

Our role in ending domestic violence

By Archbishop William E. Lori

When video of Ray Rice assaulting his future wife in the elevator of an Atlantic City casino hotel surfaced this past week, it unleashed a chain of events that has left many, especially those who live in our archdiocese and who consider themselves fans of the Baltimore Ravens and Mr. Rice, with many questions and with many emotions, ranging from sadness and disillusionment to anger and disgust.

Of the many questions people have been asking about the way this matter has been handled by the civil authorities, the National Football League and the Baltimore Ravens, perhaps the one that is hardest to answer is the most basic one and the one fans, especially children with no knowledge or experience of domestic violence, have been asking: "How could it happen?"

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time each year when that very question is discussed in hopes of providing the education and awareness that are critical to preventing the violence that befalls one in four women and one in seven men in their lifetime. This was also the goal of the U.S. bishops' 1992 statement, "When I Call for Help," which unequivocally rejected domestic violence.

"As pastors of the Catholic Church in the United States, we state as clearly and strongly as we can that violence against women, inside or outside the home, is never justified," the statement said. "Violence in any form - physical, sexual, psychological, 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."

The incident involving the Rices underscores the reality that domestic abuse is occurring in virtually every community. Because it involves the treatment of the victim as an object and not a person to be loved and because people's lives are often at stake, domestic violence needs to be a lasting priority of the church. Catholics can help prevent domestic violence by creating awareness that abuse, whether physical or psychological, is never acceptable. They need to know specific ways to help.

To that end, last September I approved plans for a coordinated education and resource initiative to educate first responders (clergy, pastoral ministers and parish front office staff) and others to assist an abuse victim with immediate needs and to educate families on ways to prevent domestic abuse and promote family peace. The archdiocese's Family Life Office can provide information, resources and awareness training for staff and parishioners.

All Catholics need to know three basic things about domestic violence. They need to:

- RECOGNIZE the signs of domestic violence in themselves and others, which can be both physical and psychological;
- RESPOND appropriately by being supportive, sympathetic and non-judgmental (without acting as a counselor or rescuer, which should be left to the professionals); and
- REFER them to someone qualified to help them act safely and appropriately. The National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It has access to resources for both the survivor and for the abuser, and it can connect people directly to a local resource.

Much more information about this issue can be found on our website, archbalt.org, in the Family Life section.

To see more of Archbishop Lori's columns, [click here](#).