



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Domestic Violence, the attempt to manipulate, control or destroy the lives and well-being of others, is never acceptable

Last month, this newsletter (Vol 2. No 13) addressed the issue of gun violence. Equally disturbing is the problem of domestic violence which, as Pope Francis has said, is especially prevalent when people are isolated or homebound because of a pandemic like COVID-19.

The Book of Genesis tells the story of the first instance of domestic violence in recorded history—Cain’s murder of his brother Abel. Violence is always sinful. It is never OK to abuse another human being—physically, emotionally or by the force of legal or psychological intimidation. Any abusive behavior or deliberate violence against another human being (especially innocent and defenseless women and children) is horrible and unjustified. As Pope Francis says, “Abuses and violence against women are acts of cowardice and a degradation of all humanity.”



Every act of domestic violence contributes directly to what Pope St. John Paul II called “the culture of death.” It tears down and destroys what God has created—human persons made in His image and likeness—and it violates the “culture of life” that we are called to nurture and grow as members of the Body of Christ.

What’s the difference between normal conflict within families and domestic violence? Conflict is part of life. We all have to learn to disagree in healthy and productive ways. Respectful differences of opinion, even arguments, are to be expected in any relationship. Violence, on the other hand, destroys all hope for the peaceful resolution of conflict—especially among individuals and families. Peace and domestic harmony are only possible

when violence has been rejected and when forgiveness and reconciliation have taken the place of bitter disagreement and unresolved conflict.

Regrettably, we have witnessed recently an increase in instances of domestic violence including abusive behavior against children, spouses, and even among neighbors and “strangers” in our midst. Domestic violence is any kind of behavior that a person uses, or threatens to use, to control another, usually more vulnerable, person. The two key elements are threat and control. Within families and intimate relationships, domestic violence can take various forms:

- **Physical**—Violent actions such as hitting, beating, pushing, and kicking. In many cases physical abuse becomes more frequent and severe over time.
- **Sexual**—Includes any sexual acts that are forced on an unwilling partner by another.
- **Psychological**—Includes a wide range of behaviors such as intimidation, isolating the victim from friends and family, controlling where the victim goes, making the victim feel guilty or crazy, and making unreasonable demands.
- **Emotional**—Undermining an individual’s self-esteem, constant criticism, insults, put-downs, and name-calling.
- **Economic**—Examples include limiting the victim’s access to family income, preventing the victim from working or forcing the victim to work, destroying the victim’s property, and making all the financial decisions.

Alcohol and drugs are often associated with domestic violence but they do not cause it. An abusive person who drinks or uses drugs has two different problems: substance abuse and violence. Both must be taken seriously and treated.

Let’s work to end domestic violence in all its forms. Let’s be women and men who respect one another in spite of our differences. Let’s pray for all victims of domestic violence and let’s work to ensure that vulnerable family members are given the help they need to find safe and secure alternatives to unhealthy relationships and situations.

An Overview of Domestic Violence

A selection from *When I call for help: A pastoral response to domestic violence against women* by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

[Click here to read the full document](#)

Domestic violence is any kind of behavior that a person uses to control an intimate partner through fear and intimidation. It includes physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, and economic abuse. Some examples of domestic abuse include battering, name-calling, and

insults, threats to kill or harm one's partner or children, destruction of property, marital rape, and forced sterilization or abortion.

Younger, unmarried women are at greatest risk for domestic violence. According to a U.S. government survey, 53 percent of victims were abused by a current or former girlfriend or boyfriend. One-third of all victims were abused by a spouse, while 14 percent said that the offender was an ex-spouse. Women ages 16 to 24 are nearly three times as vulnerable to attacks by intimate partners as those in other age groups; abuse victims between ages 35 and 49 run the highest risk of being killed.

While abuse cuts across all ethnic and economic backgrounds, some women face particular obstacles. Women of color may not view the criminal justice system as a source of help. Additionally, in some cultures, women feel pressured to keep problems within the home and to keep the family together at all costs. Some fear that they will lose face in the community if they leave. Immigrant women often lack familiarity with the language and legal systems of this country. Their abusers may threaten them with deportation.

Women in rural communities may find themselves with fewer resources. The isolation imposed by distance and lack of transportation can aggravate their situation. Isolation can also be a factor for women who do not work outside the home. They may have less access to financial resources and to information about domestic violence. Women with disabilities and elderly women are also particularly vulnerable to violence.

Some who suffer from domestic violence are also victims of stalking, which includes following a person, making harassing phone calls, and vandalizing property. Eight percent of women in the United States have been stalked at some time in their lives, and more than one million are stalked annually.¹⁰ Stalking is a unique crime because stalkers are obsessed with controlling their victims' actions and feelings. A victim can experience extreme stress, rage, depression, and an inability to trust anyone.

Domestic violence is often shrouded in silence. People outside the family hesitate to interfere, even when they suspect abuse is occurring. Many times even extended family denies that abuse exists, out of loyalty to the abuser and in order to protect the image of the family. Some people still argue—mistakenly—that intervention by outside sources endangers the sanctity of the home. Yet abuse and assault are no less serious when they occur within a family. Even when domestic violence is reported, sometimes there are failures to protect victims adequately or to punish perpetrators.

Why Men Batter

Domestic violence is learned behavior. Men who batter learn to abuse through observation, experience, and reinforcement. They believe that they have a right to use violence; they are also rewarded, that is, their behavior gives them power and control over their partner.

Abusive men come from all economic classes, races, religions, and occupations. The batterer may be a "good provider" and a respected member of his church and community. While there is no one type, men who abuse share some common characteristics. They tend to be extremely jealous, possessive, and easily angered. A man may fly into a rage because his spouse called her mother too often or because she didn't take the car in for servicing. Many try to isolate their partners by limiting their contact with family and friends.

Typically, abusive men deny that the abuse is happening, or they minimize it. They often blame their abusive behavior on someone or something other than themselves. They tell their partner, "You made me do this."

Many abusive men hold a view of women as inferior. Their conversation and language reveal their attitude towards a woman's place in society. Many believe that men are meant to dominate and control women.

Alcohol and drugs are often associated with domestic violence, but they do not cause it. An abusive man who drinks or uses drugs has two distinct problems: substance abuse and violence. Both must be treated.

Why Women Stay

Women stay with men who abuse them primarily out of fear. Some fear that they will lose their children. Many believe that they cannot support themselves, much less their children.

When the first violent act occurs, the woman is likely to be incredulous. She believes her abuser when he apologizes and promises that it will not happen again. When it does—repeatedly—many women believe that if they just act differently they can stop the abuse. They may be ashamed to admit that the man they love is terrorizing them. Some cannot admit or realize that they are battered women. Others have endured trauma and suffer from battered women syndrome.

REMEMBER: Some battered women run a high risk of being killed when they leave their abuser or seek help from the legal system. It is important to be honest with women about the risks involved. If a woman decides to leave, she needs to have a safety plan, including the names and phone numbers of shelters and programs. Some victims may choose to stay at this time because it seems safer. Ultimately, abused women must make their own decisions about staying or leaving.

Roman Catholic Province of Indianapolis

Lifting of the Dispensation from the Obligation of Mass

Effective 11 June 2021

As of March 2020, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, all Roman Catholics throughout the entire Province of Indianapolis, which comprises all five dioceses of Indiana, have been dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. However, with the decrease of cases in our state, the widespread availability of vaccines and following the guidance of public health officials, we are now able to safely accommodate more parishioners for Masses. Therefore, effective June 11, the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass is hereby lifted throughout the state of Indiana.

Except for the unique situations as described below, those who are otherwise healthy are obliged to return to Sunday Mass by the weekend of June 12-13, 2021:

- Those who are seriously ill, exhibit flu-like symptoms and/or may have a contagious disease (including quarantine due to exposure).
- Those who are unable to attend Mass through no fault of their own (e.g. transportation issue).
- Those who are homebound and/or incapacitated due to age, infirmity and/or medical restrictions.
- Those who have compromised health conditions and/or at high risk of contracting the virus.
- Those who are caretakers of person who are sick or of persons at high-risk of serious illness if they contract Covid virus.

If you have any questions about any specific needs, concerns or protocols, you are advised to contact your parish directly. Your pastor, who has the authority to dispense in individual cases, may be helpful in addressing individual fears and concerns.

The obligation to attend Mass is a joyful one, reflecting the very character of who we are as Catholics

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Abuses and violence against women are acts of cowardice and a degradation of all humanity. We must not look the other way. Let us pray for women who are victims of violence, that they may be protected by society and have their sufferings considered and heeded by all.



It's shocking how many women are beaten, insulted and raped. The testimonies of the victims who dare to break their silence are a cry for help that we cannot ignore.

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.

My Prayer for You

One source of healing we have in our lives as Christians is prayer. Psalm 55 may be an especially apt prayer for women who are dealing with abusive situations. Let's pray these verses on behalf of all victims of Domestic Violence:

Listen, God, to my prayer;
do not hide from my pleading;
hear me and give answer.

If an enemy had reviled me,
that I could bear;
If my foe had viewed me with contempt,
from that, I could hide.
But it was you, my other self,
my comrade and friend,
You, whose company I enjoyed,
at whose side I walked
in procession in the house of God.

But I will call upon God,
and the Lord will save me.
At dusk, dawn, and noon
I will grieve and complain,
and my prayer will be heard.
(Ps 55:2-3, 13-15, 17-18).

+ Charles C. Thompson