

Prayers and Reflections

OPENING PRAYER

O God, Creator of the heavens and of earth,
Help us to see one another through eyes
Enlightened by understanding and compassion.
Help us to listen to the voices
of all of our sisters throughout the world
with respect and attention.
Open our ears to the cries of women
who have been denied their rights and their dignity.
Empower us to be instruments of justice for all,
For in the wholeness of Christ,
all mothers are our own mothers,
and we are one.
Amen.

REFLECTIONS

There followed a great multitude of people
And of women who wept and lamented.
But Jesus turned to them and said,
“Daughters of Jerusalem,
do not weep for me,
but weep for yourselves
and for your children.”
Luke 23:27-28

When it comes to setting women free from every kind of exploitation and domination, the Gospel contains an ever relevant message which goes back to the *attitude of Jesus Christ himself*. Transcending the established norms of his own culture, Jesus treated women with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness. In this way he honored the dignity which women have always possessed according to God's plan and in his love. As we look to Christ . . . it is natural to ask ourselves: how much of his message has been heard and acted upon?

Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women, #3

As pastors of the Catholic Church in the United States, we state as clearly and strongly as we can that violence against women, inside or outside the home, is *never* justified. Violence in any form “—physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal—is sinful; often, it is a crime as well.”
U.S. Catholic Bishops, When I call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women, Tenth Anniversary Edition, November 12, 2002

CLOSING PRAYER

We believe in the goodness and value of women,
As Christ did throughout His life;
We rejoice in their strength and compassion.
We look forward to the future in faith and hope,
Praying and working for the day
When all God's children are truly respected
And free to develop and use all their gifts
And to share in all the benefits of human life and work.
We look forward to an age of peace
When violence in all its forms is ended
And men, women and children live in true peace.



Activities

1. Begin this session with the opening prayer and two reflections on page 1.
2. Distribute copies of the fact sheet on page 3. Have participants take turns reading the facts aloud. Afterwards, discuss the following questions:

Are you surprised by the facts and numbers listed above? Why, why not?

Is violence against women a social issue that the average American knows and cares about? Why or why not?

Why does gender-based violence receive so little attention in the media?

How does violence against women hurt not only women, but society as a whole?

Given the centrality of the dignity of the human person, what perspective does Catholic Social Teaching offer on the issue of gender-based violence?

Identify structures/systems which overtly or subtly prevent women from developing fully as human beings in various cultures throughout the world.

What role do poverty and limited opportunities for human development play in the problem of gender-based violence?

3. Slowly reread Luke 23:27-28 aloud to the group. Ask them to respond to the following questions:

When you think of women who endure violence, for whom do you weep?

How can you respond to these women and help transform their suffering?

4. Divide participants into five small groups. Assign one case study (found on pages 4-6) to each small group. Have the small groups read and discuss their respective case studies, using the following questions as a guide:

How did the case study illustrate a program/effort to eliminate violence against women?

Why do you think that the program/effort was effective?

Could the program/effort be used as a model for other communities?

5. Next, have one member from each group present a summary of the case study to the larger group. Then discuss the following questions:

How does gender-based violence relate to the power structure found in a particular culture?

Why do efforts to eliminate gender-based violence so often get met with indifference or resistance? For whom is the status quo beneficial?

What are some of the challenges to eradicating gender-based violence?

What are some of the roots of gender-based violence?

Why is it so important to involve all members of society—women, men and children; civil society and government—in efforts to eradicate gender-based violence?

6. End this session with the closing prayer on page 1.

Fact Sheet: Violence Against Women

Gender-based violence, whether it occurs on the streets or in homes, in sex “industries” or wars, affects women of every nation, belief, class, race and ethnic group. It is silenced by custom, institutionalized in laws and state systems, and passed from one generation to the next.

- Among women aged 15-44 worldwide, gender-based violence accounts for more death and ill-health than cancer, traffic injuries and malaria put together.
- Each year 2 million girls between ages 5 and 15 are introduced into the commercial sex market.
- Approximately 60 million women, mostly in Asia, are “missing”—killed by infanticide, selective abortion, deliberate under-nutrition or lack of access to health care.
- Based on recent studies, more than 130 million girls and women, mostly in Africa, have undergone female genital mutilation and an estimated 2 million girls are at risk for undergoing the procedure each year.
- Between 20,000 and 50,000 women and girls were raped in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war in the Balkans (1992-1995).
- More than 15,000 women and girls were raped in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide.
- While no official estimates have yet been made, accounts of rape by the Janjaweed against the women of Darfur, Sudan are in the thousands.
- In Canada, the costs of domestic violence amount to approximately \$1.6 billion per year, including medical care and lost productivity. Estimates in the United States place

this figure between \$10 and \$67 billion.

- In nine Latin American countries, a rapist who marries his victim stays out of jail.
- Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that adolescent girls are five to six times more likely to be HIV positive than are boys the same age, since girls are mostly infected by older men, often by force. This trend has become more widespread as the myth that sleeping with a virgin will cure them of AIDS.
- A 1998 study shows that in the United States 1 out of every 6 women has experienced an attempted or completed rape. Of these women, 22% were under 12 years old and 32% were aged 12-17 at the time of the crime.
- Studies suggest that 1/4 to 1/3 of the 170 million women and girls currently living in the European Union are subjected to male violence.
- 70% of female murder victims are killed by their male partners.
- Small arms and light weapons are the main tools of almost every conflict. Women and children account for 80% of the casualties of small arms and light weapons.
- Throughout the world, as many as 5,000 women and girls a year are murdered by members of their own families, many of them for the “dishonor” of having been raped.

Current Crisis: Sudan

When we tried to escape they shot more children. They raped women; I saw many cases of Janjawid raping women and girls. They are happy when they rape. They sing when they rape and they tell that we are just slaves and that they can do with us how they wish.” - 37-year old woman from Mukjar, Darfur

Amnesty International reports that since 2003, the Janjaweed, often acting with full impunity and with the full knowledge or acquiescence of the government army, have been responsible for numerous reports of rape and other reports of sexual violence. In one case, 41 school girls and teachers were gang raped by up to 14 Janjaweed men. In other cases, pregnant women were raped and their bellies slit, and those who have resisted rape have been tortured and/or killed.

Sources: United Nations Population Fund, Amnesty International, Amnesty International USA, United Nations Development Fund for Women, afrol News



Case Studies: Saying No to Violence Against Women

Although gender-based violence sometimes seems to be an insurmountable problem, women have led the way in defining and addressing it in all of its forms. Progress has been made at local, national, and global levels—especially in the last decade—thanks to women and men throughout the world; however, much work remains to be done. The following pages feature five case studies of local efforts to end violence against women.

Community Caravans in Trinidad & Tobago

Over the last two decades, projects to respond to the urgent needs of women survivors of gender-based violence have sprung up in many different communities. These tend to start in cities, rather than rural areas, and usually lack awareness of other, similar groups. In response, the Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad & Tobago sought to provide an integrated system of support services through the creation of a network among existing social agencies that deal with victims of gender-based violence.

The project developed a program of “community caravans,” using techniques of popular theatre as well as games and video presentations to address topics ranging from developing self-esteem and understanding human sexuality to basic support skills and legal resources.

The caravans went primarily to rural communities, many of them served by few telephones and limited public transportation. Events took place over a three-day weekend, targeting different sectors of the community from Friday to Sunday. The caravans were particularly effective in reaching men, who were always ready to express their opinions if not inclined to attend workshops and meetings on a regular basis.

The Rape Crisis Society also used the caravans to train people in the communities to become counselors themselves, using the skills learned in the caravans to help other women in need of such services.

“Courts of Conscience” in Latin America

In Latin America, machismo has often silenced women, especially indigenous women, who may be treated in public as virtual children. To counteract this, women's organizations have created “Courts of Conscience” to allow women to speak for the first time about the abuse they have suffered. “We are here so that society realizes that it's not nature that dooms us to suffer violence just for being a woman, it is society,” said Carmen Caceres, who introduced the proceedings at the First Court of Conscience of Guatemalan Women. The court was organized by 40 women's organizations in 1998 and heard the testimonies of 200 indigenous and rural women who were victims of the country's armed conflict.

A similar court in Uruguay documented the experiences of a group of women who were victims of sexual abuse by medical personnel in that country. While the courts have no legal standing, they have presented testimony on issues that had previously been ignored or hidden from public view. And since attorneys and experts on violence against women participate and issue “judgments” and recommendations based on relevant national and international instruments, the courts provide public education on legal remedies—and exert pressure on governments to use those remedies.



Case Studies: Saying No to Violence Against Women (continued)

High School Sexual Abuse in South Africa

Sometimes it appears that communities have tolerated violence against women forever and nothing will mobilize them to say “enough.” Yet most often this is due to the feeling that there is nothing they can do to change the situation. One way to break through this is to identify a problem that is just emerging, where people believe they still can step in to stop it.

In South Africa, where gender-based violence is rising dramatically, the Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT) project focused on the growing problem of high school date rape. Their goal was to engage teachers and parents in an effort to stop sexual abuse in high school, and at the same time to mobilize the community to participate in a broader awareness-building effort about gender-based violence.

The project team carried out an extensive survey and interview process to find out the kinds of abuse girls were experiencing and how widespread the problem was. Training workshops were organized to enable teachers to identify symptoms of abuse and refer survivors of date rape and family sexual abuse to people who could assist them. Students participated in the sessions to learn how to seek help for their own problems as well as to provide an effective support network to help other students.

Trafficking of Women in Moldova

The Women's Organization of Moldova (WOM) staff brought together police officers, students and women's NGOs to promote dialogue and debate on the trafficking of women.

While the interaction between these groups—with such varying opinions on women's rights and trafficking—was difficult, the greater challenge was getting them to come in the first place. Most of the police officers were apathetic about the issue, believing that women who were trafficked had chosen their own path. “So many officers told us they didn't need a training to help them understand prostitutes,” said one WOM staff member. “First, we convinced the police chiefs to make the training mandatory. Then we used the training to show them the real story.”

WOM staff ended each session with a question: “Where do we go from here?” The answer to that question has taken them far. Since the first training in 2000, police officers have distributed information and brochures to precincts throughout the country. WOM has created a National Advisory Board to Combat the Trafficking of Women, and has published a book of local and international documents on women's rights. One of their greatest achievements, they believe, is statute 113, a new law that makes it more difficult for traffickers to transport women and children across the borders between Moldova and Romania.

With other NGOs and the International Organization for Migration, WOM has since lobbied to bring laws into full compliance with the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime. As a result, a new criminal code was adopted in April 2002. WOM and other NGOs are now partners with the Government in implementing an action plan to combat trafficking.



Case Studies: Saying No to Violence Against Women (continued)

Legal Obligation for Police to Protect Women in the United States

Maria Teresa Maclas (Teresa) had good reason to fear that her husband would kill her. In the 18 months before her death, Teresa appealed to the police more than 20 times. Her husband beat and sexually assaulted her and their three children. After Teresa fled the family home, he stalked her constantly, terrorizing her and making repeated death threats. On April 15, 1996, he shot and killed her, then shot her mother twice before turning the gun on himself.

Not once in the preceding months was Teresa's husband arrested for ignoring court orders that prohibited him from going near her or contacting her. Appeals to the police for assistance were ignored, rarely even documented, and no follow-up action was taken. Women's rights groups investigated the case, organized legal assistance and support for Teresa's family, and launched a national campaign.

Only after six years of legal proceedings was the Sheriffs Department in Sonoma County, CA, held to account for its failure to protect Maria Teresa Maclas. Teresa's family initiated a federal civil rights lawsuit, contending that she had been denied her constitutional rights by being denied equal protection under the law because she was a woman, a victim of violence in the family and a member of an ethnic minority. In July 2000 the U.S. Court of Appeals found that Teresa's constitutional rights to benefit from police protection in a non discriminatory manner had been denied, reversing an earlier ruling dismissing the case. In June 2002 the Sheriffs Department paid Teresa's family one million U.S. dollars in compensation.

The precedent-setting court ruling and award were powerful reminders to law enforcement agencies throughout the U.S. of their legal obligation to protect women from violence. The ruling underlined the authorities' obligations to take effective steps to prevent and punish violence against women, whoever the perpetrator.

Sources for Case Studies: Amnesty International USA, United Nations Development Fund for Women