

Listening Session and Survey Responses Compilation for Synod Response

In response to the Synod's call for us to listen to all people's experience of the Church, Catholics For Family Peace Initiative on Domestic Abuse collected feedback from members of ministry organizations and anyone who has been personally impacted by domestic abuse and intimate partner violence. We wanted to hear from anyone affected by DV, ministers, clergy, survivors, family members.

Catholics For Family Peace conducted an online survey in English and Spanish (February 24-April 10, 2022). We asked, "How is the Catholic response to DV going? What are Catholics doing well? What could Catholics do better?"

Next, we held a Zoom Listening Session, with Spanish interpretation, on May 4, 2022, in collaboration with Catholic Charities USA, inviting those who received the survey into a deeper conversation about the Catholic response to Domestic violence. We asked participants in the meeting: "What concrete suggestions do you have for steps that could make a difference? What can we learn from other Catholic projects that could be applied to the domestic violence issue? Why do you feel passionate about this issue?"

ACTION ITEMS

- Results of these listening efforts will be sent in June 2022 to the USCCB Synod Committee for inclusion in the national report from the US Catholic dioceses and organizations to the Vatican Synod committee.
- Stories from the listening session participants, "Why I am passionate about this issue," will appear in forthcoming editions of the CFFP Quarterly Newsletter.

Main Take-Aways from the Surveys and Breakout Groups:

- Educate and provide training for clergy, pastoral staff, and parishioners about the Church's teaching and how to respond with compassion and refer for help.
- Encourage the bishops and all homilists to be more vocal on the issue.

- Partner with existing helping and education agencies to increase awareness and improve response.
- Distribute resources for Catholic outreach to parishioners and general public.
- People have witnessed poor responses and lack of knowledge about what the Church teaches. Many are themselves survivors of domestic abuse.

Survey Summary. 570 individuals who opened the survey. Although not all completed the survey, 570 people engaged with the invitation to participate. They had the chance to experience that their input was welcomed and valuable to the Church.

- CFFP received 79 completed surveys.
- 34 respondents work for Catholic entities
- 51 respondents know a survivor
- 39 respondents are survivors themselves. The overlap with those who are active workers in the Church is notable.

Although the number of survey respondents is too low to consider the results an assessment of the Catholic Church’s response to intimate partner violence, the information gleaned is very useful in

- 1) describing individuals’ experiences with the Church when facing a situation involving intimate partner violence,
- 2) how that response impacted people personally as well as their feelings for the Church, and
- 3) providing numerous examples of what the Church can/should do and what members of the Church community should NOT do.

- A very large majority of the responses to the first question, as well as responses to later questions, addressed interactions with priests. It is very clear that clergy are the “first responders” to many Catholics experience intimate partner violence. It speaks also to the dearth of other services for victims and seemingly to a lack of awareness by priests about existing services.

- Therefore, educating clergy to empower them to respond to intimate partner violence should be a top priority. The teaching should also include priest-adjacent people in the parish including lay leaders, deacons, and parish staff.
- The survey results also demonstrate the need for awareness, de-stigmatization, and outreach within parishes through sermons, bulletin pieces, and other outreach materials (such as posters and flyers) and within dioceses through diocesan media and DV Awareness Month events and throughout the year.
- Although the parish seems to be the first stop for many, the respondents made it clear that additional resources need to be available to give victims a real option to protect themselves and their families.

Listening Session Summary. We had 40 registrations, with 16 attendees (15 women and one man), in 4 breakout rooms. The meeting included Spanish translation, requested by 2 registrants. Most participants in the listening session work in church-related positions, either as part of parish-level or diocesan outreach, or in social work. Polling the participants revealed that few had heard a homily or seen resources posted in their parish about DV, but a majority had read or heard an interview or podcast about DV from a Catholic perspective in the wider media.

What could make a difference?

Educate Catholics so that they know and teach authentic Catholic teaching on this topic and be effective helpers and first-responders. Training for pastoral response for priests, deacons, religious, and volunteers should be trauma informed and deal how to help spiritually, emotionally, and physical safety. Recommended: 40- hour sexual assault and domestic violence training offered as online course by Pax in Familia.

Offer training - online and in-person:

1. Clergy and pastoral leaders
2. Homilists
3. Retired priests and religious who tend to serve as spiritual directors
4. Marriage tribunal staff and advocates

5. Parish staff especially front desk people
6. Parish nursing and health ministries
7. Any emergency responses groups – Food and clothing programs, St. Vincent de Paul, Stephen Ministry, etc.
8. All parish groups – Council, choir, prayer groups, women’s groups, men’s groups
9. Catechists
10. Catholic School personnel
11. Youth Ministers
12. Parish social justice groups

Bishops’ Statement Update. Publish a 2022 version of the USCCB Pastoral Message, *When I Call for Help*. Include current research and address it to both men and women. This is a chance to show renewed support for all who experience violence at home.

Publish and distribute resources in multiple languages (flyers, signs, videos, YouTube channel) for laity to get involved when someone turns to them; know what to say; where to refer. Explore creating a Catholic “warm line (hotline)” where people could call in for ideas, resources, information – just a connection would help people as they are struggling to figure out what to do.

Create parish support groups. See the step-by-step process for forming a parish support group:

- Archdiocese of Chicago DV Outreach
[http://www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org/uploads/9/7/5/4/9754767/diocesan_plan_for_dv_ministry_1\[36347\].pdf](http://www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org/uploads/9/7/5/4/9754767/diocesan_plan_for_dv_ministry_1[36347].pdf)
- Archdiocese of Washington Catholic Charities: Survivor-Focused Parish Ministry
http://www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org/uploads/9/7/5/4/9754767/parish_based_response_washington.pdf

Host more listening sessions. Start the conversation about what is required to be safe and supported during each phase of your life whether it be for young children, teens, young adults, married, separated, divorced, single, widowed – promote a mind-set that we are each beloved children of God, deserving to be safe and supported. What does that mean at each phase of our

lives? Help people get in the habit that they have a right to be safe and it makes it easier to discern God's will in their life.

Improving Our Effectiveness – What Works Elsewhere?

Investigate how existing projects are addressing the problem of domestic abuse to learn what works and to offer training to enhance their message. Apply the “Two Feet of Social Action” to the DV issue: Work to change structures and do charitable acts.

- Catholic Charities affiliates working on housing and legal assistance
- Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking
<https://www.usccb.org/offices/anti-trafficking-program/coalition-catholic-organizations-against-human-trafficking>
- Respect Life groups
- Men's and Women's Prayer and Bible Study Groups
- “Walking with Moms in Need” – pro-life outreach
- Esther Ministry (California) on human trafficking
- Habitat for Humanity
- Immigration and Refugee Services
- Homeless Outreach and Shelters
- Stephen Ministries
- Safe environment education for children and adults
- Seminary curricula