

NJPN Comment in the Catholic Universe: Freda Lambert

Raising awareness of domestic abuse

Imagine being in an enclosed space with a partner who aims to establish control over you using various strategies, the most common being isolation. The lockdown in March provided the perfect conditions for establishing complete control and was a terrifying experience for many trapped in that situation.

The statistics record that on average two women a week are murdered by their partner or ex-partner. At least 10 women commit suicide every week as a result of domestic abuse. Every six seconds somewhere in the UK a woman is assaulted in her home. During the first month of Covid lockdown the number of murdered women and girls more than tripled. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children estimates that 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse and 130,000 children live in high-risk domestic-abuse households.

The National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW) has launched a booklet 'Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse', which is a resource for use in Catholic parishes. Its launch coincides with the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill through Parliament and with problems linked to the pandemic. It is a pastoral document intended to highlight the many forms of domestic abuse and to indicate appropriate action. It recognises that domestic abuse occurs in Catholic households and parishes should be the ideal place of safety for those seeking escape from an abusive situation.

It is a difficult issue for some Catholics. The teaching of the Church proclaims that marriage is based on love, trust, mutual respect and support between spouses. Promises for life are made by the couple. However, all forms of abuse constitute a violation of the essential nature of marriage. It is a sin as well as a crime. A victim of abuse should never be encouraged to remain in the same house as the perpetrator in the hope of saving the marriage or for the sake of the family (*Canon Law 1153*).

Parishes need to be equipped to offer help and support to victims and training should be given, because victims of abuse are sometimes given dangerously misguided "advice". Good relations between the parish and specialist agencies

to enable signposting is something to be encouraged. Victims who identify as religious benefit from the support of their faith community.

The resource booklet may be downloaded from www.nbcw.co.uk or a hard copy can be obtained free from margaretclark123@gmail.com. Hopefully every parish will have one available.

Freda Lambert and Celia Capstick convene the NBCW's Committee for Social Responsibility. NBCW is part of the NJPN Network.