

Dear Marriage Ministers,

Have you checked out <http://www.foryourmarriage.org>? This is a fantastic resource created by the USCCB for couples and marriage ministers, with articles and information for engaged couples, dating couples, information about Catholic weddings, and marriage enrichment info. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and one of the lead articles on the website features the bishops' pastoral letter "[When I Call for Help.](#)" Since, sadly, domestic violence occurs in Catholic marriages and relationships just as it does in the rest of the culture, so as a matter of justice and service to the dignity of the human person, it is important to raise awareness about it in marriage prep programs. It is also important to make sure resources are readily available for women and men in your parish.

Take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with the [Wheel of Domestic Violence](#). A selection of downloadable wheels are [here](#), where you can also order a poster.

What would you do if a woman preparing for marriage in your parish called off the wedding because her partner was abusing her? Would you know how to support her, and what resources to direct her towards?

Abuse usually escalates, and victims are usually reluctant to speak about it until it has progressed to an extreme level. Abusers often promise to change, but domestic violence experts say that they rarely see this happen—it would require years of therapy, and a new relationship with someone else in which the abuse has not been an established pattern.

With this in mind, I would be very wary of encouraging a couple in the situation described above to reconcile and go forward with the wedding. This could be nothing short of life-threatening for the victim, especially in cases of physical abuse.

In addition to Catholic Charities, local resources offering support and advocacy for domestic violence victim include:

- [New Beginnings](#), in Seattle
- [DAWN](#), in Kent
- [Crystal Judd Family Justice Center](#), in Tacoma.

These organizations all have hotlines which you can call for more information. Are they far from your own parish? You could call to ask whether they know of good organizations closer to your own community. You could also call to request a training for your parish staff to help raise awareness about domestic violence across all the ministries in your parish. This could be life saving.

Blessings on all the work you do to serve marriage and family life!

In Christ,

Dr. Sarah Bartel

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