

## **Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month**

During this month the wider community has a focus on *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention* with the theme for 2025 being, ***Take positive action today to build a safer Queensland. A safer Queensland can start with you.*** So, this is a fitting time for our Church to revisit the Australian Catholic Bishop's Social Justice statement from three years ago, titled, ***Respect: Confronting Violence and Abuse***. Here are some pertinent extracts taken from that document.

Many have spoken out to highlight the extent of abuse throughout society – in the home, in the workplace, and in various groups in the community, including the Church. Those who suffer such abuse are most frequently women and children while the perpetrators are most frequently men. The damage to the lives of the victims and survivors of such abuse is real, destructive, and long-lasting. The teaching of Christ urges us to promote relationships marked by respect and freedom rather than coercion and control, of mutual esteem and kindness.

Existing research suggests that the incidence of domestic violence and abuse within Christian congregations is similar to the rate within the general population in which they are located. It is important that we realise the power of religious manipulation to keep people in abusive relationships. The Church must begin to recognise and condemn the use of biblical references to justify abuse. Manipulating religious teachings or cultural traditions to excuse violence or to exert control over (others) are all examples of spiritual violence and abuse.

Jesus rejects violence. Consider the story of the woman threatened with stoning. (John 8: 1-11). Jesus uses his status as a male teacher to turn the situation around. He rejects the Scribes' and Pharisees' understanding of sin and God's response to it, which appears to justify violence against women. He actively intervenes to prevent it. In this story Jesus rejects the use of religious traditions to justify violence.

In *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) Pope Francis names "sexual manipulation, submission and violence as fundamental distortions that contradict the very nature of marriage".

It is alarming to learn that abused Christian women are more likely to remain in or return to unsafe relationships, citing religious beliefs to support such decisions. We know that some men in the Catholic community are perpetrators of domestic violence, and we feel especially responsible to make clear that this behaviour is sinful. The Bible cannot be legitimately interpreted to justify male power and control over women and children.

Church teaching on the family affirms that in cases of violence and abuse, separation can be "morally necessary" for the safety of victims. Perpetrators of violence and abuse in families are the ones who are undermining the sanctity of marriage, not those who leave marriages seeking safety, dignity and wellbeing for themselves and their children. Perpetrators are responsible for their behaviour. (They) are not beyond the reach of God's transforming love. They can change.

Today the Church does not ask women to be subservient to their husbands any more than it endorses slavery. Rather, the relationship between spouses should reflect their equality in Christ, the equal dignity of every human being created in the image and likeness of God. Marriage is based on a relationship of love, mutuality, and partnership.

Our faith provides hope for transformation for both victim-survivors and perpetrators. It calls us to believe and support women and children experiencing violence and to ensure their safety and well-being. It calls us to challenge perpetrators to take responsibility for their behaviour and to assist them to change.

That concludes excerpts from the document. Please remember that CatholicCare CQ is a strong provider of assistance in matters related to Domestic Violence both for victim-survivors and for perpetrators who wish to change. There is information available on their website or give them a call. As you leave today, please consider ways in which you can start to build a safer Queensland community.

The full Social Justice Statement "***Respect: Confronting Violence and Abuse.***" can be found online at - <https://socialjustice.catholic.org.au/2022/08/02/sjs2022-23/>