

**DIOCESAN RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:  
Report from a Survey of U.S. Dioceses  
July 2008**

Between March and June, 2008, the Bishops' Committee for Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth surveyed all dioceses to learn about programs and activities they have undertaken to address domestic violence. Thirty-five arch/dioceses responded to the survey. This report tabulates the data and includes comments from respondents. Questions may be directed to Sheila Garcia, Associate Director, Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, at 202-541-3041 or [sgarcia@uscgb.org](mailto:sgarcia@uscgb.org).

**1. What have been specific responses to date of the diocese to domestic violence? Please check all that apply.**

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<b>Links to Community Resources (e.g. safe houses, counseling)</b>	<b>31</b>
Clergy Education	21
Victim Advocacy	19
Observance of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month	17
Abuser Intervention Programs	13
Distribution of Preaching Helps	11
Victim Support Groups	11
Informational Display	11
Educational Forum	7
Seminary Workshops	5

*(Total= 34)*

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**Comments:**

“Some parishes have developed a parish based initiative called Hope Ministry that trains parishioners to listen and to connect persons who may suffer from abuse to resources in the community.”

“Retreats for couples integrating spirituality, social sciences and feminine movement reflection.”

“Workshop trainings for pastoral ministers (in addition to clergy) create support ministries in each parish is our goal.”

“Third edition of a comprehensive domestic violence pastoral response resource manual; victim referrals for legal assistance, shelters, pastoral counseling; day of reflection for survivors of abuse; interdenominational prayer service for victims and survivors of abuse”

“Website information; pamphlets for engaged couples and new parents.”

“Catholic schools and the Diocesan media library were provided with copies of prevention curriculums. Discussion and activities designed to educate children and youth in "right relationships" and "what to do if something isn't right in a relationship" were integrated into religious education curriculum as part of the Safe Environment program for children and youth. Victim Assistance Coordinators appointed in response to the Charter for the Protection of Children have been made available as a resource individuals victimized by any type of abuse, including intimate partner abuse, as a source of support and identification of community resources.”

“Some training for marriage preparation mentor couples”

“Victims receive outpatient counseling services at six sites around the diocese.”

“...assistance with workplace policies on domestic violence”

“A resource binder, containing information on community resources in various areas of the Diocese, was assembled and distributed to each parish in the Diocese by the Office of Family Life. In March 2008, the Diocesan Women's Commission hosted an annual conference, at which domestic violence was one of the topics. This was addressed by a representative of the Police Department's task force on domestic violence.”

“In addition to the clergy, education on domestic violence was presented to: Family Life leaders, many lay leaders of some deaneries, parish secretaries, some Youth Directors, some DREs, Youth and Young Adult parishioners on dating violence, and immigrant leaders.”

“Counseling and referral for victims and perpetrators.”

“Cooperation with various community programs: Empty Places at the Table, Isaiah Project, Silent Witnesses. ISAIAH Faith in Democracy: Renewing the Promise gathering, State Department of Health Prevention of Sexual Violence plan, Dating Violence- there are four groups of teens to speak to both public and private schools around the state.”

“When the diocese puts together its annual youth rally, the staff always includes a service project. In the past one of the service projects directly benefited a domestic violence agency in the parish community that helped host this event. Household and personal care items for mothers and children who need emergency shelter, were collected to be donated to the abuse shelter. In addition, a representative from that agency gave a presentation to the youth and adults who were present, indicating the importance of outreach to families in need of support in times of domestic violence. Several local ecumenical clergy associations in our diocese, in collaboration with local law enforcement and social service agencies, provide vouchers for meals, travel and lodging to people in need. Although these networks are not specifically set up for domestic violence victims per se, often times mothers and children needing immediate refuge, food, or transportation to safety, are certainly part of that outreach.”

**2. Who has been involved in the implementation of the response? Please check all that apply.**

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<b>Diocesan Offices</b>	<b>30</b>
Most respondents listed more than one Diocesan Office; most listed were the <b>Family Life Office, or equivalent (14)</b> and <b>Catholic Charities (10)</b> . Other responses included Social Concerns/Catholic Social Services (5), Child Protection (3), Youth/Young Adult Ministry (3), Continuing Education For Clergy (3), and the Diocesan Tribunal (2.)	
Diocese in Partnership with Community Organizations	21
Parishes in Partnership with Community Organizations	15
Diocesan Bishop	12
Parish Staff	10
Catholic Advocacy Group(s) Not Connected with Diocese or Parishes	6
Diocesan Women’s Commission	5
Seminary Faculty	3
Auxiliary Bishop	2
<i>(Total= 34)</i>	
Diocesan Offices or Other Comments	35

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**Comments:**

“Education: Non-archdiocesan providers: Good Shepherd Services--services to the Vietnamese community, Caminar Latino--(not self-identified as Catholic but located on a parish property)--services to Hispanic community.”

“One of our Youth Ministry programs works with youth to maintain the garden at the local shelter - as they work they teach healthy relationship concepts though discussion and activities. Their program is called "Hands for Growing." Another parish obtained a mini-grant a number of years ago to offer prevention programs ("Quit It" "Bully Proof" "Reaching and Teaching Teens.." and "Love All That and More") within their parish - In fact, our diocesan mini-grant proposal was modeled after their program.”  
"When I call for Help" was presented to community organizations that the diocese worked with. ”

“The Council of Catholic Women in [our] Diocese has created the "Healing the Wounds" brochure which is used nationally and creates opportunities for communities to provide local resources. The Council affiliates in parishes often support shelters through their Family Concerns, and Community Concerns Commissions. Hope Community Center, an outreach to the Farmworkers Ministry offers a 15 week parenting program that addresses Domestic Violence and its impact on children. The center also has three Americore volunteers that assist at a shelter for victims of Domestic Violence and volunteer lawyers that work with immigrants that have been victims of Domestic Violence. St. Rita Ministry at Holy Family Parish supports Harbor House, a shelter for domestic abuse victims, through fund raising and outreach programs. St. Rita Ministry was also involved in creating awareness of National Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Week.”

“We work with Bill Degnan who works with the Probation Office. He trains people involved in ministry on the topics of healing and reducing violence. He works with seminarians, Youth Group Leaders. I participated in a Conference of awareness raising at the local state college.”

**3. To whom has the response of your diocese been directed? Please check all that apply.**

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<b>Parishioners at large</b>	<b>23</b>
Clergy	22
Victims: Intimate Partners and Children Impacted by Domestic Violence	20
Parish Staff	17
Victims: Intimate Partners	16
Diocesan Staff	15
Perpetrators	9

(Total=34)

Other (please specify)

11

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**Comments:**

“Our approach is to attempt first to save the couple if it is possible, without putting the victim at risk.”

“Engaged couples & preparing clergy; new parents (baptism preparation.)”

“Catholic Charities employs a bi-lingual therapist providing counseling to victims of crime and other individual/family issues. Through Immigration & Legal Services Division staff work with victims of crime to obtain legal residency. T-visa VVWA.”

“Victim Assistance posters were placed in men’s and women’s restrooms in parishes, schools, and diocesan offices to increase confidentiality and accessibility of the information to victims who may not otherwise have independent access to the resources. Victim assistance posters were made more general to include all types of abuse. Posters were printed in English and Spanish and a bilingual victim assistance coordinator joined the other volunteer VACs.”

“Family Life leaders, Sponsor couples ministering to the engaged, other Marriage Preparation programs, Youth and Young Adult leaders, some deacons.”

“Counselors and Social Workers.”

**4. To what extent has the USCCB Pastoral Letter "When I Call For Help" (1992, 2002) influenced your diocese's response to the reality of domestic violence? Please check the most appropriate.**

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<b>Very Much</b>	<b>10</b>
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<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>10</b>
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Moderately	9
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Minimally	9
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(Total =34)

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**Comments:**

“The Bishops’ letter provides a theological foundation and authority which is important.”

“It has provided us with a different avenue to reach clients we were already serving or trying to serve and a new way to speak to priests about how they can intervene.”

“It was the impetus for our response and a most useful resource.”

“Great Resource. Much of our work is focused on the goal of the Bishops' statement, and now we can implement its goal at a diocesan & parish level.”

“The pastoral letter’s and clear, forceful message from the bishops that violence against intimate partners is never tolerated has brought a dark secret into the light of Gospel truth (not distortion).”

“A clear message from the Bishops offering hope and freedom for those trapped in domestic violence.”

“We had many efforts in motion before I was introduced to the document, as part of our efforts to prevent abuse of children through teaching right relationships, however, we have definitely made use of the document and find it to be a powerful resource that validates our commitment.”

“Our diocese feels a Catholic response is warranted to ensure that anyone experiencing these tragic events is directed to appropriate interventions. The diocese has attempted to educate and inform the various target groups about the realities of domestic violence. Our diocese continues to network with various community agencies that provide expertise and services for those experiencing domestic violence.”

“Our Diocesan Youth Director has developed 2 special formation programs that include awareness of domestic violence issues. Catholic Charities, Caritas Counseling Service, provides court mandated anger management and this deals to a large extent with domestic violence. The staff of Caritas does an annual training on the impact of domestic violence on children.”

“The Archbishop wrote an article in our newspaper, "People of God," indicating the importance of eradicating domestic violence. "When I Call for Help" pastoral letter was distributed at meetings and workshops. Our local Catholic Radio, interviewed Sheila Garcia and Bishop Ramirez on the reality and sad effects of domestic violence.”

“The Signs of Abuse card has been very well received by pastors. We are now including info from the card on a poster designed for women's restrooms regarding this and other women's issues.”

“I use it when I speak to the seminarians or perhaps a St. Vincent de Paul conference.”

**5. Is there any initiative or program that you wish your diocese would sponsor or support as a response to domestic violence?**

*(Total responses= 30)*

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**Comments:**

“In partnership with our local Self-Help counselor, we have prepared a retreat for victims. We attempted grant funding but failed. I would still like to see this happen.”

“I feel there is a need of an archdiocesan reflection team that meets regularly towards creating a response to domestic violence issues in marriage and families. The Church has the responsibility to reflect (re-think) domestic violence issues from the faith point of view and not be satisfied with what secular groups are offering as the one and only response.”

“Yearly response to healing for victims & their families (Catholic) but also including our voice to interfaith organizations.”

“Give domestic violence a higher profile in ministry formation (priest, deacon and lay minister) and in marriage preparation efforts.”

“Crisis Hotline. Crisis Counseling”

“We would like to expand and improve our efforts in the area of prevention through educating children and youth in right relationships - stressing how scripture and Catholic doctrine support and guide us in having healthy relationships. At this time our victim outreach is limited to providing support through clergy and victim assistance coordinators and referring individuals to existing programs in the community. We may have parishes that would be interested in offering further outreach or support group interventions in a Catholic setting.”

“Something more global - perhaps if there is an updated document?”

“Better support for the victims of abuse and their families.”

“Pastors and Parish Pastoral Councils need to take more initiative in addressing this issue. This was made clear at our recent Women's Commission Conference, when participants commented that they do not hear anything said in their parishes about this.”

“Reaching out to the children of domestic violence victims. Seminarian and deacon candidates education on domestic violence. Help for the perpetrators. Establishing a protocol in situations when a domestic violence victim approaches the church. (Updating the clergy and lay leaders on the devastation of domestic violence. Establishing a protocol in situations when a domestic violence victim approaches the church for help. Further assistance to the immigrant victims of domestic violence, including the Asian community)”

“To encourage observance of Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October in parishes of diocese, by offering presentations, resource information, and homily helps for pastors.”

“More should be done on the parish level.”

“Easy to implement small group resources.”

**6. Do you think there is interest in the diocese in obtaining further resources for responding as Catholics to domestic violence?**

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<b>Yes</b>	<b>28</b>
I do not know	6
No	3
<i>(Total=40)</i>	

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**Comments:**

“We need a Catholic focus scripturally and sacramentally. We use other professionally done video resources, e.g. Center for Prevention of Sexual & Domestic Violence, that are not Catholic. At times I think there is inappropriate or slanted negative, implied criticism of our Church, which, in truth does the very best teaching based on the dignity of the human person.”

“There is interest in people and families affected by domestic violence. A response created by the Catholic Church, not from someone else and accepted by the Church performe.”

“Each diocese should respond individually to their faith communities, but all dioceses should also join together with one common goal - unite voices against domestic violence.”

“Yes, the response I received from clergy, diocesan staff and parishioners as I met with them was quite positive. I have been approached by parish staff who have requested additional information and stressed the great need in both our English and Spanish speaking parish populations. We receive regular notices from community programs re: educational and collaborative workshops. We forward them to our parishes, schools and programs and have had individuals (clergy, pastoral ministers, youth ministers) continually express interest in attending.”

“Possibly, but I am not sure it is seen as high priority.”

“Additional funding earmarked specifically for victims of domestic abuse to be able to offer free counseling as well as help with housing and other services vital to their well being.”

“No, the diocese has taken the necessary steps to ensure that a Catholic response to domestic violence has been implemented. Awareness of this important issue and its impact has been disseminated throughout the diocese, and intervention networking with community providers



established.”

“I would like to have the document used in all formation programs.”

“More literature and other resources. Re-iterating the misinterpretation of scriptures. More resources to help the victim and their children after leaving the shelter. Reminding the victims frequently that they are made to God's image and likeness. More attention to all of cultural backgrounds including the Asian and Native American families.”

“Not on an archdiocesan level but I would like them.”

## **7. Please enter any further thoughts you have about a Catholic response to domestic violence.**

*(Total responses= 17)*

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### **Comments:**

“We have found it helpful to have a canon lawyer from the tribunal explain that the marriage covenant is broken when abuse exists. I think we need to do a lot to educate clergy and the Catholic community that the marriage covenant is broken when there is abuse.”

“I do believe partnership with local Family Violence & Sexual Assault prevention programs is key.”

“A good number of women as well men affected by domestic violence don't want to leave the relationship. They will rather look for a solution to the problem and continue with the relationship. An important component in helping families and couples is the faith component. We can not ignore it anymore.”

“Create curriculum for seminarians and pastoral ministers in responding to violence **from the pulpit** to the pews. Clergy should not be afraid to preach about domestic violence, and follow up with the support network in the parish.”

“I believe that there are two additional populations who are prone to become victims of violence and that the Catholic Church and our bishops should address: teenagers (both male and female) and the elderly. The rising incidence of date rape and violence perpetrated against friends, videotaped and posted on Internet teen sites (e.g. the recent incident with cheerleaders in Florida) is very troubling and needs attention. Additionally, the aging of the large cohort of baby boomers who require care will bring increased incidents of physical, emotional, financial and sexual abuse of the elderly, often at the hands of family caregivers.”

“The training was immensely helpful to me in increasing my awareness of domestic violence and those affected, addressing in marriage preparation, making referrals for several women caught in violence. This continues to be a hidden problem. Clergy and pastoral ministers need assistance in when and how to make effective referrals as well as encouragement to speak about the issue regularly and knowledgeably.”

“Good marketing materials would help - materials in addition to tapes. Thank you for fostering this important awareness and prevention effort.”

“Prevention of abuse of any kind falls within our core beliefs regarding respecting life, promoting human dignity, and living the Gospel message to "love our neighbors as ourselves." Educating children and youth in right relationships and how to seek help when a relationship "isn't right" is central to our efforts to prevent all types of abuse. An emphasis on these concepts in all we do with children makes sense (as opposed to separate, compartmentalized efforts and programs) and seems something to strive for as we evaluate best practices.”

“In the diocese there is a need for domestic violence programs with a faith perspective that target immigrant women and children because the church is their primary support system. Their faith is their only resource. The Domestic Violence Program Coordinator for El Centro advised [us] that women have told her that ‘the most powerful moment was when a priest came and blessed them and said that Jesus doesn't want that for you.’ She said that in Mexico they tell women who are abused ‘this is your cross.’ Now they are hearing from a priest that ‘Christ died for us to liberate us...not to have us carry his cross for him.’”

“Designating a specific Sunday in the month of October for Domestic Abuse Awareness and sending a complete packet of materials that would include homily helps, intercessory prayers, etc. (similar to the packet of resources sent by USCCB for Catechetical Sunday).”

“For approximately 12 years, the Archdiocese has had a mass for victims and survivors of violence. This mass is usually celebrated by the local archbishop with a reception for the victims and survivors of violence. The mass is usually held on the fifth Sunday in Lent. We also provide prayer cards and literature to our Catholic community and the local community at large.”

“[Catholic Charities] provides safe housing & shelter, civil legal services, sexual assault training services, transitional housing, operates the Family Justice Center, and runs the Supervised Visitation Center.”

“1. Re-iterating that leaving the abusive spouse is not a sin and is not against the church teaching. 2. Circulate "When I Call for Help," and Bishop Ramirez's pastoral letters on domestic violence entitled, "Speaking the Unspeakable," and "Speaking for Those Who Have No Voice." 3. Mention the fact that although they are the minority, men can also be domestic violence victims. 4. Lobby for tougher laws against domestic violence.”

“When the original letter was released, we initiated several components, i.e., workshops, etc. and again in 2000 we re-evaluated our response & added to & revised it. It is good this has surfaced again as a reminder to again re-evaluate our response. Thank you!”