

# A Statement by the Catholic Bishops of Victoria: Committing to prevention and response on Domestic Violence

***“...we must always say ‘no’ to violence in the home”***

Pope Francis

We, the Catholic Bishops of Victoria, condemn domestic violence in the strongest possible terms, and call on parishes, church organisations and people of faith to play a part in its elimination.

Domestic violence is a crisis in Australia – each week a woman dies at the hands of her partner or ex-partner. It is estimated that one in four children experience the fear and distress of witnessing their mother being abused.

In addition to this physical violence, domestic violence can also be emotional, financial or spiritual. The roots are abuse of power and the control of one person over another.

While men also suffer domestic violence, women and children form the great majority of the victims of domestic violence.

This statement is addressed to the whole Church community – we must all work to prevent violence against women and children. In particular, it is addressed to:

- victims of violence who may need the Church's help to break out of their situation,
- priests, pastoral associates, and parishioners, and teachers, who may be the first point of contact for adults and children who are victims of domestic violence, and
- men who abuse and may not know how to break out of the cycle of violence.

Domestic violence in all its forms offends against a vision of family as a place of safety and love, where children learn to respect and live with others.

We hope that this statement will lead people to learn about domestic violence, and seek to do what they can in their relationships, parishes, communities and organisations to eliminate violence and assist survivors to heal from its impact.

Our goal must be a society where all people are safe in their home, families and close relationships; where violence and abuse are not acceptable; and where all relationships respect the equality and dignity of each person. This is part of the Gospel vision of love and respect.

Jesus always protected the oppressed and exposed evil. He always respected the human dignity of women, consistently challenging cultural attitudes of oppression and exclusion. We see him breaking social taboos that exclude people, and expanding the boundaries of human love, acceptance and friendship. Jesus challenges us to act in favor of the victims and work against anything that would prevent individuals from ‘living life to the full’.

As pastoral leaders in Victoria, we reject a reading of scripture that condones domestic violence. A correct reading of scripture leads to an understanding of the equal dignity of men and women and to relationships based on mutuality and love.

Responses to domestic violence are needed, which provide victims with protection and help in rebuilding their lives; which make offenders accountable and assist their rehabilitation; and which change those community attitudes from which violence emerges.

We need to look at prevention, intervention, supports for victims, accountability and healing for offenders. We need to confront the causes of this violence, including the unequal position of women and men in our community. We welcome the work undertaken by Catholic agencies in these areas, while recognizing the continuing challenges.

We aim to make all Church communities places of support and healing.

To our priests, pastoral associates and others in leadership positions – we say that our churches should be a safe place for victims of domestic and family violence, where understanding and assistance are readily available. For this to happen we all need to reflect on our attitudes and equip ourselves with the knowledge to assist those who ask for help, through referrals to specialist services where needed.

We all need to foster in our families and communities alternatives to violence. In particular we need to lead boys and young men to treat girls and women with respect and teach them how to develop positive and violence-free relationships.

In Victoria we have benefitted from the insight of the Royal Commission into Family Violence that recently made recommendations on how we, the Victorian community can prevent and respond to domestic and family violence. We welcome this report, and the Victorian Government's prompt and positive response to its recommendations.

Our hope is that the implementation of these recommendations brings about very positive change within the Victorian community. We are pleased to join with other Churches and faith communities in being part of that change.

Catholic Social Services Victoria has made information and resources available to Parishes and organisations to promote understanding of domestic and family violence, and of how to respond to those affected. This is also available through the website – [www.css.org.au/dv](http://www.css.org.au/dv). We recommend this material, and the training that will be available, to assist you and your community in playing your part in preventing domestic violence, and responding appropriately when it does occur.

For advice or support in relation to family violence call  
**1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)**

If you or someone else are in immediate danger, contact **000**

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Archbishop of Melbourne



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