

Prayer Service on Violence Against Women

SETTING: Ritual table set up with a candle; newspaper, magazine, and/or web articles on domestic violence and other forms of violence toward women; a globe or Earth representation to symbolize our desire for healing and wholeness around the world.

CALL TO PRAYER:

Today we gather to reflect on our world's culture of violence evidenced by the wounding, abusing and killing that we call domestic violence. We are outraged at the facts reported by the United Nations:

In the United States, a woman is beaten every 18 minutes.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury among women of reproductive age in the United States.

In Peru, 70 percent of all crimes reported to the police involve women beaten by their husbands.

In the 400 cases of domestic violence reported in 1993 in the province of Punjab, India, nearly half ended with the death of the wife.

We stand with the U.S. Bishops who declare that "... violence against another person in any form fails to treat that person as someone worthy of love. Instead, it treats the person as an object to be used." (*When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops)

As we pray for the healing of the human family, we are invited to focus our attention on our ritual center, which witnesses to the wounding of this family. Let us pray for healing and wholeness as we look and listen.

MUSIC: "Healer of Our Every Ill", "Healer of My Soul," or other music that speaks of our desire for healing

PRAYER: (*A reader may proclaim the sections, and all join in the response*)

O Christ,
In whose body was named
All the violence of the world,
And in whose memory is contained
Our profoundest grief,
We lay open to you:
The violence done to us in time before memory;
The unremembered wounds that have misshaped our lives;
The injuries we cannot forget.

RESPONSE

ALL: The remembrance of them is grievous to us;
The burden of them is intolerable.

We lay open to you:
The violence done to women in time before memory;
The unremembered wounds we have inflicted;
The injuries we cannot forget.

RESPONSE

We lay open to you:

Those who have pursued a violent knowledge the world must recognize;
Those caught up in violence they have refused to name;
Those who have enacted violence for which they have not repented.

RESPONSE

We lay open to you:

The victims of violence whose only memorial is our remembrance;
Those whose suffering was sustained on our behalf;
Those whose continued oppression provides the ground we stand on.

(Adapted from *All Desires Known* by Janet Morley)

RESPONSE

READINGS

“... we state as clearly and strongly as we can that 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. We have called for a moral revolution to replace a culture of violence. We acknowledge that violence has many forms, many causes, and many victims—men as well as women.” (*When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops)

“There followed a great multitude of people
And of women who wept and lamented.
But Jesus turned to them and said,
‘Daughters of Jerusalem,
do not weep for me,
but weep for yourselves
and for your children.’” (*Lk. 23:27-28*)

REFLECTION:

Women and girls are also victims of violence in sexual assaults; in some parts of the world, mass rape has been, and is being, used as a weapon of war. Sexual trafficking is growing around the globe, and younger and younger girls are being forced into sexual slavery as male clients try to avoid AIDS. Additionally, economic violence continues to traumatize and destroy the lives of millions of women and their families around the world.

When you think of women who endure violence, for whom do you weep?
How can you respond to these women and help transform their suffering?

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

SHARING:

Invite anyone in the group who would like to share to do so.

PETITIONS:

Our response is, "Lift us up with hope for those oppressed by violence!"

1. God of life, you teach us that love and welcome should be at the center of every home. We pray for the 50,000 women in the United States who every week seek orders of protection, women who are nine times as likely to be assaulted in their own homes as out on the street. We pray for the many women who are afraid to seek such restraints, who are disempowered by cultural conditioning and fear. In their name, we cry out today: RESPONSE
2. God of life, you teach us that children learn what they live. When 50-70% of men who abuse women also abuse their children, when being abused or neglected increases the likelihood of being arrested as a juvenile by 53%, we search for hope for our children. In the name of these little ones who suffer from lifetimes of violence, we cry out today: RESPONSE
3. God of life, you are a God who shares your gift of healing. Give it to the 30,000 battered women who each year seek healing in hospitals; and to the one-third of the women in an emergency room at any given time who are there because of domestic violence. May all those in healing professions see in those who come to them your face: the God who suffers whenever humanity is violated, mutilated, or handled with disrespect by those with power. In the name of all who protect and heal, we cry out today: RESPONSE
4. God of life, bring the bodies and spirits that are wounded to an unfailing belief in your love for them: the 85% of women in substance abuse programs who are victims of domestic violence; the 25% of all female psychiatric patients who attempt suicide as victims of domestic violence. In the name of all those who yearn to believe that they are precious, and honored, and loved by you, we cry out today: RESPONSE
5. God of life, you transform our lives. Bring transformation to the 200,000 women and girls who are the victims of rape and attempted rape each year in the U.S. alone; all those who have been raped in war crimes and the millions of women and girls who are trafficked for the sex industry, including the 45,000 brought into the U.S. each year. In the name of these suffering and wounded women, we cry out today: RESPONSE
6. God of life, teach us the ways of justice. Bring justice to the millions of women around the world who are victims of economic violence, women in free trade zones in Jamaica, in Mexico, in Thailand, who must work in inhumane conditions for minimal pay so they can help feed their families; women subsistence farmers whose land is taken for export crops; and women who cannot get training and placement in jobs with just wages. In the name of all women struggling to feed their children, provide them with health care and education, we cry out today. Response

For what else shall we pray? (*Invite spontaneous petitions*)

CLOSING PRAYER:

Invite all to extend their hands towards the ritual center as a gesture of blessing the human family and praying for the healing of our world.

ALL:

O God, down through the ages you have seen the battered bodies of women and children. With the broken body of Jesus hanging on the cross, they carry the burden of sin and violence in a world you created out of love. Give each of us the grace to unburden our hearts of hate and retaliation so that we may transform this suffering into redemptive love. Heal the hearts that wound and the bodies that are wounded so that we may know both as your sons and daughters, and each as sisters and brothers. We ask this through our brother, Jesus, whose wounds have brought salvation to all. Amen.

(Taken from *The Women's Prayer Companion* by the Carmelites of Indianapolis)

Prayer for Women

We ask forgiveness
of one another,
woman to woman,
sister to sister.

We ask forgiveness
of one another,
as children of God,
as friend to friend.

Too many times
have we failed to stand
together
in solidarity.
Too many times
have we judged one another,
condemning those things
we did not understand.

We ask forgiveness
for assuming we know
all there is to know
about each other,
for presuming to speak
for each other,
for defining,
confining,
claiming,
naming,
limiting,
labeling,
conditioning,
interpreting,
and consequently oppressing
each other.

-Medical Mission Sisters

