

MEDIA RELEASE

26 August 2022

Whole-of-Church Response to Family and Domestic Violence

Social Justice Sunday on 28th August 2022 is an opportunity for all to pause and consider the causes and structures that sit behind harm, inequality, and injustice that are present in our society and what we might all be prayerfully and practically involved in—joined with others as a community and society—to together address these issues.

This year the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference have focused their annual [social justice statement](#) on domestic and family violence, naming the gendered nature of this violence and quoting the 2016 Bishops of Victoria [pastoral letter](#) which described the roots of domestic violence as ‘abuse of power and the control of one person over another’.

The Bishops recognise in this statement that existing research suggests that the incidence of domestic violence and abuse within Christian congregations is similar to the rate within the general population in which they are located.

Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) welcomes the statement, [Respect: Confronting Violence and Abuse](#), and the important challenge that it brings and the serious implications for all who are committed to social justice, recognising that [1 in 3 women \(30.5%\)](#) have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 in Australia.

CSSV member organisations accompany victim/survivors and are active in both response to, and prevention of, domestic violence in many different forms—as described by the Bishops: ‘In addition to physical violence, domestic violence can also be emotional, financial, or spiritual.’

To respond to this issue holistically and seriously, a whole-of-Church response is needed. In collaboration with the Catholic Diocese of Sale, with support from the Victorian Multicultural Commission, and auspiced by CSSV’s Domestic Violence Committee, Sr Nicole Rotaru RSM has been working with parish communities from across the Diocese of Sale since March 2022 in a [pilot program](#), which has enabled participants to attend ‘Shining A Light’ workshops across the six regions of the diocese.

Each ‘Shining A Light’ workshop—held in Sale, Traralgon, Bairnsdale, Warragul, Wonthaggi and twice in Berwick—has enabled more than 100 key parish community participants to be better informed and equipped to respond to domestic and family violence. Participants have included social service staff and volunteers, parish staff, pastoral associates, educators, parishioners, and members of the community.

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Felicity Rorke, Chair of the CSSV Domestic Violence Working Party and Executive Director of the Good Samaritan Inn, said, 'The intention of the program is to develop capacity for an effective whole of Church prevention of, and response to, violence against women and children. We're grateful to be able to run this pilot program, which was funded through a grant from the Victorian Multicultural Commission.'

In addressing participants and people in leadership positions in parish communities, Sr Nicole Rotaru said, 'Addressing domestic and family violence is important to us because we are all equally created in the image and likeness of God. In our faith tradition, we follow the teachings of Jesus, which is around justice and truth. We are called to be witnesses of light and love in the world.'

'You all have key roles in your faith community, and as a faith community there is always an opportunity where we can learn something new for transformation, and for change of attitude,' she said.

'CSSV will evaluate this pilot program with the intention and hope that this program will be replicated across Victoria and Australia. The program demonstrates that the Catholic Church is active and engaged in this core issue of justice and is working toward better equipping people to understand domestic and family violence, and to respond effectively. Though, with the statistics as they are, there is still much work to be done,' said Josh Lourensz, Executive Director of CSSV.

More information about CSSV's work in the prevention of, and response to family and domestic violence, click [here](#).

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