children, women and men) and aggressors, provides constructive responses and prevention strategies, counselling guidelines, theological reflections, while simultaneously offering the Christian faithful —clergy, religious, and lay; teachers or family members, adult or young, victim or aggressors— a sound holistic and authentic Christian response that seeks to redress domestic abuse, heal wounds and usher a new future of hope, where Christ's power "at work within us"

transforms every sorrowing wound by the cleansing brilliance of His love.

Sensitive therefore, to the radiance of gospel values and to Divine revelation, Dr. Welland explains how the brightness *of hope supreme, of love unfeigned, of mercy strong*, constitute essential ingredients and innate psychic responses which characterize the very resilience of man and woman, who made in the image and likeness of God, are not lead by mere physical instinct, but fundamentally, by spiritual dynamism, which with the help of God, is capable of elevating past, present and future to an arena of liberating and life-giving transformation.

Vatican City  
June 16, 2015



The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised.

POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 218

We cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love. Indeed, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else "to perfect the couple's love".

POPE FRANCIS, *Amoris Laetitia*, 89

I spend my days as a psychologist in intimate conversation with men and women from many countries and many religions. What do they have in common? **A thirst to love and be loved.** That thirst is in the depths of every human heart. We suffer when we do not experience the love of those who are close to us, when we do not live up to our call to love and be loved as Christ loves, to become a gift to others.

DR. CRISTAURIA WELLAND



# What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is behavior by a spouse, intimate partner, or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors.<sup>2</sup>

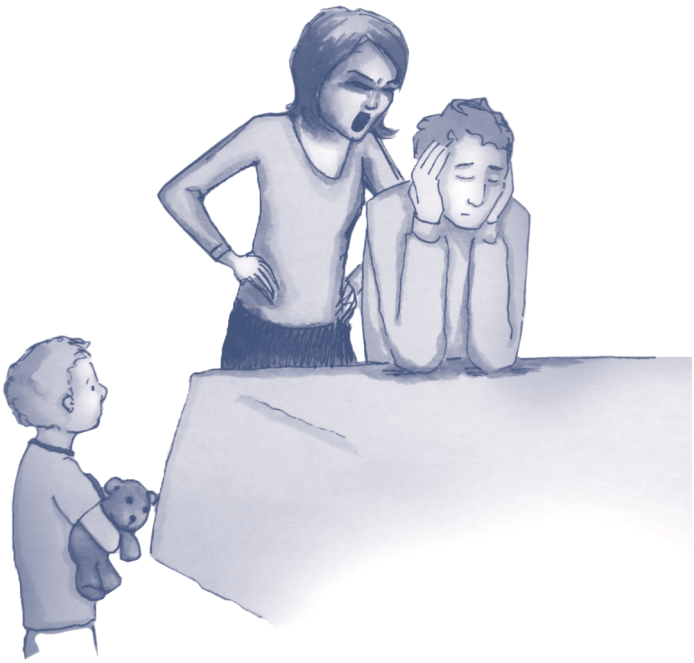
It is also called intimate partner violence, to distinguish it from other kinds of abuse that happen in a domestic setting, but in this booklet we will use the term *domestic violence* throughout, as it is in common use.

## Types of domestic violence

- ❖ **Physical abuse:** hitting, punching, slapping, kicking, scratching, use of a weapon, etc.
- ❖ **Sexual abuse:** violent rape, coerced sexual relations, any unwanted sexual behavior.
- ❖ **Emotional abuse:** insults, name-calling, mind-games, putdowns.



- ❖ **Economic abuse:** denying access and information regarding finances, taking property and money spouse earns, spending household money on alcohol and drugs and depriving the family.
- ❖ **Controlling Behaviors and Social Isolation:** not allowing the spouse (or children) to be in contact with family, friends, and associates; not allowing spouse to work or better family situation. Keeping spouse in the house against their will; imprisonment.
- ❖ **Intimidation:** threats to hurt or kill the spouse, to kill oneself if spouse tries to leave, to report her/him to authorities if undocumented; threats against the children.
- ❖ **Religious abuse:** misusing Catholic teaching or Scripture to justify domination and abuse; forcing the spouse to practice your faith, or denying her/him the freedom to practice her/his own faith.
- ❖ **Male privilege:** speaking and acting with expressions of male superiority and failure to accept the equality of men and women before God; treating the spouse like a servant and an object (including for sex).
- ❖ **Child abuse:** In this case, the intention is to hurt the child, or sometimes stepchild, in order to hurt the spouse. It can include threats to take the child away from the other parent or actual abduction of the child.





# How much of a problem is domestic violence worldwide?

Violence against women remains devastatingly pervasive and starts alarmingly young, as shown by new data from WHO and partners. **Across their lifetime, 1 in 3 women, around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner** - a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade.<sup>iv</sup>

**World Health Organization, 2021**

Although the lifetime prevalence rate is 30% of all women who experience domestic violence at least once in their life, the majority of victims experience multiple assaults rather than just one assault.

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The following statistics do not include the other kinds of domestic violence mentioned, which are often more common, such as emotional abuse. Emotional abuse tends to be inflicted by both men and women.

About 1 in 4 women and nearly 1 in 10 men have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/ or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and reported some form of IPV-related impact.

## **INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IS COMMON IN THE UNITED STATES<sup>vi</sup>**

Most statistics do not provide rates of domestic violence against men. When they do, the numbers are very troubling (*CDC, 2014*). **Research shows that the impact of domestic violence against women is three times greater than domestic violence against men.** This does not make domestic violence against men less important; it must also be addressed. However, in the remainder of his booklet, since we do not have global statistics for female-to-male domestic violence, we will focus on male-to-female domestic violence. Under prevention of domestic violence we will include both genders equally.

# Lifetime prevalence rates of male to female physical and/ or sexual domestic violence among women aged 15-49 in other regions of the world<sup>viii</sup>

Least Developed Countries - 37%

## SUBREGIONS

Oceania -	44%
Southern Asia -	35%
Sub-Saharan Africa -	33%
Northern Africa -	30%
Western Asia -	29%
Northern America	25%
Australia and New Zealand -	23%
Latin American/Caribbean -	25%
Northern Europe -	23%
South-Eastern Asia -	21%
Western Europe -	21%
Eastern Asia -	20%
Eastern Europe -	20%
Central Asia -	18%
Southern Europe -	16%

# Is there violence in Catholic families? if so, how common is it?

Studies conducted in the USA show there is no difference in the rate of domestic violence among members of different religions and the general public.<sup>ix</sup> Thus, domestic violence among Catholics **worldwide** is likely to be the same 30% lifetime prevalence as the rest of the population. Researchers did find that men who attended religious services *every week* were less violent than infrequent attendees.

## Statistics for likely numbers of Catholic women who are victims of domestic violence

Number of Catholics worldwide in 2022<sup>x</sup> 1,360,000,000

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Global gender ratio is 101 men to 100 women.<sup>xi</sup>

26% of the global population is under 15 years of age.<sup>xii</sup>

Thus, there were 1,006,400,000 Catholics in the world age 15 and above in 2020 (subtract 353,600,000)

Number of Catholic men age 15 and above<sup>xiii</sup>  
505,703,483

Number of Catholic women age 15 and above  
500,696,517

At global rates of domestic violence, **if 30% of Catholic women are abused, that equals: 150,208,955**

**Even calculating a rate of 25% of Catholic women being abused equals: 125,174,129**

There is much variation between and within countries, but there seem to be no countries where the rate of violence against women is less than 13%. In some nations it is over 50%.

Therefore, even calculating a lower than average rate of domestic violence for Catholic women, that still adds up to over **125 million Catholic women who have been physically and/or sexually abused by their spouse or partner!**

### **POPE FRANCIS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (2016)**

In this brief overview, I would like to stress the fact that, even though significant advances have been made in the recognition of women's rights and their participation in public life, in some countries much remains to be done to promote these rights. Unacceptable customs still need to be eliminated. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic violence and various forms of enslavement which, rather than a show of masculine power, are craven acts of cowardice. The verbal, physical, and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of the conjugal union.

POPE FRANCIS, *Amoris Laetitia*, 54

# Lifetime prevalence rates of physical and/or sexual domestic violence against women in countries with Catholic populations over 20 million

Nation	Number of Catholics in the nation <sup>xiv</sup>	% of nation that is Catholic	Lifetime prevalence of DV (%) in the nation <sup>xv</sup>
<b>Brazil</b>	123 million	58%	23%
Mexico	100 million	80%	24%
<b>Philippines</b>	85 million	81%	14%
USA	69 million	21%	26%
<b>Italy</b>	50 million	83%	16%
France	39 million	59%	22%
<b>Colombia</b>	35 million	75%	30%
Poland	33 million	86%	13%
<b>Spain</b>	30 million	66%	15%
Argentina	28 million	69%	27%
<b>DR Congo</b>	28 million	37%	47%
Nigeria	24 million	12%	24%
<b>Germany</b>	23 million	27%	19%
Peru	23 million	75%	38%
<b>India</b>	20 million	1.5%	35%

# Why does violence happen in the family?

## Theories of domestic violence

Domestic violence happens for complex reasons, and no one theoretical explanation is usually sufficient to account for it in a particular situation.<sup>13</sup>

- ❖ **Ecological Theory:** The man is influenced by violence in the overall environment.
- ❖ **Sociocultural (Patriarchal) Theory:** The man views women as inferior and believes he has the right to control, punish, and discipline her.
- ❖ **Social Learning Theory:** He has learned through example, usually in his family, that violence against the spouse is acceptable and effective.
- ❖ **Cognitive Behavioral Theory:** He believes that violence against the spouse is an appropriate response to an upsetting thought or situation. He doesn't know how to calm himself down when angry, and often doesn't see the need to do so.
- ❖ **Psychopathological Model:** He has problems with impulse-control, posttraumatic stress disorder, brain injury, or other emotional or neurological issues.
- ❖ **Attachment Theory:** He has an insecure attachment style and is thus plagued by jealousy. He acts on inner fears with control and violence.

# What else contributes to domestic violence?

## Risk factors for domestic violence<sup>14</sup>

Risk factors contribute to, but are not the cause of domestic violence. Understanding what puts men and women at risk can help guide prevention efforts. In countries where young people date before marriage, it is important to know that the risk factors for dating violence are the same as the risk factors for domestic violence. The rates of *dating violence* are high for both young men and young women, thus both genders need to be included in prevention efforts.

Here are some of the characteristics or circumstances of the aggressor that may contribute to domestic violence in a couple:

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- ❖ History of experiencing abuse and/or witnessing domestic violence in childhood.
- ❖ Low income, low educational level.<sup>15</sup>
- ❖ Use and abuse of alcohol or drugs.
- ❖ Presence of guns, knives, or other weapons.
- ❖ High levels of conflict in the marriage.
- ❖ No laws or insufficient response from the police.
- ❖ Approval of violence in relationships.
- ❖ High levels of stress (financial stress or unemployment).
- ❖ History of violence and/or criminal behavior.
- ❖ High levels of violence in the community and culture.





# What does the Catholic faith teach about love and respect in marriage?

## Marriage is a communion of life and love

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

*John 2: 1-2.*

The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1613*

32 |

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her... 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the Church.

*Ephesians 5: 21-22. 25. 31-32*

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

*Ephesians 4: 32*

I, Paul... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

*Ephesians 4: 1-3*



# Marriage is a communion of life and love

[In marriage] the permanent commitment to solidarity, fidelity and fruitful love responds to the deepest longings of the human heart.

POPE FRANCIS, *International Colloquium on the Complementarity of Man and Woman*, 2014

God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.

34 | ST. JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11

The matrimonial union requires respect for and a perfecting of the true personal subjectivity of both (spouses).

ST. JOHN PAUL II, *On the Dignity of Women*, 10

Marriage based on an exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love.

BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 11

The family reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

*The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization, Relatio Synodi*, 2014

# Christian anthropology

St. John Paul II shared the fruits of his contemplation and his profound analysis of Holy Scripture with us in a language that spoke to the real issues that confront us, shedding light and giving meaning to the many challenges Christians face in contemporary life. His teaching is an approach to the contemplation of the most amazing of all mysteries, the Incarnation of the Word, Jesus Christ, and how his taking on our human flesh, his self-emptying, and his Resurrection transforms and revolutionizes our human experience. It relates directly to our Christian life as spouses and members of our families.

Saint John Paul II encouraged us to explore two questions: *Who am I? and How am I to live?* These are the perennial questions of every reflective human being.

We are sacred beings from the start of God's creation, made in God's image: Every person is a sacred mystery. Once we have truly understood our sacredness as persons with bodies and souls made in the image of God, and further sanctified by the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Sacraments we have received, our lives in this world can never be the same. In a word, we are sacred, our neighbor is sacred, husband, wife, and children are sacred.

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Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?...  
Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6, 15. 19-20

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

*John 1, 14*



# A brief summary St. John Paul II's teaching on marriage and the theology of the body

In love, we become a gift, and so fulfill the meaning of our existence!

## ❖ **The Sacramentality of the Body.**

In some way... even if in the most general way —the body enters into the definition of sacrament, which is “a visible sign of an invisible reality”, namely, of the spiritual, transcendent, and divine reality. In this sign... God gives himself to man in his transcendent truth and in his love.

ST JOHN PAUL II, *General Audience*, 28/07/1982

## ❖ **Marriage is compared to Christ and the Church.**

In the Bible marriage is used as an earthly image of God's love for Israel and, in the New Testament, of Christ's love for the Church. The spousal analogy, though inadequate, is the most fitting human image of the divine mystery.

CF. ST JOHN PAUL II, *General Audience*, 18/08/1982

## ❖ **The Spousal (Nuptial) Meaning of the Body is a Sign of the Image of God.**

The call to love as God loves is inscribed in the human body as male and female. The nuptial meaning of the body is “the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the man-person becomes a gift and —by means of this gift— fulfills the meaning of his being and existence.”

ST JOHN PAUL II, *General Audience*, 16/01/1980

FROM THIS TEACHING IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS CONTRARY TO THE SACREDNESS  
OF THE HUMAN PERSON AND THE HUMAN BODY.

# Living the reality of the sacredness of our body

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

*1 John 4:9.*

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

*John 3:16*

38 |

Let us first apply the truth about the sacredness of the body to the everyday expression of love that having a body makes possible to each one of us. A smile, a look of sympathy and understanding, a word of encouragement, a song, laughter, a gesture of affection, a caress, an extended hand to a person in need, a pat on the back—all of these are possible because we have bodies.

The service we render to each other, and thus to Christ, by working to support our families, by cooking, cleaning, caring for children, the sick, and the elderly—the actions we fulfill with our bodies and our senses concretize and make visible the presence of Divine love in our lives.

**KNOWING THIS, HOW CAN CATHOLICS EVER TRULY THINK  
THAT IT IS ACCEPTABLE TO HURT AND ASSAULT  
THEIR SPOUSE OR CHILDREN?**

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS CONTRARY  
TO THE SACREDNESS OF THE HUMAN PERSON  
AND THE HUMAN BODY.





# What does the Catholic faith teach about violence in marriage?

Be subject to one another, out of reverence to Christ... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her... Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body.

Ephesians 5: 21, 25, 28-30

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By expressing himself in this way, St. Paul does not mean that the husband is the "master" of the wife and that the inter-personal pact proper to marriage is a pact of domination of the husband over his wife... The husband and wife are in fact "subject to one another", they are mutually subordinate. The source of this reciprocal submission lies in Christian "pietas", and its expression is love... Love means that at the same time the husband is also subject to his wife, and in this subject to the Lord himself, as well as the wife to the husband... The community or unity that they must establish by reason of marriage is realized through a reciprocal gift, which is also a reciprocal submission

**St. John Paul, General Audience, Aug. 11, 1982**

[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1982/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_19820811.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1982/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19820811.html)

Whenever a man is responsible for offending a woman's personal dignity and vocation, he acts contrary to his own personal dignity and his own vocation.

ST. JOHN PAUL II, *On the Dignity of Women*, 10



# His Holiness Pope Francis on violence

There are those who believe that many of today's problems have arisen because of feminine emancipation. This argument, however, is not valid, "it is false, untrue, a form of male chauvinism" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 43). The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear, and within families there is a growing reciprocity. If certain forms of feminism have arisen which we must consider inadequate, we must nonetheless see in the women's movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women.

POPE FRANCIS, *Amoris Laetitia*, 54

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In the case of the popular cultures of Catholic peoples, we can see deficiencies which need to be healed by the Gospel: machismo, alcoholism, domestic violence... and the like.

POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 69

How I wish that all men and women of good will would look to the Cross if only for a moment! There, we can see God's reply: violence is not answered with violence, death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue, and peace is spoken... Let everyone be moved to look into the depths of his or her conscience and listen to that word which says: Leave behind the self-interest that hardens your heart, overcome the indifference that makes your heart insensitive towards others, conquer your deadly reasoning, and open yourself to dialogue and reconciliation.

POPE FRANCIS, *Vigil of Prayer for Peace*, Sept. 7, 2013

# Why is there violence in so many Catholic families?

- ❖ Family violence happens worldwide, and many Catholic families share the same risk factors as the rest of the population (see p. 30).
- ❖ The desire to dominate and control others is deeply rooted in our nature damaged by sin. We need conversion and transformation in Christ to overcome it.

Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but...against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

*Ephesians. 6: 12-13*

| 43

- ❖ We are all products of the culture we are born and raised in, especially if we have not assimilated the non-violent and compassionate values of Christianity
- ❖ Generally, there is an absence of knowledge of the Catholic teaching on marriage, and the dignity of both men and women, as well as on the proper role of parents toward children.

Even with this knowledge, unless we become new men and women (*Ephesians 4:22-24*), conformed to Christ in our daily lives through grace, prayer, and the learning and practice of communication and relationship skills, we will find it more difficult to resist the negative influences within and around us.

# The extraordinary synod on the family, 2014: violence in Catholic families<sup>16</sup>

The dignity of women still needs to be defended and promoted. In fact, in many places today, simply being a woman is a source of discrimination... Not to be overlooked is the increasing violence against women, where they become victims, unfortunately, often within families.

THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE FAMILY  
IN THE CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY WORLD,  
*Lineamenta*, 7

44 |

Married couples with problems in their relationship should be able to count on the assistance and guidance of the Church. The pastoral work of charity and mercy seeks to help persons recover and restore relationships. Experience shows that with proper assistance and acts of reconciliation, through grace, a great percentage of troubled marriages find a solution in a satisfying manner. To know how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a basic experience in family life. Forgiveness between husband and wife permits a couple to experience a never-ending love that does not pass away (cf. 1 *Corinthians* 13:8). At times, this is difficult, but those who have received God's forgiveness are given the strength to offer a genuine forgiveness that regenerates persons.

IBID., *Lineamenta*, 43

Strongly reconfirming their faithfulness to the Gospel of the Family and acknowledging that separation and divorce are always wounds that cause deep suffering to the married couple and to their children, the synod fathers felt the urgent need to embark on a new pastoral course based on

the present reality of weaknesses within the family, knowing oftentimes that these are more “endured” with suffering than freely chosen.

IBID., *Lineamenta*, 44

Respect needs to be primarily given to the suffering of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce or abandonment, or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to interrupt their life together. To forgive such an injustice that has been suffered is not easy, but grace makes this journey possible. Pastoral activity, then, needs to be geared towards reconciliation and mediation of differences, which might even take place in specialized “listening centres” established in dioceses.

IBID., *Lineamenta*, 46



## Professional commentary by the author on lineamenta 43, 44, & 46

46 | Forgiveness and reconciliation are essential actions in the Christian life. However, when it comes to domestic violence, precautions must be taken. Many cases of domestic violence are far more severe than other relationship issues, threatening physical life and health as well as emotional health. As a psychologist with 50 years of training and experience working with Catholic couples, I am witness that many partner-abusive men do not change over time, due to risk factors and the life choices they make and continue to make, even though their spouses repeatedly forgive them. This is why I have dedicated the last 25 years to the treatment of partner-abusive men. It is quite insufficient for a pastoral worker to encourage abusers to change, and to advise forgiveness. Pastoral work with families affected by domestic violence must focus on the safety, well-being, and healing of the victim and children, and not merely rely on advice to forgive and forget. (see pp. 53 to 56). The abuser needs to seek the forgiveness of God and his family in sincerity by making a long-term effort to change his attitudes, speech, and behavior in conformity with the teaching of Christ. Until this happens, there will be no change in the family. Encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation in the absence of such change can perpetuate the violence and the suffering of the victim and children.

**FORGIVENESS YES, EVENTUALLY.  
RECONCILIATION? MAYBE, MAYBE NOT.**

Sometimes when there is abuse or violence, the abuser will insist that the victim/survivor of the abuse should forgive him and be reconciled. Even family members may expect this and encourage it. But forgiveness does not necessarily mean the victim/survivor should receive the abuser back into the family and expose herself and the children to hurt and harm, or even death. We can forgive in our hearts, which takes time, but that is not the same as being reconciled with a dangerous and demeaning spouse. Each situation must be seen and judged separately, and the safety and well-being of the survivor and children carefully evaluated.

**POPE FRANCIS ON FORGIVENESS  
FRATELLI TUTTI, 2020**

We are called to love everyone, without exception; at the same time, **loving an oppressor does not mean allowing him to keep oppressing us**, or letting him think that what he does is acceptable. On the contrary, true love for an oppressor means seeking ways to make him cease his oppression; it means stripping him of a power that he does not know how to use, and that diminishes his own humanity and that of others. Those who suffer injustice have to defend strenuously their own rights and those of their family, precisely because they must preserve the dignity they have received as a loving gift from God.

FT #241

**Forgiving does not mean forgetting.** Or better, in the face of a reality that can in no way be denied, relativized or concealed, forgiveness is still possible. In the face of an action that can never be tolerated, justified or excused, we can still forgive. In the face of something that cannot be forgotten for any reason, we can still forgive. FT #250



## WHEN AND HOW TO INTERVENE AND TREAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- ❖ Domestic violence must be responded to, based on the guidelines on pp. 70 and following. However, once the initial response has taken place, this violence is best treated by those who are trained to understand the complexity of the problem, and who know how to work toward change in families, beginning with the aggressor. The partner-abusive man (or woman) is a child of God as well, and he/she can learn to be different in family relationships, through the grace of Christ and the sacraments, and through learning specific skills that bring about change and an end to violence.

### A CHALLENGE TO US ALL!

- ❖ If intimate partner violence is such an enormous problem among Catholic women worldwide, and their children who have been exposed to violence in the family, **what are we, the pastoral agents of the Catholic Church, going to do about it?** How about the silent men who have also been abused?

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- ❖ LISTEN AND LEARN
- ❖ RESPOND WITH THE LOVE OF JESUS, ACCOMPANY.
- ❖ JUSTICE FIRST, THEN PEACE!
- ❖ HELP TO PREVENT VIOLENCE IN CATHOLIC HOMES AND SCHOOLS
- ❖ TEACH, SHARE, PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU SEE
- ❖ BE AN AGENT OF CHANGE IN YOUR PARISH AND DIOCESE!

## When abuse persists in spite of attempts to change: when reconciliation puts a family at risk

If the abuser does not change and the violence and abuse continue, the Church provides remedies for the abused spouse, and for the children.

### Catechism of the Catholic church on separation

There are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons. In such cases the Church permits the physical *separation* of the couple and their living apart. The spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to contract a new union. In this difficult situation, the best solution would be, if possible, reconciliation. The Christian community is called to help these persons live out their situation in a Christian manner and in fidelity to their marriage bond which remains indissoluble.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1649

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### H. H. Pope Francis on separation

In some cases, respect for one's own dignity and the good of the children requires not giving in to excessive demands or preventing a grave injustice, violence or chronic ill-treatment. In such cases, "separation becomes inevitable. At times it even becomes morally necessary, precisely when it is a matter of removing the more vulnerable spouse or young children from serious injury due to abuse and violence, from humiliation and exploitation, and from disregard and indifference". Even so, "separation must be considered as a last resort, after all other reasonable attempts at reconciliation have proved vain".

POPE FRANCIS, *Amoris Laetitia*, 154

## What does the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops say about domestic violence?

- ❖ The Church can help break the cycle of violence.
- ❖ Many abused women seek help first from the Church because they see it as a safe place.
- ❖ As bishops, we condemn the use of the Bible to support abusive behavior in any form.
- ❖ A correct reading of Scripture leads people to an understanding of the equal dignity of men and women and to relationships based on mutuality and love.

50 |

We emphasize that no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage. Some abused women believe that church teaching on the permanence of marriage requires them to stay in an abusive relationship. They may hesitate to seek a separation or divorce. They may fear that they cannot re-marry in the Church. Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage. We encourage abused persons who have divorced to investigate the possibility of seeking an annulment. An annulment, which determines that the marriage bond is not valid, can frequently open the door to healing.

USCCB, *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence against Women*, 2002

# Declarations of nullity: possible grounds for nullity when there is domestic violence

## Partial Simulation: Exclusion of the Good of the Spouses<sup>17</sup>

If one or both parties deliberately excludes an essential element of marriage such as the good of the spouses, the marriage is invalid (*Canon* 1101.2). *Canon* 1055.1 speaks of the good of the spouses as an essential element of marriage. The good of the spouses refers to the conjugal partnership, and it includes the right to personal dignity and fundamental human rights; physical, moral, spiritual, sexual and psychological integrity; and mutual respect. The partnership of the marriage covenant must include the equal dignity of the other person. In cases judged on this ground, the evidence is examined for the presence or absence of benevolence, companionship, friendship, caring, and partnership. A marriage involving physical and/or emotional abuse, absence of financial support, absence from the home, or refusal to treat one's spouse as an equal might be examined on this ground.

MSGR. MARK DUCHAINE, V.G., DIOCESE OF SIOUX CITY, USA

# What are the short and long-term effects of domestic violence on the person who suffers it?

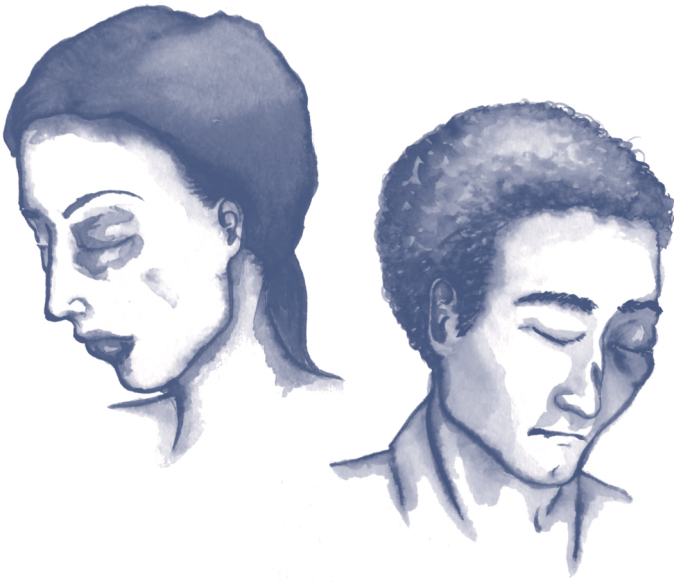
Some possible effects on victims<sup>18</sup>

- ❖ **Death:** 1095 women and 241 men were murdered by an intimate partner in the United States in 2010.
- ❖ **Injuries** as a direct result of the physical violence (e.g., bruises, knife wounds, broken bones).
- ❖ **Adverse health outcomes** through chronic stress.
  - › Cardiovascular disease.
  - › Fibromyalgia.
  - › Chronic pain syndromes.
  - › Gastrointestinal disorders.
  - › Migraines and headaches, etc.
  - › Children might be injured during violent incidents.

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Physical violence is typically accompanied by emotional or psychological abuse.

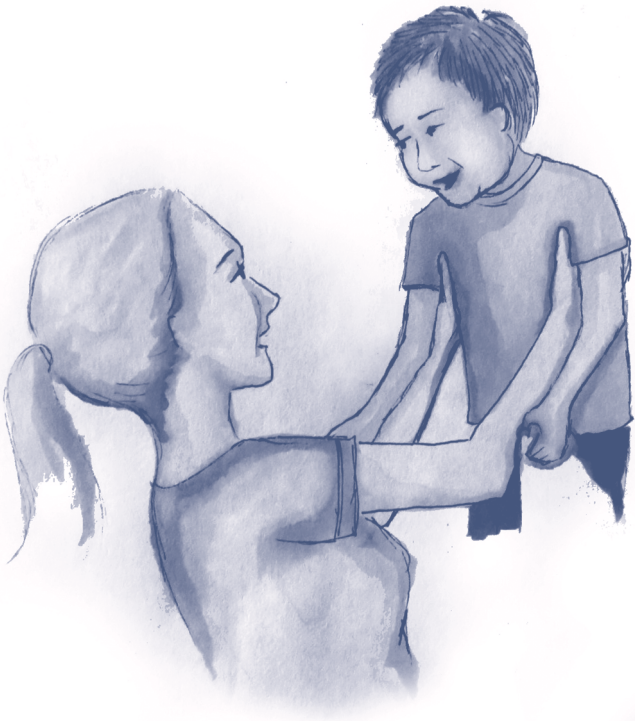
- ❖ Domestic violence often leads to various psychological consequences, for example:
  - › Anxiety.
  - › Depression.
  - › Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
  - › Suicidal thoughts or behavior.
  - › Inability to trust others.
  - › Sleep disturbances.
  - › Flashbacks.
  - › Ineffective parenting.
  - › Abuse and neglect of children.



# What do children need to develop as healthy persons and Christians?

Children need:

- ❖ Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments.
- ❖ Secure attachment to both parents, or at least one parent.
- ❖ Caring, protective adults.
- ❖ To be taught and modeled the values of human and Christian dignity, justice, equality, respect, and love.



Children do not need to be exposed to domestic violence!!

What are the short and long-term effects of domestic violence on children who are exposed to it in their family?<sup>19</sup>

- ❖ Depression.
- ❖ Anxiety.
- ❖ Aggression.
- ❖ Refusal to go to school or failure at school.
- ❖ Affects cognitive and emotional development.
- ❖ Constant toxic stress produces damaging neurochemical changes, which can lead to problems in learning, health, building friendships, and responding to challenges.
- ❖ Exposed children are more likely to be violent or to become victims of domestic violence in their families as adults.





## What are the short and long-term effects of domestic violence on the person who commits it?

Potential effects on the abuser:<sup>20</sup>

- ❖ Incarceration.
- ❖ Loss of employment.
- ❖ Increased abuse of alcohol or drugs.
- ❖ Isolation and depression.
- ❖ Loss of love and trust of family.
- ❖ Distance in relationship with children.
- ❖ Existential diminishment.
- ❖ Distance in relationship with God.



# The scourge of drugs and alcohol

Drug use was also mentioned [at the Synod on the Family] as one of the scourges of our time, causing immense suffering and even breakup for many families. The same is true of alcoholism, gambling and other addictions. The family could be the place where these are prevented and overcome, but society and politics fail to see that families at risk “lose the ability to act to help their members... We see the serious effects of this breakdown in families torn apart, the young uprooted and the elderly abandoned, children who are orphans of living parents, adolescents and young adults confused and unsupported.”

POPE FRANCIS, *Amoris Laetitia*, 51

## Alcohol abuse, an important risk factor for domestic violence

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According to the World Health Organization, alcohol is often, “a major contributor” to domestic violence. The intensity of domestic violence increases as someone drinks more heavily or more frequently, complicating problem-solving skills and communication.

Women whose husbands drank alcohol are significantly more likely to be victims of both physical and sexual abuse than those whose husbands did not drink alcohol

Roughly 55% of domestic abuse perpetrators were drinking alcohol prior to assault.

World Health Organization

# How can we prevent domestic violence?

By preventing domestic violence, we avoid all the negative short and long-term effects of domestic violence on victims, children and aggressors. There is a worldwide push to extend prevention efforts through the World Health Organization, (WHO, 2014).<sup>21</sup>

Even though we work on prevention as Church and society, there will always be acts of family violence that we need to address as Catholics. We need to be prepared to both respond to *and* prevent domestic violence.

## Prevention of intimate partner violence

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### **As a society, how can we help to prevent domestic violence in at-risk families?**

- ❖ Teach safe and healthy relationship skills.
- ❖ Engage influential adults and peers.
- ❖ Disrupt the developmental pathways toward partner violence.
- ❖ Create protective environments.
- ❖ Strengthen economic supports for families.
- ❖ Support survivors to increase safety and lessen harms.

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, USA, PREVENTIOON OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, TECHNICAL PACKAGE, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-technicalpackages.pdf> (2017)

# Proven methods to prevent interpersonal violence

**Interpersonal violence of *all kinds* can be prevented by focusing on the *same strategies* throughout our cultures.**

- ❖ Develop safe, stable and nurturing relationships between children and their parents.
- ❖ Develop life skills in children and adolescents.
- ❖ Change cultural and social norms that support violence.
- ❖ Reduce violence through care and support programs.
- ❖ Reduce the availability and harmful use of alcohol.
- ❖ Reduce access to guns and knives.
- ❖ Promote gender equality [and complementarity] between men and women, to prevent domestic violence.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, 2014

## His Holiness Pope Francis on complementarity

To reflect upon complementarity is but to ponder the dynamic harmonies which lie at the heart of all Creation. This is a key word: harmony. The Creator made every complementarity, so that the Holy Spirit, the Author of harmony, could create this harmony.

In effect, this complementarity lies at the foundation of marriage and the family, which is the first school where we learn to appreciate our talents and those of others, and where we begin to acquire the art of living together. For most of us, the family is the principal place in which we begin to “breathe” values and ideals, as we develop our full capacity for virtue and charity.

60 | When we speak of complementarity between man and woman in this context, we must not confuse the term with the simplistic idea that all the roles and relationships of both sexes are confined to a single and static model. Complementarity assumes many forms, since every man and every woman brings their personal contribution —personal richness, their own charisma— to the marriage and to the upbringing of their children. Thus, complementarity becomes a great treasure. It is not only an asset but is also a thing of beauty.

POPE FRANCIS, *International Colloquium on the Complementarity of Man and Woman*, 2014

# Prevention of future domestic violence: work with boys and men

A peace which is not the result of integral development will be doomed; it will always spawn new conflicts and various forms of violence.

POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 219

Integral development includes the development of the emotional and psychological capacities of the person, as well as the development of a rich and profound spiritual life in union with Christ and his teaching.

Let us teach boys and men in our schools and parishes to accept and promote non-violence, and to make a stand against domestic violence in their families and neighborhoods!

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## Young men need non-violent skills development

Programs to build these skills are widely available<sup>23</sup> for both young men and young women, and can be added to current catechesis, youth groups, and marriage preparation in parishes and Catholic schools.

- ❖ Anger management.
- ❖ Respectful conflict resolution.
- ❖ Negotiation and compromise.
- ❖ Respectful assertiveness.
- ❖ Empathy and emotional intelligence.
- ❖ The parents' and teachers' example of love and respect is essential.
- ❖ Parents and teachers must teach their children to respect both men and women and treat them as equals.

NON-VIOLENT BOYS AND MEN  
CAN USE THEIR POWER FOR GOOD!<sup>24</sup>



## Prevention of future domestic violence: work with girls and women

St. John Paul II and Pope Francis often repeat Jesus' words: "Do not be afraid." Let us not be afraid to live the Gospel by treating each other as equals worthy of love and respect.

Catholic women can make a difference by reaching out to and supporting each other. Abused women usually seek help first from the women they are close to—their mother or a mother-figure, or from close family or friends. If you are that person, your understanding and compassion can bring light and comfort. But if you are rejecting or blaming of the victim of violence, she will most likely retreat into her painful solitude again.<sup>25</sup>

Catholic women can help victims of violence by being aware of and participating in efforts to learn about domestic violence, as well as about local laws and resources available to victims.

Once you know about domestic violence, you can intervene in this simple but effective way when you suspect a woman is being abused:

- ❖ Go up to her and ask her what is happening.
- ❖ Support her by listening without judging or blaming her.
- ❖ Help her, she may be in danger.
- ❖ Go with her to a place she can get help.
- ❖ Respect her confidentiality at all times.



A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

*Luke 10: 33-34*

**AS JESUS SAID, GO AND DO LIKEWISE.**

*Luke 10:37*



## Work with girls and women: create solidarity!

Girls and women as a group can stand up for each other and stand together for their equal rights and dignity!

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

*Isaiah 58: 6-7. 9*

- ❖ Share what the Church teaches on the equal rights and dignity of women and men.
- ❖ Teach women to stand together against dating violence and domestic violence. Catholic women cannot accept violence and disrespect!
- ❖ Encourage women to break their silence by offering your support. Teach women to expect to be treated with dignity.
- ❖ Teach and model a non-violent lifestyle for girls and women too. They need to develop the same relationship skills as boys and men!

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In some countries the rate of dating violence from young women towards young men is very high.<sup>26</sup> It has also been found that domestic violence from female to male partners is very common, as stated on p. 24.<sup>27</sup>

Some of this violence is likely to be in self-defense or in retaliation for violence from the man. In some cases, the woman is the primary aggressor. For successful prevention efforts, we must work to eliminate all violence between partners. **Young women also need non-violent skills development.**

VERBAL, PHYSICAL, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE ARE WRONG,  
REGARDLESS OF THE GENDER OF THE AGGRESSOR!



# Prevention of future domestic violence: work with young men and women to prevent dating violence<sup>28</sup>

- ❖ Unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime.
- ❖ Exposure to domestic violence as a minor increases the risk of becoming a victim or a perpetrator of dating violence and domestic violence as development progresses.
- ❖ Domestic violence, witnessed at home, leads to dating violence.
- ❖ Dating violence leads to domestic violence.
- ❖ Rates of victims and aggressors of dating violence are very high for both young women and young men.

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, 2014

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## Promote healthy relationships<sup>29</sup>

- ❖ Foster respectful, non-violent relationships and trust.
- ❖ Emphasize freedom from substance abuse and sexual risk taking.
- ❖ School-based components directed to youth can be designed to build skills such as emotion identification, healthy coping, communication, and conflict resolution. These can help prevent multiple forms of violence, such as bullying, dating violence, and domestic violence.
- ❖ Components directed to parents could focus their attention on the following risk factors for teen dating violence: harsh parenting, low parental supervision, negative parent-child interactions, and witnessing violence in the home.



## H.H. Pope Francis on sexual abuse in marriage

We also know that, within marriage itself, sex can become a source of suffering and manipulation. Hence it must be clearly reaffirmed that “a conjugal act imposed on one’s spouse without regard to his or her condition, or personal and reasonable wishes in the matter, is no true act of love, and therefore offends the moral order in its particular application to the intimate relationship of husband and wife”. The acts proper to the sexual union of husband and wife correspond to the nature of sexuality as willed by God when they take place in “a manner which is truly human”. Saint Paul insists: “Let no one transgress and wrong his brother or sister in this matter” (1 *Thessalonians* 4:6). Even though Paul was writing in the context of a patriarchal culture in which women were considered completely subordinate to men, he nonetheless taught that sex must involve communication between the spouses: he brings up the possibility of postponing sexual relations for a period, but “by agreement” (1 *Corinthians* 7:5).

POPE FRANCIS, *Amoris Laetitia*, 154



# A pastoral response to domestic violence

## Welcoming and responding to those who are troubled by domestic violence in our parishes

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- ❖ Do Catholics in our parishes know that we as Church are aware of domestic violence in our society, and concerned about domestic violence *among our members*?
- ❖ Train your parish staff to be respectful and compassionate, to respect the privacy and confidentiality of troubled parishioners, and to know what the parish offers them regarding prevention of and response to domestic violence.
- ❖ Once the parish staff have been trained on how to respond, make sure to get the word out to all the families and ministry groups in the parish, to issue an invitation to those who are affected to seek help.
- ❖ Know the resources in your community! Parish office staff should have copies of an up-to-date list of local resources on hand, to offer to parishioners in need. Diocesan departments may be of service to parishes in gathering and distributing this information.
- ❖ This list should include the domestic violence hotline number (if there is one), information on shelters for victims, counseling opportunities for victims, children, and aggressors, plus financial, medical, and food assistance.
- ❖ Once the parishioner has been welcomed by the staff, the next step is to meet with one of the parish ministers, as mentioned on the next page.
- ❖ Find additional resources at the end of the book.

# First responders: priests, deacons, religious, and lay ministers

## Main goals of intervention<sup>33</sup>

- ❖ **Safety** for the victim and children.
- ❖ **Accountability** for the abuser.
- ❖ **Restoration** of the relationship (if safe and possible) or **Mourning** over loss.

*U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops,  
When I Call for Help, 2002*

## Compassion and comprehension towards the victim of violence

- ❖ **Never blame the victim!!**
- ❖ Take her concerns seriously.
- ❖ Focus on her and the children's safety.
- ❖ Do not minimize the potential risk of harm.
- ❖ Be armed with accurate information about domestic violence.
- ❖ Be ready with updated information on resources in the community; print them in the bulletin and on the website.
- ❖ Place information on available resources in the women's restroom.

*U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, IBID*





## Timing is everything!

- ❖ When a victim asks for help, it is not the time to talk about “forgiving and forgetting.”
- ❖ Human beings do not *forget* trauma. We *can* learn to process it better, with help and with the Lord as our Healer.
- ❖ We may and should forgive once healing is taking place, but this takes time.
- ❖ Forgiveness does *not necessarily mean* the victim should receive the abuser back into the family and expose herself and the children to hurt and harm, or even death.
- ❖ Sometimes a victim has to leave (or the abuser has to leave) for reasons of physical safety and emotional health.<sup>34</sup>
- ❖ Some abusive persons can and do change *with help*, but without that change, it is unreasonable and unjust to expect their family members to live in a dangerous and intolerable situation that we would not be willing to endure ourselves.
- ❖ Let us learn to help the person with the problem, the abuser, and not expect the victim to face a painful future with no remedy in sight.

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## Tips for initial counseling

- ❖ Counseling a couple where there is violence can put the victim at risk of more violence after the session. Be aware! Be careful!
- ❖ *For change to happen*, the abuser must be held accountable for his actions and offered ways to change.
- ❖ Education groups for Catholic couples can be effective for awareness and prevention.
- ❖ Group treatment is most effective when dealing with abuse.
- ❖ Your Catholic parish could offer group treatment for abusers, with specially trained facilitators.<sup>35</sup>
- ❖ Your parish can offer support groups for victims of domestic violence.

## Reflections on bearing the cross of Christ

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

*Psalm 23: 1-3*

The Lord walks at the side of both the victim of domestic violence and the aggressor, leading them to healing. He uses us, his people, to serve as guides to families suffering from violence. Saying, “It is your cross and you must bear it” is not only hurtful and possibly places the victim at risk—it also contradicts Catholic social teaching.

74 | For 2000 years, the Church has reached out to the sick, the injured, and those who are oppressed, not fearing to stand up for the poorest and the most neglected. Victims of domestic violence are some of these people. The fact that they are married in the Church does not remove our responsibility as Christians to minister to those who suffer injustice and violence, and to help them seek solutions in both their physical and spiritual lives. When violence and injustice take place within the family, does this make these actions less sinful or injurious than crimes committed by strangers? Does the intimacy of the marital bond and the resultant betrayal of trust not cause *more* harm instead of less?

As we embrace the Cross of Jesus in our lives, let us move forward in solidarity to lessen the suffering of victims and children in Catholic families, and to provide non-violent solutions to those who are the cause of that family’s suffering.



# Reflections on bearing the cross of Christ

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Romans 8:38-39*

Experiences of suffering can be occasions for growth. People who suffer may realize in retrospect that they learned a great deal from the experience and gained maturity as a result... This awareness of suffering as the occasion for growth, however, must come from the individuals themselves, and is recognized only at a time when they are well on their way to healing and renewal. It is never appropriate, when someone is feeling great pain, to point out that things really are not so bad and that someday she/he will be glad that all of this happened. At a later time, it may be useful to share a perspective that new growth has taken place, and very simply to affirm the reality that this person has survived an extremely difficult situation.<sup>36</sup>

# If you are a bishop, what can you do to end domestic violence in Catholic families?

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

*Matthew 5, 9*

The bishop is *typos tou patros*: he is like the living image of God the Father.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1549*

Violence against women, inside or outside the home, is never justified. Violence in any form —physical, sexual, psychological or verbal is sinful; often, it is a crime as well.

*U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops,  
When I Call for Help, 2002*

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- ❖ Most Rev. Ricardo Ramírez, C.S.B., Bishop Emeritus of Las Cruces, USA, raised his prophetic voice on violence in Catholic families:<sup>37</sup>  
“Violence inflicted in the family on spouses, parents, children or siblings is intolerable and unconscionable. We ask the forgiveness of all persons affected by the inadequate response of the Church’s pastoral leaders to violence which has occurred in homes and in the family —places meant to be of sanctuary for all persons.”
- ❖ Taking the place of Christ himself, teacher, shepherd, and priest, and acting as his representative (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1558*), Catholic bishops are uniquely situated to raise their voices and proclaim the dignity and equality of women and men in their dioceses, and to promote genuine love and security in Catholic families.



# If you are a bishop, what can you do to end domestic violence in Catholic families?

Bishops can make an important contribution to ending domestic violence among the faithful of their dioceses:

1. **Draft statements at the diocesan and/or episcopal conference level**, promoting respect, love, and non-violence in Catholic couples, and suggesting appropriate pastoral responses to families affected by domestic violence.<sup>38</sup>
2. **Provide expert training from Catholic professionals to priests, religious and laity in their dioceses**, with sensitivity to local customs.
3. **Provide for basic training on domestic violence in the diocesan and regional seminaries**, preparing priests to respond to families in need.
4. **Lead the way to diocesan-wide education from a Catholic perspective in catechesis at all stages of life**, teaching about the dignity of persons and the inappropriateness of violence against persons, especially family members.
5. **Establish ongoing study committees at the diocesan and deanery levels** involving local Catholic women and men, and resulting in a diocesan or regional prevention and intervention plan for domestic violence.
6. **Create a response protocol in every parish in the diocese and region**, with pastors, deacons, religious sisters, lay ministers, and office staff prepared to respond effectively and rapidly to parishioners seeking help.



# If you are a priest, what can you do to end domestic violence in Catholic families?

1. **Do not blame the victim/survivor!**
2. **Avoid telling victim/survivors that this is their cross** and they must carry it (See pp 73-76). Support and defend victim/survivors; do not turn your back on a person in need!
3. **Get trained on domestic violence and learn about local resources:** Consider taking Pax in Familia's online course to learn how to respond to violence in Catholic families. <https://health-transformations.learnworlds.com/Many>
4. women and men are ashamed and afraid to tell their pastors what is happening in their families. If they realize there is compassion and help available, they will come forward. **Designate a member of the parish staff** as your on-site expert in pastoral response to domestic violence and local resources. This person will help carry your burden and respond effectively. **Preach on the good of the spouse and on domestic violence** whenever the readings of the day or any other occasion are conducive to it.<sup>xliii</sup>
7. **Men who hear their priest use his moral authority to denounce domestic violence** are positively influenced by it. Women and children find hope and support. **Encourage religious and catechists** in the parish and teachers in the parish school to be aware of domestic violence and responsive to parishioners' needs.
9. **Gather your priest colleagues, discuss domestic violence, and ask your bishop to get training for you. The leadership of the priest on domestic violence** makes all the difference
10. in a parish.

This I ask you: be shepherds, with the “odor of the sheep”,  
let that be felt by others.

POPE FRANCIS, *Chrism Mass*, 2013



# If you are a priest, what can you do to end domestic violence in Catholic families?

As father of your flock,  
you can be part of the solution

‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away —and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

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*John 10: 11-15*

## If you are speaking with the aggressor what can you do or say?

- ❖ Be straightforward with abusers. Ask them: “What did you say? What did you do? Why do you think you act like that?” Help them to take responsibility for their actions, and not to blame others.
- ❖ Pray with abusers to open their hearts to repentance and transformation.
- ❖ Stress the dignity and equality of their spouse and children.
- ❖ Ask them if it would be acceptable for you to comment on what you see in their behavior and what you think they need to change.
- ❖ Review the notes on forgiveness in these situations often so that your advice will sound (p. 73 ff)
- ❖ Consider starting gender-specific support groups at the parish where men and women can learn to be non-violent and to express love and respect to their spouses and children <sup>xliv</sup>

- ❖ Ask them to answer sincerely if there is a problem with alcohol or drugs. If so, help them to take action now.
- ❖ Review the notes on forgiveness in these situations often, so that your advice will be sound (see p. 73).
- ❖ Consider starting gender-specific support groups at the parish where men and women can learn to be nonviolent and to express love and respect to their spouses and children.<sup>40</sup>

Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God's saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings.

POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 44



## If you are a religious sister or brother, what can you do to end domestic violence in Catholic families?

The church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.

*Evangelii Gaudium, #114*

- ❖ Get training on domestic violence! Consider taking Pax in Familia's online course for a group in your congregation, so many will learn how to respond to violence in Catholic families. <https://health-transformations.learnworlds.com>
- ❖ Do not blame the victim/survivor!
- ❖ Know the resources in your community; do not be afraid to partner with other organizations.
- ❖ Provide emergency shelter and assistance if you can, or know where it is available.
- ❖ If you know the offender well, you may be able to safely intervene once the crisis has passed.
- ❖ Speak up on human and women's rights in your parish and/or school.
- ❖ Consider dedicating a month to focusing on domestic violence in your parish and/or school, e.g. include the topic in October Right to Life month celebrations, Or, if you'd rather, designate a day in your parish to focus on peace in the family and an end to domestic violence.<sup>41</sup>



## If you are an educator or a catechist, what can you do to end domestic violence in Catholic families?

- ❖ In some countries, the priest and/or religious sisters and brothers are also the primary educators and catechists. Yet the work of ending and preventing domestic violence is for all the members of a parish. We cannot attempt this pastoral challenge without the help of committed laity, educators, and catechists from all walks of life.
- ❖ Married people are uniquely suited to attend to victims of domestic violence and often to aggressors as well.
- ❖ Laity who are professionals and business people are well-positioned to use their education, influence, and financial resources to help heal family violence.
- ❖ Areas where teaching non-violent principles and skills can be included as part of human and Christian formation:
  - › Catechesis from elementary to high school.
  - › When children are from ages 11-14 is an especially important time to teach about peace and non-violence in relationships.
  - › Confirmation catechesis.
  - › Youth groups.
  - › Marriage preparation.
  - › Adult catechesis.
  - › Youth and adult retreats.
  - › Women's education and prayer groups.
  - › Men's education and prayer groups.
  - › Education groups for couples and parents.
  - › Trainings for healthcare workers at local Catholic hospitals, nursing schools, and medical schools.
- ❖ Get training on domestic violence! Consider taking Pax in Familia's online course for a group in your diocese or parish, so many will learn how to respond to violence in Catholic families.  
<https://health-transformations.learnworlds.com>





# If you are a husband and father, what can you do to end domestic violence in your family?

Authentic conjugal love presupposes and requires that a man have a profound respect for the equal dignity of his wife.

ST. JOHN PAUL II, *On the Christian Family*, 24

Catholic men, pause and reflect on the kind of husband and father you are, resolve to be the best you can be, and ask the Lord to guide you with his Holy Spirit to become the man Christ has called you to be:

- ❖ When was the last time I hurt my spouse, then realized it, said sorry, and asked forgiveness? Did she extend forgiveness to me? If not, did she tell me why not?
- ❖ Do I continue to inflict the same harm again and again, with no sign of changing? Or am I making a sincere effort to behave in a loving way, through self-awareness, obtaining help from wise others, and seeking help from the Lord in prayer and the sacraments?
- ❖ Does my wife, do my children, light up with joy when they see me?
- ❖ Am I reflecting Jesus, the Light of the World in my family?

Consider this saying, and reflect on it whenever you believe it is appropriate to dominate others:

“I cannot control others, I can only control myself.” <sup>42</sup>

## As a follower of Christ, your deeds should match your words of repentance

- ❖ Do your attitudes and behavior match up with the teaching of Christ and the Church?
- ❖ How did your father and other men in your life treat your mother and other women in your life?
- ❖ What did you copy from them, and which attitudes and behaviors have you decided on your own, based on your experience and convictions?
- ❖ Are you following in the footsteps of Christ?

If you are ready, resolve to show your spouse the equal dignity and loving respect she deserves as God's child, in your words and in your actions.

Disagreements and conflicts cause pain in our relationships. However, this does not give us permission to cause suffering to our dear ones. If we become violent in any way, our first duty is to acknowledge our failings, our sin and weakness, to sincerely apologize, and to seek forgiveness from the one we have hurt.

**THE NEXT STEP IS TO CHANGE OUR BEHAVIORS!**

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

*2 Corinthians 5, 17*



# If you are a wife and mother, what can you do to end domestic violence in your family?

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

*Colossians 3: 12-15*

St. John the Evangelist reminds us that we have not seen God, but that "if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

*1 John 4, 12*

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Ask yourself:

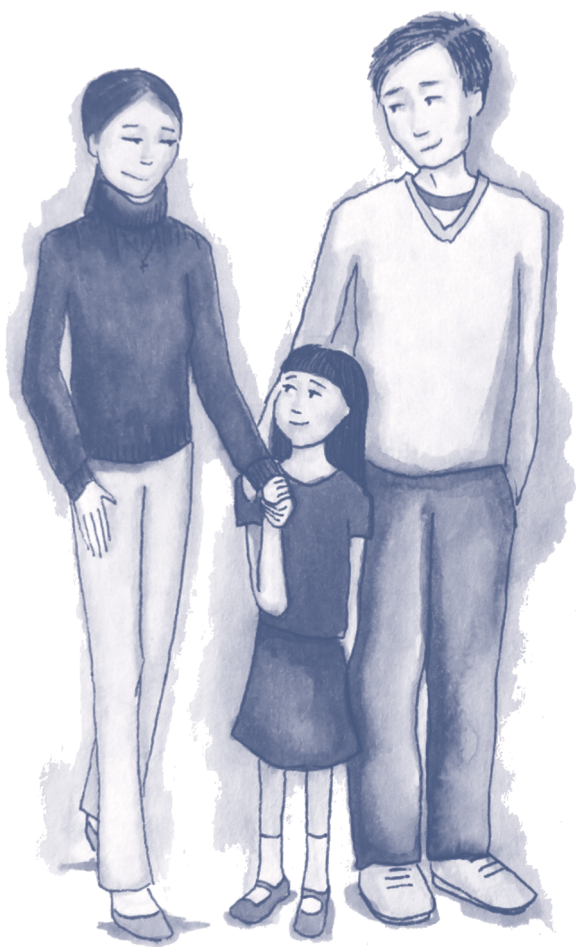
- ❖ When was the last time I hurt my husband, then realized it, said sorry, and asked forgiveness? Did he extend forgiveness to me? If not, did he tell me why not?
- ❖ Do I continue to inflict the same harm again and again, with no sign of changing? Or am I making a sincere effort to behave in a loving way, through self-awareness, obtaining help from wise others, and seeking help from the Lord in prayer and the sacraments?
- ❖ Does my husband, do my children, light up with joy when they see me?
- ❖ Am I reflecting Jesus, the Light of the World, in my family?

## Living the dignity and equality of a Catholic wife

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God —what is good and acceptable and perfect.

*Romans 12:2*

- ❖ How can you incorporate the values of dignity and equality into your life and help your family to understand the respect you deserve?
- ❖ Make sure to inculcate the values of dignity in all your children by not favoring boys over girls, thus perpetuating inequality and preferential treatment towards boys.
- ❖ It helps to let our dear ones know they have hurt us, and ask them to make changes in their manner of treating us. This is because many people, including many husbands, wives, and parents, are unaware of how hurtful their behavior is. What if they grew up in a family where insults and sarcasm were standard ways to communicate? What if they believe that men are superior to women and have not understood our equal dignity before God—that Christ’s blood was shed equally for both men and women? What if they are so self-focused that they fail to notice our tears and sorrow?
- ❖ We must be both understanding and forgiving, and know how to set appropriate limits to attitudes, words, and behaviors that are out of sync with the divine love that binds us. We must speak the truth in love and not turn a blind eye to injustice, including when we are the targets.
- ❖ **No one can escape some pain in their human relationships. Yet we cannot accept to participate in an abusive relationship that goes against every principle of Christian love. If something is wrong, we must seek help, we must seek change.**



## Living the “communion of persons”: the vocation of Catholic marriage

- ❖ As Catholic spouses, we strive to grow daily in respect, mutuality and equality, affection, trust, faithfulness, and the creation of a safe environment for our spouse and children.
- ❖ Perhaps we forget to tell our spouse “I love you” every day, and to show it not only in words, but in deeds through our loving actions and thoughtfulness.
- ❖ Perhaps we have forgotten to express kind thoughts to our spouse, to compliment him or her on the many efforts made to bring order, peace, comfort, and prosperity into our homes and families.
- ❖ Perhaps we fail to notice all the good our children do and say, and have been focused on their failures or bad behavior.
- ❖ Real love is for all the time, for every day of the week, for every evening when we are tired after a long day, for the days when we do not feel energetic or generous. Sometimes we don’t feel like speaking kindly to our husband, our wife, our children, our relatives. It is such an effort to smile, to muster up a kind expression, to reach out and touch them with affection and caring. We may not feel words or actions of blessing rising up from our hearts. When we feel challenged by love - that is when we call on the Lord to give us strength, to pull us beyond ourselves and our narrow, selfish viewpoint and desires into the wide place of light and love that is his kingdom, his domain.
- ❖ **Bless your spouse every night before you go to sleep and pray that the Lord may shower his blessings upon her, upon him.**

HOLY FAMILY, JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH,  
GRANT US PEACE!





# THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING

- ❖ Every follower of Christ must take up his or her Cross and follow Jesus.
- ❖ We cannot escape suffering in this life.
- ❖ Neither should we cause suffering to others with injustice, abuse and violence.
- ❖ Jesus teaches us that in serving those who suffer we serve Him.
- ❖ Suffering brings many Christians closer to Christ and is the royal way to intimacy with Jesus and to gratitude for all that He has done and does for us.
- ❖ Nevertheless, as Christians we do not seek out suffering, but do our best to accept the suffering that comes our way.
- ❖ Just as we are encouraged to get help when we are sick, we should get help when we suffer violence and injustice.
- ❖ It is our honor and privilege to touch the Flesh of Christ in those who suffer and to alleviate their pain.

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“Violence against women cannot be treated as ‘normal,’ maintaining a culture of machismo blind to the leading role that women play in our communities. **It is not right for us to look the other way and let the dignity of so many women, especially young women, be trampled upon.**”

Pope Francis, Peru, 19 June 2018

## If you are a victim of domestic violence, what can you do to get help?

**The victim of abuse is not responsible for that abuse.** Each of us is responsible for our own actions, and your spouse's violence was a choice he made. Many victims believe that if *they* change, their violent spouse will change, but this is most often not the case, unless the abuse is mutual.

- ❖ **Reach out for help** from your family, from your parish, and from your neighbors. They are learning better every day to respond to your needs and to protect your safety. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case in the past.
- ❖ **Do not hesitate to call the police**, if they are helpful where you live. Your partner may think going to the police is a great disloyalty, without being aware of how disloyal and unchristian his violent behavior is.

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### **Remember!**

- ❖ You need help!
- ❖ Your children need help!
- ❖ The aggressor needs help!

**Remember** that you are precious in God's eyes and he loves you (*Isaiah* 43:4). You are his daughter/son and he is your Father. Jesus gave his life for you! You are worthy of love and no one can take your dignity away from you!



# If you are a victim of domestic violence

## Some steps you can take now<sup>43</sup>

- ❖ Speak in confidence to someone you trust: a relative, friend, parish priest, deacon, religious sister or brother, or lay minister.<sup>44</sup>
- ❖ If you choose to stay in the situation, at least for now, set up a plan of action to ensure your safety. This includes placing personal documents and perhaps some money, in a safe place, and locating somewhere to go in an emergency.
- ❖ Find out about resources in your area that offer emergency help to victims of violence and their children, as well as counseling.
- ❖ Find out the Domestic Violence Hotline or the emergency phone number in your location (your parish may be able to help you get it), and program it into your cell phone, if you have one. Write it down where you will be able to find it in case of need.
- ❖ Ask your neighbors to come to your assistance if they hear or suspect renewed violence in your home.
- ❖ Remember that your violent partner is unlikely to seek help or to change unless there is some external pressure to do so. You can help him and your family by:
  - › Deciding for yourself what is and is not acceptable behavior towards you, and being prepared to seek safety for yourself and your children when the need arises.
  - › Letting your spouse know, if it is safe for you to do so, that abuse and violence in your relationship is unacceptable and that it must stop. This is especially important the first time your spouse is abusive. If setting

this kind of limit will endanger you, skip this step and focus on the following points.

- › Asking those who are important in your circle to take your side and encourage the abuser to seek help for violence, and often for alcohol or drug abuse.
- › Leaving the option of involving the police open if the violence should recur.
- › Insisting that the abuser seek counseling for violent behavior through a social service agency in your area, or the parish if a program is available.
- › Following through on your side of the agreement: if the violence persists, you will take action, by having the abuser leave the home, or by leaving yourself, with the children.
- › As a Christian, you will strive to forgive the violence. This may take time (see p. 73). This does not mean that it is acceptable for the violence to continue, or that you should not protect yourself!
- › **The best chance you have of being able to reconcile with your spouse and reuniting your family is to seek qualified help that leads to change in the relationship.** Of course, there are no guarantees of reconciliation, since you cannot force another person to change their behavior.

## Violence takes a toll! Take care of yourself!

You have suffered a great deal, sometimes more deeply emotionally than even physically. The abuse you have been through, including perhaps as a child, makes it difficult for you to be the spouse or parent you want to be. Because of this, as well as the current abuse, you may struggle to contain or control yourself, or to think clearly when under stress. You need help too, to provide a positive environment and loving relationships in your family.<sup>45</sup>



## If you know a child whose parent is suffering from domestic violence, what can you do to help that child/family?

- ❖ Remember that one other adult in a child's life who offers protection, love and support can make all the difference in the healthy attachment, development, adjustment and recuperation of that child.
- ❖ Be the safe place!
- ❖ Extend a hand; do not speak ill of the parents.
- ❖ Respect the child's or the children's privacy, unless you need to, or feel it is right to make a report to child protective services. Children feel ashamed of what is going on in their home and they are trained to keep it secret.
- ❖ Get help for the family, whether at the parish, the school, the catechist, a counselor, therapist or doctor.
- ❖ If you meet with ignorance of the realities of domestic violence, or negative, unhelpful responses, be the one who stands up for justice and who seeks to do what is right.
- ❖ Do not be afraid!

## If you are the person who is being abusive or violent in word or action, whom could you ask for help?

**First and foremost, beg the Lord in prayer** to help you to control yourself, to remain calm, and to heal your troubled spirit. Then, ask him to help you find the assistance you need.

Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love... Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

*Psalm 33, 18.22*

- ❖ Look at yourself in the mirror and be honest. “What did I say? What did I do? Why do I act like this?” A mature human being takes responsibility for his or her actions. I cannot blame someone else for what I do.
- ❖ Ask the Lord to open your heart to repentance and to transform your heart and actions.
- ❖ Ask our Blessed Mother to help you to see the dignity and equality of your spouse and of your children.
- ❖ Ask someone you trust - your father, your mother, your brother or sister, your spiritual guide, your best friend... to tell you what they see in your behavior and what they think you need to change.
- ❖ Take a good look at yourself and ask yourself if you have a problem with alcohol or drugs that you have been denying. If so, take action now. For no-cost services, find out if there is an Alcoholics Anonymous or other 12-Step recovery group in your area.
- ❖ Pick up the phone or walk over to the parish and make an appointment to talk to the priest or deacon, or someone who can help you.



- ❖ Don't just expect your spouse to forgive and forget. She/he may forgive. She/he will never forget. If you can't be trusted to be different, she/he should not take you back, until you have received the help you need and made the changes you need to make. Face the consequences of your actions maturely. Resolve to be different.
- ❖ Forgive your spouse if a police report is made and you are held accountable for your actions. Many studies show that arrest is the best deterrent to future domestic violence.
- ❖ Keep praying, every day. Come close to him and hold on to him. The Lord is our Healer.
- ❖ Knowing it is up to you to change your thoughts, words, and actions, find out what you need to do to make these changes. This will take time. Let this be your job for the next 12 months of your life. You will learn new ways to think, to speak, to act, and to love. **Give it your best effort!**



## St. Joseph, model for Christian men

Today, in our world where psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident, **Joseph appears as the figure of a respectful and sensitive man.** Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, **he makes a decision to protect Mary's good name, her dignity and her life.** In his hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment.

POPE FRANCIS, 2020. *Patris Corde #4*



# His Holiness Pope Francis counsels us on peace, and on avoiding violence in our homes

The Gospel tells us to look to the log in our own eye (cf. *Matthew* 7:5). Christians cannot ignore the persistent admonition of God's word not to nurture anger: "Do not be overcome by evil" (*Romans* 12:21). "Let us not grow weary in doing good" (*Galatians* 6:9). It is one thing to sense a sudden surge of hostility and another to give into it, letting it take root in our hearts: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (*Ephesians* 4:26). My advice is never to let the day end without making peace in the family. "And how am I going to make peace? By getting down on my knees? No! Just by a small gesture, a little something, and harmony within your family will be restored. Just a little caress, no words are necessary. But do not let the day end without making peace in your family". Our first reaction when we are annoyed should be one of heartfelt blessing, asking God to bless, free and heal that person. "On the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing" (1 *Peter* 3:9). **If we must fight evil, so be it; but we must always say "no" to violence in the home.**

POPE FRANCIS, *Amoris Laetitia*, 104

# How can you stop the violence you are committing against others?

Ask yourself: what do I believe as a Catholic?

Apart from me, you can do nothing.

*John 15: 5*

We must pray and come close to Jesus if we desire to be like him. As baptized Christians, we rely on the Lord for his grace and his help in the specific circumstances of our life. We approach the throne of grace through prayer, meditation on the Word of God, the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?

*1 Corinthians 6, 19*

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My body is a temple, and so are those of my spouse and my children. Our path to God is not only through prayer, the sacraments, and fidelity to the commandments. We are called to live the gift of love by making it concrete in our loving care of our neighbor. Just as we cannot see God, others cannot see him in us unless we radiate the warmth of his love onto them, as the moon reflects the light from the sun. Our neighbor is a kind of sacrament for each of us, making the Lord present and tangible to us. How much more so are our spouse and our children those sacred beings to whom we can show the love we would like to show to God?



# How can you stop the violence you are committing against others?

Ask yourself: what am I thinking?

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

*Matthew 12, 34*

What is my attitude?

- ❖ What do I think of the value of men, redeemed by Christ's blood?
- ❖ What do I think of the value of women, redeemed by Christ's blood?
- ❖ Have I made the papal teaching on the rights, dignity, equality, and complementarity of men and women my own?
- ❖ Do I see Christ in the victim of domestic violence?
- ❖ Do I see Christ in the violent aggressor?

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For Catholic men:

Look deep into your hearts and ask yourselves:

- ❖ Have I mistreated my wife, my daughter, my mother, my sister, my mother-in-law, my daughter-in-law, my sister-in-law or any other woman in my life mainly because she is a woman?
- ❖ Was I looking at her through the eyes of my ancient culture, and not through the eyes of Christ?
- ❖ Christ came for all men and for all women, to bring us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 *Peter* 2:9).

- ❖ When the culture around us is in conflict with our Catholic faith, faith must win out.
- ❖ It can be very hard to accept to change our attitudes; we need the Lord's help.

### For Catholic women:

Look deep into your hearts and ask yourselves:

- ❖ Have I mistreated my husband, my son, or any other man in my life, because of the anger I may feel towards men in my family or men in general?
- ❖ Was I looking at him through the eyes of my ancient culture, and not through the eyes of Christ?
- ❖ Christ came for all men and for all women, to bring us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 *Peter* 2:9).
- ❖ When the culture around us is in conflict with our Catholic faith, faith must win out.
- ❖ It can be very hard to accept to change our attitudes; we need the Lord's help.

# How can you stop the violence you are committing against others?

Ask yourself: what am I saying?

Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.

*James 1, 19-20*

- ❖ I speak in a respectful manner when I ask for what I need and desire in a manner that shows reverence for the other, while maintaining respect for myself as a human being with dignity.
- ❖ I listen to the other with attention, valuing their point of view.
- ❖ When I speak respectfully, I show understanding and compassion.
- ❖ I say what helps, not what hurts.
- ❖ I strive to resolve conflict, not to create it.
- ❖ I avoid insults, false accusations and threats, name calling, sarcasm, and mind games.

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Accept/expect respect!

- ❖ In order to respect my spouse, whether man or woman, I must accept his or her inalienable dignity before God.
- ❖ I must choose to actively respect my spouse in my words and actions.
- ❖ I must expect to be treated justly and respectfully by my spouse, to be honored and loved all the days of my life.
- ❖ If such respect is missing, I must seek justice and conversion, in myself and in my spouse.



- ❖ I must seek help if that respect and love is lacking in my marriage.



# How can you stop the violence you are committing against others?

Ask yourself: what am I doing?

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

*Proverbs 16, 32*

First aid for my temper:

- ❖ In order to practice self-control, I must be aware of myself and my automatic reactions.
- ❖ By recognizing when I am getting angry, I provide time for myself to take action on my own behalf, before I hurt my spouse or child.
- ❖ I must learn to relax and to calm myself down without violence, alcohol, or drugs.
- ❖ I can avoid violent speech and action!
- ❖ Non-violence is a decision I make!
- ❖ I can't hurt my spouse or my children if I am not in the same room or within earshot!

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Steps for taking a time out<sup>46</sup>

1. Recognize that I'm getting upset.
2. Let my spouse know that I need to take a time out.
3. Go into a different room or outside for a while —breathe deeply, pray, exercise, do something non-harmful that calms me down.
4. Once I am calm, come back and see if we can speak to each other respectfully.

5. Solve the problem together, or let it go for now —if we both agree.
6. Ask forgiveness if I offended my loved one.

**KEEP TRYING! IT IS DIFFICULT TO  
CHANGE THE HABITS OF A LIFETIME!**



# How can you stop the violence you are committing against others?

## Decisions and changes to make:

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

*Colossians 3, 14*

- ❖ I will express love, admiration, and affection with the body God gave me.
- ❖ I will strive to understand the consequences of my violence by listening to those I have hurt, and by listening to the Lord and his Church.
- ❖ I will ask (but not demand) forgiveness of my spouse and my children.
- ❖ I will look at myself honestly and decide if now is the time for me to change.
- ❖ **If not now, when?**
- ❖ I will avoid all physical harm to my family.
- ❖ I will avoid sexual coercion and abuse.
- ❖ I will avoid harmful behaviors like alcohol abuse and drug abuse. Do I need to seek help for this?
- ❖ Are there people I should avoid if I really want to change my drinking habits?

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## Do I drink and then hurt my family?

Alcohol, although not the cause of violence, puts the one who drinks at risk of losing control of themselves. For example, research shows that it is from 11 to 17 times more likely that a man will abuse his partner on a day when he is drinking.<sup>47</sup>

## Facts about alcohol and domestic violence<sup>48</sup>

- ❖ Affects cognitive and physical function.
- ❖ Reduces self-control.
- ❖ Exacerbates financial difficulties, infidelity, and other family stressors.
- ❖ Can create conflict, increasing the risk of violence between partners.



To him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

*Ephesians 3: 20-21*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Christauria Welland, a Canadian, is a bilingual clinical psychologist retired from private practice in San Diego, California, specializing in family therapy and domestic violence. She founded Pax in Familia in 2014. The first edition of this book was presented at the World Meeting of Families and at the Synod on the Family in Rome, 2015. Bishops throughout the world have received copies of this book.

Dr. Welland has fifty years' experience working internationally, and has been selected as a US Department of State Fulbright Specialist in the area of domestic violence. Her Spanish program, Sin Golpes, is widely used in offender treatment in the United States and Latin America, where she has trained thousands of therapists. Dr. Welland has been a catechist since 1972; she and her husband Michael Akong have served Mexican migrant families in their Catholic parish since 1992. They founded the Oaxaca Education Fund in 2012.

[www.oaxacaeducationfund.org/](http://www.oaxacaeducationfund.org/) They are presenting together on the topic of domestic violence in Catholic families at the World Meeting of Families in Rome in 2022.

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### FURTHER INFORMATION/CONTACTS

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**Free multilingual downloads** of pastoral responses to and prevention of domestic violence in Catholic families: [www.paxinfamilia.org](http://www.paxinfamilia.org)

**Online courses** in English, Spanish and French for pastoral agents. Scholarships available.

<https://health-transformations.learnworlds.com/>

## MORE CATHOLIC RESOURCES ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN USA IN ENGLISH

- ❖ **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**  
<https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/when-i-call-help-pastoral-response-domestic-violence>
- ❖ **Catholics For Family Peace**  
<http://www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org/>  
Domestic Violence Brochure & information
- ❖ **Archdiocese of Chicago Domestic Violence Outreach:**  
<https://pvm.archchicago.org/human-dignity-solidarity/domestic-violence-outreach>
- ❖ **Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Washington, DC:**  
<https://www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/familypeace/>
- ❖ **National Council of Catholic Women**  
<http://www.nccw.org/>  
*Women Healing the Wounds* online resource guide



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*How can we help to end violence  
in Catholic families?*  
Health Transformations, San Diego, USA  
May 2022

DR. CRISTAURIA WELLAND

# How can we help to end violence in Catholic families?

*A Guide for Clergy, Religious and Laity*

“The disciple of Christ should always seek to serve Our Lord in fraternal assistance to all the needy, including where pain, poverty, solitude, or illness reveal their origin as sad consequences of domestic aggression.”

*From the Preface by BISHOP JEAN LAFFITTE,  
Former Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Family*

One in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence from their partner; this includes at least 90 million Catholic women. The mutual love and honor promised in marriage is not understood; hearts are broken; bodies and spirits are injured; hope begins to die.

What can you as a family member and Catholic do about domestic violence? What does a compassionate approach to the victim of violence look like? How can we provide help and safety to the families we know? How can you get help? Most of all, how can we work to prevent domestic violence in our families, one interaction at a time? Change is possible! The “Gospel of the Family” demands it!

Key features of this booklet

- Facts about domestic violence.
- Catholic teaching on Marriage and the Family.
- What can Catholics do to respond to and prevent violence in Catholic families?
- Attitudes and practical techniques that help to end the violence in Catholic marriages.
- Resources and references.