

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

By Sr. Brenda Walsh, Racine Dominican

In recent months, faith communities have been encouraged to share information and increase awareness of domestic violence, which is a major contributor to the overall violence in a community. It is not enough to respond to the tears and cries of so many women and children suffering from devastating abuse in their homes. They need help in connecting with resources and returning to safety and liberation from the abuse they are suffering. Frequently, they are ashamed to let anyone know about their dire need and abusive situation.

Domestic violence is an important public health issue in the US and also in our local communities. It is defined as the use or threat of use of physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse, with the intent of instilling fear, intimidating, and controlling behavior. In the US, domestic violence is rampant. . People of every race, class, economic status and educational background are physically abused. 95% of the victims are women and a small group of men are also victims of abuse. There are several common myths about domestic violence, based on a belief that it occurs only among the uneducated, the poor and in the minority communities. This could not be farther from the truth.

These statistics prove domestic violence is of epidemic proportions: In the US:

- Every 15 seconds a woman is beaten.
- 1 in 3 or 4 women is battered once in her life time.
- Annually, more than 4,000 men murder their intimate partners.
- The cost of domestic violence exceeds 5.8 billion dollars each year. 4.1 billion of that amount is for direct medical and mental health services..

Sadly, most people revictimize the victim by asking why they remain in an abusive relationship. Many women are fearful of admitting that they are victims of abuse which is often based on power and control. Some have a poor self-concept and have a hard time imagining life on their own and providing for their children. Often women fail to report abuse because they fear retaliation. They may have no place to go and do not want to go to a shelter. Some may live in hope that their abusive spouse or partner will change. Some feel threatened by the thought of leaving and wonder what effect it will have on the lives of their children.

It has been found that children who witness parental violence are more likely to turn to drugs or alcohol. They experience difficulty at school and have low self-esteem and some even consider suicide. Their Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that results from abuse needs to be treated at all levels. The abuser needs to be confronted in order to change. Faith does not require people to put up with suffering and abuse. No one is called to stay in a violent and abusive situation. In abusive situations, people need to be encouraged to seek help and safety, and to be assured that they do not deserve abuse. They need someone to listen to and respect their decision and offer support when they leave their abuser. Depression and suicide sometimes follow in cases of abuse.

National and local resources are available in various social service programs and centers.

Such as the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

(www.nrcdv.org), and Battered Women's Justice Project (www.bwip.org).

Locally , you can call the Women's Resource Center (262-633-3233) and St. John the Divine Episcopal Church, Burlington, WI Contact the Western Racine County Family Violence Advocacy Network, a program of Women's Resource Center. Get in touch with Sherry Hartog, 262-763-6226 Ex. 29. (If you live in another area, look for specific resources in your own area.)

Some Solutions

- There is a great need to educate the public. This will dispel the myths about the problem and will inform people about the different forms of violence. All ages need to be educated about this issue.
- Help prevent violence before it starts. Children are bombarded by violence and aggression in the media. All need to learn to control anger before it escalates to violence.
- Learn about organizations/programs that help prevent violence and assist the abused persons. Let people know there is a way out of the violent situation, and no one deserves to be abused or to remain in an abusive situation.
- Share information on local resources to help the abused person.
- Educate young boys about domestic violence and abuse. Teach them to control their anger. Male mentors that represent the effort to eliminate domestic violence will be a great help to juvenile boys.

- Consider using the course entitled “Cultivating Compassion>” It is offered through the Western Racine County Family Violence Advocacy Network, a program of the Women’s resource Center and St. John the Divine Episcopal Church in Burlington, WI. You can also look up Beijing Circle on the internet.

In 2006, some church leaders had a meeting on Families and declared that “The family is the privileged setting where every person learns to give and receive love.” Too often families experience discord which sullies, damages and often destroys the family.

We grieve with the adults and children who suffer, often in secret, from devastating abuse in their homes. Let us do all that we can to educate on this issue and to support families caught in the trap of violence and help them find liberation, peace and hope for their future.