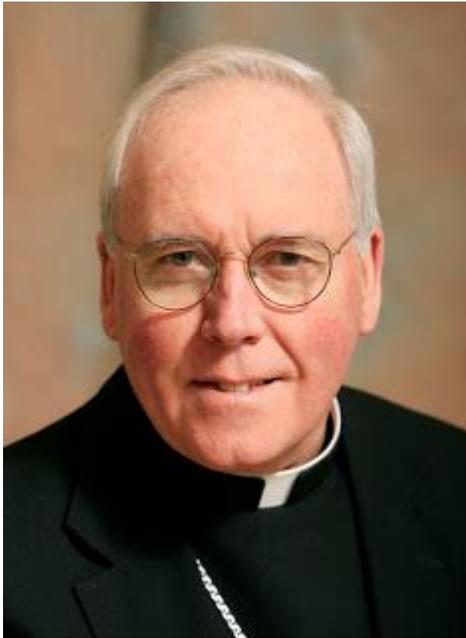


TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2016

## Saying “No” to Violence in the Home



**By Most Reverend Richard J. Malone**

In his 2016 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation [Amoris Laetitia](#), Pope Francis returns again and again to the sad theme of violence in families. In this “love letter to families,” our Holy Father is very conscious of the toll – emotional, physical, and spiritual – that domestic violence takes on the women, men, and children who experience it.

Examining “the actual situations of families” (no. 6), Pope Francis acknowledges that “there is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion” (no. 106). Speaking even more directly, he calls domestic violence “shameful” and, referring to violence of men against women, calls such actions “craven acts of cowardice” (no. 54).

As we bishops did in our statement about domestic violence, [When I Call for Help](#), the Holy Father addresses various forms of abuse, including verbal, physical, and sexual (no. 54). When I Call for Help also listed psychological and economic abuse in this sad litany (p. 3). Violent, abusive behavior strikes at the heart of what the marriage covenant is meant to be: a loving, mutually respectful communion of

persons.

What lies at the heart of domestic violence? While there are many ways to answer that question, drawing on various fields of study, Pope Francis invites us to go to the roots of the problem. His incisive commentary on what he calls “throwaway culture” is one way of describing the environment in which domestic violence flourishes. In a particularly fervent paragraph, he writes, “We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. Then, goodbye” (no. 39).

The Holy Father also flags the inability to control one’s anger as another root cause of domestic violence. “It is one thing to sense a sudden surge of hostility,” he writes, “and another to give into it, letting it take roots in our hearts.” He concludes, “We must always say ‘no’ to violence in the home” (no. 104).

Creating families of peace, where all family members say “no” to violence, is the responsibility of all of us. During October, which is [Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#), in addition to [Respect Life Month](#), we have a special opportunity to draw attention to the tragic fact that according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one in three women and one in four men have been victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by a boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse at some point in their lifetime.<sup>[1]</sup> These numbers are startling, and represent real sufferings experienced by everyone in the affected family, including the children who witness adult violence or are victims of abusive behavior themselves.

In addition to raising awareness about the high incidence of domestic violence and the effects it has on people’s lives, we need to bring a message of hope and healing. Christ is the Prince of Peace! He desires all families to be places of kindness, love and safety for all family members. Trained professionals and compassionate volunteers around the country work diligently to educate the public about domestic violence and provide emergency and long-term support for those experiencing violence at home.

In his closing prayer to the Holy Family at the end of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis writes:

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
may families never again experience  
violence, rejection and division;

may all who have been hurt or scandalized  
find ready comfort and healing.

That is my prayer as well. May all of us work toward a culture where all families live in peace.

Further resources:

- USCCB, “[When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women](#)” (1992, reissued 2002); order copies [here](#)
- USCCB, “[Cuando Pido Ayuda: Una Respuesta Pastoral A La Violencia Doméstica Contra La Mujer](#)” (1992, reimprimido 2002); ordenar copias [aquí](#))
- Resource cards from the USCCB that provide warning signs of domestic violence; available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
- Pamphlet from the Respect Life Program: “[Life Matters: Domestic Violence](#)”
- For Your Marriage [webpage](#) on domestic violence
- [Catholics for Family Peace](#): an education and research initiative of the National Catholic School of Social Service
- Presentations from the 2016 [Hope, Help, and Healing Symposium](#)
- [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)

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*[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Injury Prevention, [The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report](#) (2011). Quoted in the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence fact sheet, “[What Is Domestic Violence?](#)” (2015).*

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