



**ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE of ORANGE**

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

13280 CHAPMAN AVENUE, GARDEN GROVE, CA 92840

*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*

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

As Catholics in the Diocese of Orange, we are committed to the protection of the life and dignity of every human person, not only in the upcoming Respect for Life month, but in our pastoral outreach and ministry as priests of Jesus Christ. On Good Friday in Rome, Pope Francis stopped for the Eighth Station of the Cross and read the following meditation:

Then too, let us weep for those men who vent on women all their pent-up violence. Let us weep for women enslaved by fear and exploitation. But it is not enough to beat our breast and to feel compassion. Jesus demands more. Women need to be given reassurance, following his example; they need to be cherished as an inviolable gift for all humanity [,] so that our children may grow in dignity and hope.

The Gospel of Life, so well-articulated by Pope Saint John Paul II, exhorts us that we live out our commitment to the life and dignity of the human person in practical ways. I write to you because domestic violence is a hidden threat to our families and communities that demands more of us. As parish priests we have all encountered our share of the spiritual and physical damage that ensues from this reality.

Domestic violence is far too common, affecting women and men, teenage dating relationships, children, and the elderly. Within Orange County, domestic violence is occurring even in our parishes and centers, across all ethnic and economic backgrounds. Domestic violence is a family issue and a pro-life issue: our families are being torn apart and lives are being lost. Here are just a few startling statistics:

- 1 in 4 women will be physically assaulted by a jealous boyfriend or husband during her lifetime
- 1 in 5 teenage girls will experience dating violence
- Children who grow up in homes with domestic violence are more likely to become abusers or be abused
- One-third of all 911 calls reporting domestic violence are made by children (Orange County, CA Domestic Violence Court)
- 90% of elder abuse is committed by family members
- In Orange County, 26.3% of women surveyed said they have experienced domestic violence; the state average is 20.5%.

As pastors, parishes, and people of God, we are all called to be bearers of hope to those struggling with domestic violence. In past ages and in that historical context, often such situations were not addressed with the love, care and insight that perhaps might have been. However In the age where we are now in God's Providence, we have the blessing and benefit of insight and possibilities for relief that were not present in ages past. Thus, it is time for us to respond with the full range of resources available in order to make our parishes' safe, healthy, healing, and hopeful places for those whose lives are touched by domestic violence, both the victims and the perpetrators. The Gospel offers hope to all and we are well-equipped to be communities that encourage all to find safety and shelter in the loving arms of our God, healing under the care of the Great Physician, and hope in the power of the Holy Spirit.

To that end, a Domestic Violence Awareness Committee comprised of diocesan staff, clergy, and community experts, including representatives from Orange County domestic violence organizations, has been formed and has begun a Domestic Violence Awareness (DVA) Initiative. Envisioning a long-term commitment to a healthy, healing, and hopeful response to this issue which affects so many families, the committee has gathered resources and created training opportunities for parish engagement included in this letter. I hope that you will avail yourselves of these resources, as well as the opportunities for training and development in this area.

I have also dedicated the last Sunday of Respect Life Month 2015, October 25<sup>th</sup>, as Domestic Violence Awareness Sunday with the hope that parishes will give special attention to this pressing issue on that weekend, availing themselves of the resources provided. Please make use of the resources and opportunities provided by the DVA Committee (see the attached letter), liturgical resources for DVA Sunday, protocols for responding to victims, and resources for victims are available.

Strengthened by God's grace, our call is certainly one of prayer, education, and being of assistance where we can and where the Lord calls us to be. The goal of our Domestic Violence Awareness Initiative is to have a realistic, effective response to domestic violence, utilizing our county's established domestic violence resources. We can help break the cycle of violence by making our parishes places that can direct people affected by domestic violence to timely help and provide spiritual support along the way.

Thank you for all that you do to live and teach by the Gospel of Life by word and example.

For more information regarding resources, please contact Michael Donaldson, 714-282-4203, [mdonaldson@rcbo.org](mailto:mdonaldson@rcbo.org).

Gratefully yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin W. Vann". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann, J.C.D., D.D.  
Bishop of Orange