

# CONTINUED...

## Abused

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happy.

"I thought we were free of that by now," she added, "but I realize we are not. The younger women may be listening to counselors and making the decision to leave. But some of them are still getting static from 'old-time Catholic mothers.'"

It isn't priests making them doubt, she said. She hasn't heard of any "in the '90s" telling women it's their duty to stay. But the message is still around.

"I had a student in her 30s come in the other day and her mother was very upset she had left her husband who was abusing her all the time," she reported, "because her mother was 'old-time Catholic' whose tradition said your obligation is to stay with your husband no matter what."

Kirkeby-Prosser personally found help from the Sisters of Social Service in the San Francisco diocese after a friend saved her life. Had the friend not walked into her home at the right moment and

pulled her husband off her, she believes her husband would have strangled her to death. Upon going to the sisters, she was told, "You have no choice but to get out of this situation."

In light of the Diocese of Rochester's Synod Goal 3 - to recognize and promote the value and dignity of women in church and society - Kirkeby-Prosser has offered to be a resource person to diocesan personnel on domestic violence issues based on her experience on the women's commission in the Diocese of Richmond, Va.

"We put a lot of effort into educating the entire diocese about domestic violence," Kirkeby-Prosser said. "We put together pamphlets having to do with spouse abuse, domestic violence and child abuse. Our goal was to get them distributed to everybody in the diocese, and then to have the homilist on a certain day speak out and actually say to the men in the congregation, if you're doing this you're sinning, and telling the women if your husband is doing this to you, you don't have to put up with it. We have to help them realize their own goodness and self-esteem."



"They need to hear God understands and God doesn't want them to live like this," she continued. "And if you can help convince them that Jesus died on that cross because God loves us and doesn't want them to suffer, it's a big weight lifted off their shoulders."

The chaplain said one of her strongest messages to battered students is to point to a picture of Bishop Clark on her wall and say, "You know, he doesn't want you to suffer. He doesn't want you to be hurt."

Mary Kessler, implementation coordinator for the Diocese of Rochester's Synod Goal 3, said that the domestic violence issue may well fit into all four of the diocesan Pastoral Plan goals that emerged from the Synod. "It is education, it certainly is consistent ethic of life, and certainly small Christian communities," she said, adding the women's commission will be developing support groups and community resource lists.

Awareness of the need to address domestic violence has emerged on the national level of the church as well - and Bishop Clark was a part of that process.

In their June, 1992, statement, "When I Call for Help: Domestic Violence Against Women," the National Conference of Catholic Bishops stated, "violence against women, in the home or outside the home, is never justified. Violence in any form - physical, sexual, psychological or verbal - is sinful; many times it is a crime as well." As part of the statement, the bishops listed suggestions for abused women, abusive men, and pastors and pastoral staff.

Bishop Clark, who as a member of the Committee on Women in Society helped to write the document, said, "One thing church communities can offer is a place of hospitality, where women can reasonably hope to find help and understanding."

Women must believe that others have found help, the bishops wrote. They should trust a friend, priest, or other confidant. If they must stay for now, they should form a plan of action (hiding a car key outside the house, keeping some money in a safe place, finding a place to go). Men also should have the courage to look honestly at themselves and believe they can change and find help to do so. Pastors should address domestic violence and make it clear they care.

In counseling situations, Rev. Poling agreed with the bishops that direct questions should be asked.

"Now I ask people if they are being abused by anybody or were in the past, were they hit or raped," Rev. Poling said. "A man will use physical violence and it may be a long time before he does again. But he will threaten it. The issue is if they are living in fear or their safety is compromised."

The woman is the best judge of the danger she is in, he said, and it may be a year before she feels ready to leave.

Once a woman does leave, she may be in even more danger, according to ABW's Nealon, because the batterer is no longer in control and "may try to do anything to get it back."

ABW offers the only domestic violence shelter in Monroe and the surrounding four counties, according to Nealon. If a woman is in danger, she said, 911 is the first call to make; ABW (232-7353) is the second. If ABW is full, it may refer women to Bethany House of Hospitality or to Catholic Family Center's Women's Place, both homeless shelters. A few "safe houses" are available also.

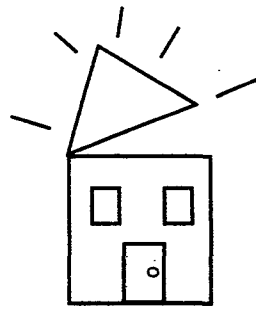
Donna Ecker, co-director of Bethany House, said of the bishops' letter, "I would make it required reading for parish staff. My suggestion is the church as a community needs to be very very verbal and very very adamant in saying abuse is wrong."

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