**OUR FAITH RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN.**

**The Life and Dignity of the Human Person**

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred, made in the image and likeness of God. Our belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation for all of the principles of our social teaching. We believe that every person is precious, from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death; that people are more important than things; and that the measure of every institution or policy is whether it enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

It is this firm foundation that solidifies the Church’s opposition to abortion, and other direct attacks on human life. We support the [adequate health care](http://www.nyscatholic.org/category/issues/health-care/) for poor mothers, children, and the elderly. As Christians, we have an obligation to defend and support the dignity of human life in all stages and in every condition.

The sacredness and dignity of human life is shared by all, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, religious belief, disability, economic status, age or sexual orientation. Thus respect for human life lies at the heart of the Church’s opposition to racism, discrimination and violence of all kinds.

We can only hope to overcome the escalating violence against women and children in our society if we are prepared to admit that it is happening. It is a serious social problem, sometimes prolonged by the mistaken belief that it is a “private” matter. It is also an offence against God, as well as the victim. Family and home are meant to be centres of love and security. Yet we are frequently reminded that the family home can be a very dangerous place for women and children. Whether the violence against them is psychological, physical or sexual, it is a grave injustice which cannot be accepted as inevitable in any community.

We want to assure those women who suffer violence in their own home that it can be a faithful and loving action to take positive steps to end the violence of the situation. Christian forgiveness in not in opposition to requiring those who perpetrate injustice to be held accountable. This can mean requiring them to seek positive help, or be confronted in a court of law.

The Catholic Church has created a document that affirms the basic human right of each person to live without violence at home or anywhere else. This is an important tool. I believe it will significantly enhance our work in creating God’s Kingdom on earth. Violence and domestic abuse is against God’s teaching and it’s an issue that affects families, women, men, children and all of their close family members and their neighbours. Our mission is to bring hope and healing. The Church has a secret weapon. The asset we can bring to this fight is the forgiveness and mercy of Jesus Christ. To become the voice for peace and justice in the community through education, reflection and social action.

Our Catholic response has been to encourage the development of programmes .At Parish level the special contribution the Church is able to make is the celebration of the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist. Provided the necessary steps for resolving difficulties are being taken, the sacraments can be a significant part of the journey. To empower women and children victims prayer is conducted in all its forms. We know we can do nothing without God’s grace. So we must pray incessantly that He will help us all to realize our vocation to live holy, virtuous lives free from violence and filled with love for God, self, each other and for creation.

We also provide services / for example counselling and psychological help for our victims. Also it is included in the curriculum programme for Catholic Schools – like first communion and confirmation class programmes. Tertiary level education addresses bullying, violence in school, values and virtues. We have the opportunity as clergy and lay leaders to provide helpful resources on any abuse through sermons, prayers, education and pastoral care. One valuable function of the church is support and inspiration. In a private pastoral care setting, we can offer the faith community’s encouragement and support to those seeking to end violence in their families. Church teaching can serve as a resource for victims and abusers.

To conclude it is important that our churches take a public stand like this and participate in community efforts to address this social justice issue.

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representing His Grace Archbishop Peter Loy Chong as a panelist for the Interfaith Search Fiji on topic “our faith response to violence against women and children”