Safe in Faith: A pastoral response to domestic abuse in the Catholic Church

Nikki Dhillon Keane

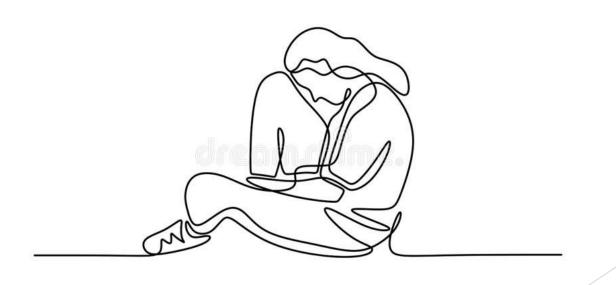
Caritas Westminster

nikkidhillonk@rcdow.org.uk

@NikkiDhillon

"God does not ask us to stay in unsafe spaces"

-"Mary" Catholic Domestic Abuse Survivor



We know from research and clinical practice that:

- ► Faith can be a source of support but also a source of difficulty
- Survivors of faith stay longer
- Survivors of faith benefit from faith literate support
- Attitudes and responses from clergy are extremely varied

Maggie's story

What does a safe space look like?

- Confidentiality
- ▶ Safeguarding
- **▶** Boundaries
- ▶ 6 principles

Principle 1: A survivor-focused approach

"Be a shepherd with the smell of the sheep"

-Pope Francis

Principle 2: A Safety-focused approach

Catholic Cannon Law:

"A spouse who occasions grave danger of soul or body to the other or to the children, or otherwise makes the common life unduly difficult, provides the other spouse with a reason to leave..."

CIC 1153

Principle 3: A Trauma -informed approach

- Theoretical understanding of trauma
- Understand the individual survivor's experience of trauma
- No quick fixes: comfort sitting with someone's pain

Principle 4: A non-judgemental, non-directive approach

- ► Respect the survivor's choices
- What happens if the survivor is employing damaging coping strategies?
- What happens if the survivor is employing coping strategies which don't sit well with Catholic teaching?
- What happens if the survivor keeps going back to their abuser?

Principle 5: A gender- informed approach

- Male victims and survivors exist
- Women are disproportionately and differently victimised
- Gender inequality is a cause of and effect of domestic abuse
- Domestic abuse is appropriately classed as a form of VAWG

Principle 6: An intersectional approach

- Understanding the intersections of oppression and abuse caused by difference, minoritisation and all forms of disadvantage
- Understanding and meeting the specific needs of minoritised groups of survivors

The Safe in Faith project, Caritas Westminster

- Specially trained group of Catholic priests and nuns for spiritual support (inspired by Jewish Women's Aid)
- Network of specially trained counsellors and psychotherapists for faith informed psychological support
- ► (Next steps) Volunteer peer support

Training includes:

- A basic understanding of the reality of domestic abuse
- Common spiritual questions and barriers
- Safe signposting
- Supporting the supporters

Some common spiritual questions

- ▶ Did God choose this path for me?
- ▶Do I have to forgive my abuser?
- What kind of justice do I need for restoration? (criminal, social, eschatological)

Safe Signposting: The "Safe in Faith 4 Stages of Restoration"

- ► Stage 1: Recognition Signpost to Safe in Faith counselling network and/or local domestic abuse services
- > Stage 2: Getting Safe Current abuse (can include post separation abuse) Signpost to local domestic abuse services. Advice available from clinical supervision or Safeguarding services.
- ▶ Stage 3: Healing Historic abuse Rebuilding relationships with self, with God, with others. Healing from trauma. Signpost (if required) to Safe in Faith counselling network
- ➤ Stage 4: New Life Developing positive living as a survivor. Signpost (if desired) to opportunities to help others or create change

Supporting the supporters

- Ongoing training
- Robust signposting system/ links with DA services
- Ongoing support: clinical supervision or informal information and guidance
- ► Developing together with ongoing dialogue

A survivor's prayer

"Lord, thank you,

I love you.

You guided me, I listened and today I
am free."

- Philippa, domestic abuse survivor



Further reading:

- Faith and VAWG Coalition (2020) "Keeping the Faith: What Survivors From Faith Communities Want Us To Know" https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/faith-vawg
- Aghtaie, N., Mulvihill, N., Abrahams, H. and Hester, M. (2020) Defining and Enabling Justice for Victims/Survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse. University of Bristol
- ► Pope Francis, (2016) Amoris Laetitia https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/do cuments/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf
- https://catholicsocialteaching.uk



interfaith partnership against domestic violence

because no one should have to choose between faith and safety

Asserting Authority

Using Scripture, traditions, or cultural norms to impose gender roles that are abusive or coercive, to assert authority, to reinforce male privilege, to encourage you to submit, to give commands, or to punish you.

Using Scripture, traditions, or cultural norms to force you to have sex or unprotected sex, to deny or force family planning, to participate in polygamous marriage or genital mutilation, to have sex or be married at a young age, to be in an arranged or forced marriage.

Controlling

Sexuality and

Reproduction

Using Children

Using Scripture, traditions, or cultural norms to arrange and force marriage for teens, to value male over female children, to use girls as commodities for bride prize or dowry, to sell young girls as commodities, to force you to raise children in another faith or no faith.

Spiritual And Religious Abuse

Using Scripture, Traditions, and Cultural Norms to Assert Power and Control

Restricting
Access to or Use
of Health Care

Using Scripture, traditions or cultural norms to force you to forego regular check ups, family planning, medications, emergency medical care, or to neglect medical care for your children.

Prolonging Abusive Relationships

Using Scripture, traditions, or cultural norms to encourage you to forgive, to keep the relationship together, to sacrifice yourself for Isolation the relationship, to excuse or Isolating you from your faith community minimize the abuse, by not allowing you to to remain silent, participate in services or events, or to accept by silencing you when you are there, suffering. by moving the family from congregation to congregation, or by forcing you to attend services in a different faith community.

Using Community Coercion

Working through clergy or lay leader, or friends or family from your faith community, to put pressure on you to stay in the relationship or Blaming to put up with abuse. Coercion may take The Victim the form of letters or phone calls Using Scripture, on the abuser's behalf, traditions, or cultural comments in social norms to blame you and settings, etc. justify abuse because you are female, sinful, and the weaker vessel, estranged from God, not created in God's image, created to be man's servant, unclean, polluted, defiled.