THE CATHOLIC PRIEST: A WITNESS TO THE SEASONS OF LIFE – AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS AND RESPONSES TO SPOUSAL ABUSE

by

JOY THOMAS NELLISSERY

(Under the Direction of MARGARET M. ROBINSON)

ABSTRACT

There are over 1.45 billion Catholics in the world who are ministered to by over 405,000 priests. For majority of Catholics, priests play a central role in their lives. Each year more abuse victims, perpetrators and family members seek help from clergy than from all other helping professions combined. Yet in the research arena the clergy have been largely ignored as a source of help for the abused population. In addition, available research on effective clergy response to abused women has been solely based on the reports of the victim. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions, understanding and response of Catholic priests to spousal abuse.

A descriptive qualitative design that used in depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews for data collection was utilized in this study. Three documents that reflect the official stand of the Catholic Church were used as supplemental sources of data. The sample of 11 purposefully selected Catholic priests reflected diversity in age, ethnicity, race, education, years of ordination, seminary of formation, and focus of their ministry. Three research questions guided this study: 1) What are Catholic priests, perceptions

regarding spousal abuse? 2) How do Catholic priests personally understand spousal abuse? 3) How do Catholic priests address the issue of spousal abuse within families and the parish community at large?

Data analysis, guided by the constant comparative method, revealed three major categories: Perceptions, Understanding and Responses. Priests perceive spousal abuse as a real problem that cuts across all ethnic and racial structures. They are aware that it can be physical, psychological, sexual or spiritual. They understand spousal abuse as a personal and private matter. Their response to the community is evasive and indifferent. Priests brought forth the concept of spiritual abuse as a form of spousal abuse. Specific conclusions from the data are: 1) Priests have a general understanding of spousal abuse. 2) Priests' responses to the individual victim are of pastoral compassion and band-aid focused. 3) Priests' response to the parish community is indifference and evasive. 4) Priests lack basic knowledge or community and Church resources.

INDEX WORDS: Catholic priests, Spousal abuse, Catholic marriage, Priesthood and ministry, Catholic Church

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in loving tribute
to my mother

MARY OUSEPH NELLISSERY

to my father

THOMAS VARGHESE NELLISSERY

and a Jubilee tribute to my Bishop

MAR JAMES PAZHAYATTIL

for their unfailing belief in me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Dobash and Dobash (1979) wrote:

> The seeds of wife beating lie in the subordination of females and in their subjection to male authority and control. This relationship between women and men has been institutionalized in the structure of the patriarchal family and is supported by the economic and political institutions and by a belief system, *including a religious one, that makes such relationships seem natural, morally just, and sacred.* (p. 34, emphasis added)

There are over 1.45 billion Catholics in the world who are ministered to by over 405,000 priests (Cara, 2002). For the majority of Catholics, priests play a central role in their lives. The priests provide spiritual leadership of course, but they often are the first persons to whom family members turn for personal guidance. Catholics place great trust in priests. They confide in them not only in the confessional but also in the private quarters of the priests' offices. Catholics believe strongly in the guidance they receive from priests.

The Catholic Priesthood

The Catholic priesthood is one of the seven sacraments of the Church. There are three orders in the Church: "In the Church there are established bodies which Tradition, not without a basis in Sacred Scripture, has since ancient times called *taxies* (Greek) or *ordines*. And the liturgy speaks of the *ordo episcoporum*, the *ordo presbyterorum*, the *ordo diaconorum*" (Catechism, 1994, p. 384). They are subsequently the ordinations of Bishophood, Priesthood, and Diaconate. A rite called ordination, a religious and liturgical act, grants integration into one of the three fellowships in the Church. As a consecration or a sacrament, ordination "confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of sacred power which can come only from Christ himself through his Church" (Catechism, 1994, p. 384). Ordination is also a setting apart and an investiture by Christ himself for his Church. The Bishop's imposition of hand, together with the consecratory prayer, constitutes the visible sign of this ordination.

The purpose of priesthood is ministerial. Explaining the purpose the Church teaches: "The function of the bishop's ministry was handed over in a subordinate degree to priests so that they might be appointed in the order of the priesthood and be co-workers of the Episcopal order for the proper fulfillment of the apostolic mission that had been entrusted to it by Christ" (II Vatican Council, 1965, p. 865). The Bishop selects the seminarians from the applicants who are members of the discernment group of the appropriate diocese. Once selected, a seminarian has five years or more of formation in a seminary assigned by the bishop. The Bishop ordains him at the completion of the seminary formation. Further the Church clarifies the

mission of the priest: “Through the sacrament of Holy Orders priests share in the universal dimensions of the mission that Christ entrusted to the apostles. The spiritual gift they have received in ordination prepares them, not for a limited and restricted mission” (Wuerl, Lawler, & Comerford- Lawler, 1995), “but for the fullest, in fact the universal mission of salvation to the end of the earth” (II Vatican Council, 1965, p. 882). They are “prepared in spirit to preach the Gospel everywhere” (II Vatican Council, 1965, p. 723). Hence, the Bishop ordains the priests for the universal Church to be the shepherds of Christ in the local communities.

The goal of the ministerial priesthood of the Church is an attempt to serve as the model of Jesus. Hence, the priesthood is to continue the mission of Jesus Christ that is “to bring good news to the afflicted…to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free…” (The New Jerusalem Bible, 1990, p. 1694).

The Bishop assigns the ordained priest to serve the parish, which is a collection of families of a specific region. Describing the roles of a parish priest Bishop Dolan (2000) writes:

> A good parish priest is a pastor, confessor, hospital chaplain, social worker, administrator, teacher, preacher, financial planner, psychologist, neighborhood activist, health care specialist, organizer, development director, canonist, legal expert, cantor, marriage and family counselor, homeless advocate, gerontologist, baby-sitter, employment agency worker, youth director, sacramental minister, etc. (p. 269)

Further, explaining the nature of each parish as a microcosm of the Church Dolan (2000) cites from a letter of Father Antall. He writes:

> Parish priesthood involves a man in so many different lives. My ministry…placed me in the vortex of changes in a small town with social problems such as immunization, health care for the poor, family fragmentation, alcoholism, and violence…. I was there for it all – the hospital, the morgue, the jail, the courtroom, the family home saddened by grief…. Parish priesthood is so public, yet intimate. At marriages, baptisms, conversions, and confessions, the life of a parish priest involves him…with so many people. (p. 269)

Each parish is a family of faith. As the shepherd and pastor of the parish, the priest becomes a minister of families. A family is the basic unit of society and of the Church. Family is understood as the primary Church. Therefore, matrimony -- the source of family - is one of the seven sacraments: "The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws…. God himself is the author of marriage" (John Paul II 1981, p. 865). Therefore, the Church understands marriage not as a human institution but as a vocation. It is a vocation to love and complement, not to use each other, in the spousal relationship. So theoretically abuse and violence in marriage are contradictions of its very purpose.

History of Societal Concern of Family Abuse

Historically, societal concern with family abuse has occurred at different junctures of the history of European settlement in North America. In the seventeenth-century Puritan founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony prohibited wife beating and child beating by law (Mignon, Larson, & Holmes, 2002). In the mid 1870s to

1890, societies were founded for the prevention of cruelty to children and women. According to Pleck (1987) the Puritans' interest in domestic violence emerged from their fundamental religious principles rather than from the knowledge of the severity or the extent of the problem. The public interest in family abuse evolved "as a response to social and political conditions, or social movements, rather than to worsening conditions in the home" (p. 36).

The current common perception of family violence is spousal abuse. Spousal assault occurs in official marriages and common law marriages and between couples living together (Mignon, et al., 2002). Spousal abuse is the single most common cause of injury to women (Stark & Flitcroft, 1988). It is the most common form of assault encountered by police (Sherman, Schmidt, & Rogan, 1992). A woman is far more likely to be attacked by her spouse than by a stranger. Three out of four offenders assaulting women have a domestic relationship with the victim (Harlow, 1991). A quarter of women report physical violence during their marriage (Medical College of Wisconsin, 1998). Violence is a prevalent problem in families virtually in every culture around the world. According to the World Health Organization (1997), around the world one out of every three women has experienced violence in an intimate relationship at some point in her life. This is an average based on national surveys in developed and developing countries. The evidence and research indicate that spousal abuse is an extensive, diverse, and severe social problem with a complex web of correlates.

Looking at the complex historical factors that create and perpetuate spousal abuse, Mignon, et. al., (2002) write:

> Traditionally, males, as husbands and fathers, have been recognized as "heads of the household." Wives and children have been regarded as their "property," objects over whom they have been accorded the right to exert an authoritative and controlling influence. Children, of course, have historically been treated as subordinate to the controlling influence of both parents and of a variety of other adults as well. (p. 2)

Definitions

There is no universally acceptable definition of family abuse or violence. Some even argue that the word *family* is too restrictive and that we should replace it with the term *intimate* (Wallace, 2002). Current research uses the term family "to include situations in which individuals are living together regardless of whether they are legally married" (Wallace, 2002, p. 2). Basically there are two types of domestic abuse: adult abuse and child abuse. Adult family abuse constitutes the abuse of one married partner by the other, abuse between unmarried partners – either heterosexual or homosexual -- and abuse of elderly parents by children. On the other hand, a larger group of people such as parents, stepparents, caretakers, siblings, or other relatives may perpetuate child abuse. In both types of domestic abuse the common forms are: physical, sexual, emotional or psychological maltreatment, intellectual, and abandonment and neglect.

Frieze and Browne (1989) define violence and abuse as follows: "Violence connotes physical force, whereas abuse can include both non violent and violent

interactions" (p. 168). This study addresses spousal abuse and how Catholic priests understand and respond to spousal abuse and violence. The study defines spousal abuse as any intentional act or series of acts that cause injury to the spouse. These acts may be physical, emotional, sexual, intellectual, or abandonment and neglect. The term "spouse" is gender neutral. Therefore, the abused can be either male or female. The term includes those who are married, cohabiting, or involved in a serious relationship. It also includes individuals who are separated and living apart from their spouses.

Physical aggression may develop from minor acts that escalate over the course of time into severe acts. The severity of abuse can escalate to striking acts, such as punching, or striking with an open or closed hand. Throwing or destroying property is another level of abuse. Choking is another common form of abuse where the abuser makes a clear statement of his or her power and control over the victim (Wallace, 2002). Repeated beating using the same objects is yet another form of abuse. Some abusers use humiliation that renders the victim helpless. Sexual abuse often accompanies physical violence (Wallace, 2002). Sexual acts that humiliate or degrade the partner are also common. Violence during the sexual act may occur. Emotional abuse is far more than name-calling; it can and often does destroy the self-esteem and dignity of the victim. Verbal dominance, isolation, guilt, fear, humiliation, financial dependence, feeling helpless and control of time and space are common types of emotional abuse.

The American Psychological Association's (1996) report suggests that there are four factors that differentiate family abuse from other forms of abuse:

1. [it] occurs within ongoing relationships that are expected to be protective, supportive and nurturing;

2. the victim wants to escape the violence but also longs to belong to a family;

3. affection and attention may coexist with violence and abuse; and

4. ongoing family relationships create opportunities for repeat victimization. (p. 5)

Even though the United States appears to be sensitive to spousal abuse, certainly more than the rest of the world, the prevalence of spousal violence is breath taking in the United States. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (1994a) reports that, "on average each year, women experienced over 572, 0000 violent victimizations committed by an intimate, compared to approximately 49, 000 incidents committed against men" (p. 2). Although both men and women in intimate relationships are victims of their partners' violence, research on the consequences of the abuse has been almost entirely limited to female victims. Hence, women are expected to suffer more severe physical and psychological consequences (Arias & Pape, 1999). Men, due to the size and strength advantage, have the potential to cause more physical damage and the ability to escape an abusive attack more easily than women (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). Women's greater social and economic dependence often prevents them from escaping abusive relationships (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). In the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data of 1998, (Bureau of Justice Statistics, May 2000) violent intimate partner victimizations totaled 1,033,660. Female victims accounted for 85 percent of the total (or 876,340) and males 15 percent (or 157,330).

The report of the findings from the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey (Tjaden & Theonnes, 2000) on the extent, nature, and consequences of intimate partner violence in the United States finds that,

> Intimate partner violence is pervasive in U.S society. Nearly 25 percent of surveyed women and 7.6 percent of surveyed men said they were raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some time in their lifetime…. According to these estimates, approximately 1.5 million women and 834,732 men are raped and /or physically assaulted by an intimate partner annually in the United States (p. iii).… Most intimate partner victimizations are not reported to the police…these findings suggest that most victims of intimate partner violence do not consider the justice system an appropriate vehicle for resolving conflicts with intimates. (p. v)

Role of the Priests

If the victim fails to report the violent incident to the police in the United States, the probability of reporting in developing and underdeveloped countries is very slim. Since in many other parts of the world women do not have economic or social freedom and literacy, the percentage of victims can be very high. If in the United States many cases go unreported to the police, where else are these victims turning for help and consolation? Many turn to their churches. Due to the mutuality of the existence of church and family, the issue of family abuse becomes an important and complex concern for the Church. The importance of family abuse to the Church derives from the family's role as the primary social institution responsible for procreating, nurturing the young and providing intimate psychosocial and religious

bonding for all its members. The issues' complexity evolves from the various ways the abusers and perpetrators express themselves. The privileged context of relationships and privacy makes family violence more intriguing and insidious to both to the Church and society.

Culturally and traditionally clergy are well positioned to respond to survivors of family violence. They are intimately involved with families, and they are often the first person family members turn to (Charlsen & Brown, 1995; Fisher, 2002). Pastors are uniquely qualified to assist the survivors of family violence – those struggling to heal their deep scars (Leehan, 1989). The President's Task Force on Victims of Crime (1982) stated:

> In hearing after hearing across the country, victims identified the religious community as a vital and largely untapped source of support for crime victims. The government may compensate for economic loss; the state may punish; doctors may physically heal; but the lasting scars to spirit and faith are not so easily treated. Many victims question the faith they thought secure, or have no faith in which to rely. Frequently, ministers and their congregations can be a source of solace that no other sector of society can provide. (p. 95)

Leehan (1989) acknowledges that Church leaders could be society's most effective agents against family violence. They see families regularly, know all of their members, are familiar with the history of the families, and have access to their homes in ways unavailable to any other human service professionals. Pennsylvania Attorney General Fisher (2002) states:

> Many families dealing with abuse and violence have active affiliations with their religious community. According to a recent poll, 21 percent of women would turn to clergy first for help, but many clergy, lay and professional, are at a loss as to what to do and advice can sometimes be devastating. (p. 1)

Acknowledging the fact that the abused may turn to the Church in search of help, the National Catholic Bishops Conference (1992) stated that, "the Church can be the first point of referral for spousal abuse. We can incorporate ways to handle family conflict in our religious education and sacramental preparation programs" (p. 2). To the question of how the clergy responds to the revelation of spousal abuse, Leehan (1989) notes:

> Few clergy or others in the caring professions in our society know how to respond to this problem. When we become aware of active cases of family violence we are uncomfortable. We feel that if we do anything, we are intruding; we are interfering in a family matter. (p.17)

The Marriage and Family

Theoretically, a Catholic priest's response to family issues is based on the Church's teaching on marriage and family. Marriage reflects God's unconditional and faithful love: "Just as marriage is a sacred bond, so too family life is sacred, because in the family persons experience intimately the love of God" (Ramirez, 2001, p. 3). Pope John Paul II (1981) teaches that "…the family has a mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love in an effort that will find fulfillment, as will everything created and redeemed, in the [reign] of God" (p.

5). Thus, violence within the family hinders the possibilities for a family to be that for which it was created. Pope John Paul II (1995) writes to the women of the world:

> When it comes to setting women free from every kind of exploitation and domination, the Gospel contains an ever-relevant message, which goes back to the *attitude of Jesus Christ himself*. (p. 2, emphasis in original)

Looking back and making a priority for future actions the Pope continues:

> …how can we not mention the long and degrading history, albeit often an "underground" history, of violence against women in the area of sexuality? …Certainly, much remains to be done to prevent discrimination against those who have chosen to be wives and mothers. As far as personal rights are concerned, there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: …equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State. (p. 3)

The Bishops Council of United States (1992) teaches that "violence in any form -- physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal – is sinful; many times it is a crime as well" (p. 1). Hence, Bishop Ramirez (2001) reiterates: "We must confront domestic violence, for it is a shameful exercise of power against those whose lives are entwined by ties of blood and family" (p. 5). The teaching of the Church makes it clear that domestic violence is never justified, and it sacrilegiously ruins the sacred covenanted relationships of marriage.

Too often Scripture is incorrectly used to justify husbands dominating wives. The inadequacy of response by both Church and society results at least in part from

an apparent close association between violence and patriarchy (Assembly of Quebec Bishops, 1989). Bishop Ramirez (2001), accepting responsibility, states:

> Church ministers have failed, at times, to recognize domestic violence for what it is because of the way in which they, themselves, exercise power…. Violence inflicted in the family on spouses, parents, children or siblings is intolerable and unconscionable. We ask the forgiveness of all persons affected by the inadequate response of the Church's pastoral leaders to violence, which has occurred in homes and in the family -- places meant to be of sanctuary for all persons. (p. 7)

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (1991) reminded priests that their silence could be very harmful:

> The abused woman is often isolated; church may be the one place she is still able to go. If she never hears a homily on this topic, her sense of isolation may be increased or she may not feel free to approach the pastor or a member of the pastoral team. (p. 2)

The U.S. Catholic Bishops (NCCB, 1994), demanding the involvement of the faith community against spousal abuse stated:

> The Catholic community is in a position to respond to violence and the threat of violence in our society with new commitment and creativity. More of the same is not sufficient. Business as usual is not enough. Our faith and facilities can be beacons of hope and safety for those seeking refuge from violent streets and abusive homes. People can become peacemakers in their homes and communities. (p. 9)

The role of the Church in meeting the needs of spousal abuse victims is pertinent to the integrity of the Church itself. The woman being abused physically, emotionally, and psychologically suffers spiritually as well. Due to the spiritual and moral component of abuse, the Church has a unique role in assisting women to overcome the effects of violence and in restoring their dignity and hope. The mission of the Church "calls for a firm and prophetic stance in regard to violence against women; there must be action and intervention" (Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, 2000, p. 30). In reality, beyond the theory and teaching, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez (2001) acknowledges that

> Our pastoral experience tells us that not only in the past, but even today, spouses – most often women – are exhorted over and over to forgive and forget spousal abuse. At times clergy tell those abused to resume marital life and thus be further victimized. In so doing clergy fail to acknowledge and validate the experience of victims…. To encourage a victim to return to such an environment without the benefit of qualified help is irresponsible. When such errors are made or sinful actions are excused in God's name, the consequences are even more tragic. (p. 6)

There are official teachings of the Church against spousal abuse and violence, from the Pope, Bishops' Conferences and from the individual Bishops. Yet so far there is no recorded study to assess how Catholic priests respond to spousal abuse and violence.

As an exploratory study of Catholic priests' understanding and responses to spousal abuse, this investigation account how the priests and the abused constructs

meaning. The theory of Social constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1966) will be used as a theoretical framework for this investigation.

Statement of the Problem

Horton and Williamson (1988) observe that, "Each year more abuse victims, perpetrators, and family members seek help from clergy than all other helping professionals combined" (p. xi). Priests are the primary consultants and advisors regarding family relationship issues of the people (Brown, Dubau & Mckeon, 1997; Fisher, 2002). Battered women who have received counseling from the clergy often say that when they left the pastor, minister, mullah or priest, they felt worse than when they arrived (Brown, et al., 1997; Fortune, 1995). Thus, the perceptions and responses of these ordained men on spousal abuse and violence are of relevance in understanding and addressing the gestalt puzzle of spousal abuse.

The clergy have been largely ignored as a source of help for the abused population in the research arena (Bowker, 1982). "Despite the burgeoning literature on social and cultural antecedents of domestic violence, the role of religion [institutions] has been virtually ignored by researchers in this area" (Ellison, Bartkowshki & Anderson, 1999, p. 88).

Since the Catholic Church prohibits divorce, the clergy response may have the potential to be controlling and oppressing, and women may associate the clergy's views as a divine mandate for them. This study seeks to understand how Catholic priests who work in parishes define spousal abuse and respond to spousal abuse and violence.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Catholic priests understand and respond to domestic abuse and violence. Three research questions will guide this study:

1. What are Catholic priests' perceptions regarding spousal abuse?
2. How do Catholic priests personally understand spousal abuse?
3. How do Catholic priests address the issue of spousal abuse within the families and parish community at large?

Significance of Study

The significance of the study relates both to a lack of any prior research in the area and also to the male hierarchy in the administration and priesthood of the Church. Being single, celibate, and having been educated and trained in a male-dominated hierarchy, Catholic priests are in a unique position to minister to individuals and families who are experiencing or witnessing abuse in their families. This study explores priests' perceptions, understanding and response of spousal abuse. This investigation might initiate future changes in seminary curriculum and policy on priests counseling women and children. It could lead to a sensitivity training for priests as continuing education on spousal abuse issues. Study would also enable Church officials to make a renewed commitment to family concerns and to encourage priests to preach on spousal abuse and violence in the family. So a study regarding to the perceptions, understanding and responses of Catholic priests on spousal abuse, is significant. Moreover, the recent clergy sex scandals (Henneberger,

2002) have created more openness on the part of the Church to examine its shortcomings.

The study would also help priests to understand how their responses and reactions can collude, deny, minimize, blame, reinforce, and maintain a family culture that condones spousal abuse. It would help priests to have a subjective evaluation regarding their problem solving and listening skills as counselors.

In conclusion, this study could have a long lasting impact both in the Catholic Church and in the treatment and prevention of spousal abuse. It would help to alleviate abuse and pain for so many in spousal relationships if Catholic priests can become catalysts, "to bring good news to the afflicted…to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free…" (The New Jerusalem Bible, 1990, p. 1694).

Definitions

Definitions of the terms central to this study are presented in this section.

Bishop: The chief of pastors in their dioceses, responsible for the character and conduct of worship and preaching, spiritual discipline, and temporal affairs. He ordains priests to the ministry and supervise their work. He is the successor of the apostles who has received the fullness of Christ's priesthood. The root of the term is the Greek word *episkops.*

Diaconate: The ministry of service, and the lowest rank of holy orders, below the priesthood and episcopate. The root of the term is the Latin word *Diaconus.*

Diocese: The territory over which a bishop exercises ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It is an administrative division of the Church. It is a geographical district

over which a bishop exercises supervision and pastoral care. The Pope alone ultimately erects dioceses, changes their boundaries, divides, unites or suppresses them. The root of the term is the Greek word *dioikesis.*

Pastor: An individual priest or a corporate person in a religious order or community to whom a pastor has been entrusted by a bishop, with the rights and responsibilities conferred by canon law and the statutes of the diocese. The root of the term is the Latin word *pastor.*

Pope: Title of the visible head of the Catholic Church. He is called Pope because his authority is supreme and because he exercises it in a paternal way, after the example of Christ. He is the successor of the Apostle Peter, the first bishop of Rome. The root of the term is the Latin word *papa.*

Priest: The person who, in relation to a community, proclaims the word of God on behalf of the church as a whole. The priest is an authorized mediator from the people to God. The priesthood is the sacrament of New Testament law, instituted by Christ at the last supper, which confers on a man the power of consecrating and offering the body and blood of Christ and remitting and retaining sins. The root of the term is the Greek word *presbytor.*

Seminary: A school established for the academic and spiritual training of candidates for the priesthood.

Tribunal: A Church court where the law of the Church (Canon law) is the criteria. Parallel structure of this ecclesiastical system is the judicial system of the country. Each diocese has a tribunal.

Vatican Council: Authorized gatherings of bishops under the Pope, for the purpose of discussing ecclesiastical problems with a view to passing decrees on matters under discussion. The councils are called after the name of the place of the gathering.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory investigation is to provide an understanding of the perceptions and responses of Catholic priests to spousal abuse. The participants in this study are Catholic priests who are exclusively celibate and ordained men. The first purpose of this chapter (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) is to synthesize the related research and the intellectual traditions that support them. Secondly, it seeks both to identify and address gaps in existing research on spousal abuse and violence. Thirdly, the review presents the research questions and the theoretical framework for the research. A thorough review of literature, both print and internet resources, as well as national and international libraries, has resulted that there are no studies on Catholic priests' responses to spousal abuse. Consequently, this study presents the review in three categories: 1) spousal abuse; 2) catholic marriage and family; and 3) priesthood and ministry.

Spousal Abuse

One of the painful contradictions of human nature is that some of the most personally injurious behaviors take place between a man and woman who make a conscious promise and vow to love and care for each other. Spousal abuse is a phenomenon that has remained largely invisible over the centuries. Within marriage and family, the use of physical force and violence has traditionally been an option of

men (Pleck, 1987). In 753 B.C. the Roman emperor granted *patria potestas,* a custom directed at protecting the husband's rights and powers as the sole authority and head of the household (Weitzman, 2000). Patriarchy continued this given authority and right to control throughout the centuries. Patriarchy provides a social structure of male ownership of family, which includes women and children (Clarke, 1986; Martin, 1976). The traditional roles of women as auxiliary and subordinate to men, and property of their fathers, have served as the model for generations. Anything in the privacy of the domestic environment is not the concern of the public domain. Religious teachings reinforced such views (Schneider, 2001).

Dobash and Dobash (2002) state: "Through religious beliefs and legal prescriptions this [spousal violence] was supported well into the nineteenth century and men were punished only when the violence was excessive, flagrant outrage and/or a public nuisance" (p.189). Moreover, even recently, spousal violence become marginalized, trivialized and ignored, or diverted to civil or lower courts (Rawstorne, 2002). In contrast, violence perpetrated by strangers constitutes a crime in the public domain. Since family, in contrast to the dangerous outside world, appears to be private place of love, safety, and protection, institutions are reluctant to acknowledge the "hidden crime" (Wallace, 2002).

Types of family abuse.

There are two basic types of family abuse, and both can simultaneously happen in the family: adult abuse and child abuse. This research will focus on adult family abuse. Adult family abuse encompasses at least three dimensions of abuse: 1) the abuse of one married partner by the other; 2) abuse between unmarried partners;

and 3) abuse of elderly parents by their children. This study focuses on spousal abuse and violence.

The four major types of abuse as follows: 1) physical abuse (ranging from aggressive acts such as pinching, destroying property, throwing things at and slapping to extreme violent acts such as punching, beating, choking, and murder); 2) sexual abuse (humiliating or degrading acts, rape, and incest); 3) emotional abuse or psychological maltreatment (verbally abusing, blaming, creating guilt, fear, humiliation, isolation, and helplessness, and creating financial dependence), and 4) abandonment and neglect (Mignon, et. al., 2002). All of these forms of abuse can happen in a spousal relationship. Current researchers perceive spousal abuse as physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological violence. Within each there are degrees of intensity. A spouse may suffer from one or all forms of spousal abuse.

World incidence and prevalence.

Spousal abuse occurs throughout the world in all communities regardless of class, creed, cast, age, race, disability, sexuality, and socio-economic life style. Incidences and prevalence of physical assault between intimate partners are disturbingly high. In most countries wife beating is an acceptable form of control, whether legal or illegal (Schuler, Hashmi, Riley & Akhter, 1996). Throughout the world, injury-causing assaults routinely reflect a pattern of male to female violence, whether in Austria, Nigeria, Hong Kong, or Japan (Bernard & Schlaffer, 1992; Kalu, 1993; Tang, 1999; Yoshima & Sorenson, 1994). Marital assault rates in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are analogous to those found in the U.S. national family violence surveys (Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1998; Knight, & Hatty, 1992; Moffitt &

Caspi, 1999). In countries such as Korea, Nicaragua, and Bangladesh rates are much higher (Kim & Cho, 1992; Wessel & Campbell, 1977). Russia has one of the highest wife murder rates in the world, with approximately 14,000 to 16,000 female homicides per year (Horne, 1999).

Phyllis Noreager Stern (1991) provides a thumbnail perspective of domestic violence worldwide:

> More than 90 million African women and girls are victims of female circumcision or other forms of genital mutilation. Six out of 10 Tanzanian women have experienced physical abuse from their partners. Fifty percent of married women are regularly battered by their partners in Bangkok, and Thailand. An estimated 1,000 women are burned alive each year in dowry-related incidents in the state of Gujarat, India. 78,000 female fetuses were aborted after sex determination tests between 1978-1982. In Mexico a woman is raped every 9 minutes. In the United States a woman is beaten every 15 seconds. One in every 10 Canadian women will be abused or battered by her husband or partner. Eight out of 10 aboriginal women in Canada will be beaten by their partner. (p. 145)

Further sharing the worldview of spousal abuse, Summers and Hoffman (2002) write:

> In England and Wales two women are killed every week, and one in three are subjected to some form of domestic violence in their lifetime. In Germany every year 40,000 women and children are provided with shelter…. In Italy where domestic violence is seen as a personal and private matter there was a 100 % increase in women attending shelters between 1992 and 1998. Yet

> there is no national survey on domestic violence and police reports are rare. In order for a woman to be considered a victim under the Italian criminal code (i.e., suffering maltreatment within the family), she must show physical proof and her injuries have to take 40 days to heal. (p. xiv-xv)

Women in the United States are more likely to be killed by a male intimate or acquaintance than by a stranger (Federal Bureau of Investigation, (FBI), 1993). In spite of the general acknowledgement that violence in intimate relationships is a serious problem, there is little agreement about what constitutes violence as well as who inflicts and who sustains violence (Arriaga & Oskamp, 1999; Gelles & Loseke, 1993).

The nature of violent relationships.

Describing the nature of violent relationships becomes a tedious task due to the several distinct conceptualizations of violence used in literature. For some family researchers, terms such as "abuse" and "physical aggression" denote behaviors like pushing, slapping, and shoving (O'Leary, 1993; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). On the other hand, criminologists, using a different standard, use the term "violent" only when actions lead to physical injury or when violence leads to a crime (Straus, 1999; Wallace, 2002).

The feminist perspective is that relationship violence is an outcome of male attempts to overpower and terrorize female victims; hence, the psychological abuse and intimidation are as much a component of violence as is physical assault (Yllo, 1993). According to Johnson (1995) another serious form of violence stems from deeply rooted "patriarchal traditions of men's right to control 'their' women" (p.

286). Besides physical abuse patriarchal traditions involve economic subordination, extreme coercion and intimidation, isolation and a host of other control tactics, which Johnson names as "patriarchal terrorism" (p. 287).

Increasingly, research shows that there are different types of violence, and so we need different types of interventions (Emery & Laumann-Billings, 1998; O'Leary, 1993). Common "couple violence" (such as hitting, pushing, or kicking a partner) rarely escalates into injurious or life-threatening behaviors (Johnson, 1995; O'Leary, 1993). Moreover, many of the couples who display it do not persist in violent interaction patterns over time (Bradbury & Lawrence, 1999). However, severe batterers escalate the intensity of the violence over time, and extreme psychological and physical abuse is a pattern perpetrated almost exclusively by men (Johnson, 1995). In the majority of cases of couple-violence, both partners instigate the actions (Bradbury & Lawrence, 1999).

Research has shown that in couples where both members engage in less severe forms of violence, the partners assault each other an average of six times per year. In contrast, male batterers who engage in extreme psychological and physical violence assault their wives an average of 65 times per year (Arriaga & Oskamp, 1999; Johnson, 1995). Hence, the research leads us to understand two areas of spousal abuse and violence: 1) that for a large number of spouses it is common to engage in violent behaviors, and behaviors erroneously labeled as "harmless" are common (Straus, 1999); and, 2) a large number of men inflict much more serious physical assaults and severe psychological abuse on their partners.

Even though both men and women in intimate relationships have been victims of their partners' violence, research on the consequences of abuse has been almost entirely limited to female victims (Arriaga & Oskamp, 1999). Violent husbands have low levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Prince & Arias, 1994), higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse (Fagan, et al., 1983; Leonard & Senchak, 1993); high levels of pathological jealousy (Walker, 1979); narcissism (Hastings & Hamberger, 1988) and anger (Heyman, O'Leary & Jouriles, 1995). They also exhibit poor communication skills (Jacobson, Gottman, Walts, Rushe, Babcock & Holtzworth-Munroe, 1994) and one-sided allocation of decision-making (Straus, 1980). Violence is most likely in households where decision-making power is solely in the hands of the husband and least likely in democratic homes (Straus, 1980).

Using data from the 1985 National Family Violence Re-Survey, Stets (1990) found that 65 % of White American men and 56 % of African American men were verbally and psychologically abusive but not physically aggressive to their partners. Battered women had significantly lower levels of self-esteem than non-battered women (Aguilar, & Nightingale, 1994). Exposure to psychological abuse lowered the self-esteem of battered women still further (Jezel, Molidor & Wright, 1996).

Studies have shown that socio-cultural factors are significant in spousal abuse. Marital violence is common among: 1) young spouses (Pagelow, 1981; Straus, 1980), especially those with low occupational status and income and high job dissatisfaction (Gelles & Cornell, 1985; Howell & Pugliesi, 1988; Straus, 1980); 2) African American families (Hampton, Gelles & Harrop, 1989); 3) acculturated Mexican American and Puerto Rican American families (Kaufman, Jasinski &

Aldarondo, 1994); 4) Korean families and Chinese families (Tang, 1998); 5) Mexican families (Dimmitt, 1995); 6) Indian families (Mehrotra, 1999); 7) Italian families (Baldry, 2002); and 8) German families (Jolin & Steffen, 2002).

Many studies focus on emotional abuse (Agnew, 1998; Engel, 1992; Jantz, 1995; Loring, 1994; Miller, & Nirenberg, 1984; Royse, 1994). Psychological abuse covaries significantly with physical abuse among couples (Follingstad, Routledge, Berg, Hause & Polek, 1990). Evidence shows psychological abuse is not only a correlate of physical abuse, but also a precursor to it (Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). The occurrence of physical abuse appears in a developmental process in which psychological abuse necessarily occurs first (Stets, 1990). Negative consequences of marital violence include physical injury (Fagan, Stewart & Hansen, 1983; Goldberg & Tomlanovich, 1984; Straus, 1986); divorce (Levinger, 1966) and increased risk for homicide (F.B.I., 1982).

Women's victimization brings with its symptoms of psychological distress, such as fear, terror, nightmares (Hilberman & Munson, 1977-1978), inability to trust (Carmen, Reiker & Mills, 1984), low self esteem (Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Walker, 1979), anxiety (Hilberman & Munson, 1977–1978; Walker, 1979), depression (Carmen et, al., 1984; Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Hilberman & Munson, 1977-1978; Rounsaville & Lifton, 1983), helplessness (Walker, 1984), guilt (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Walker, 1979), shame, feelings of inferiority, loneliness, pessimism (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983), low ego strength, shyness, introversion, tension, (Star, Clark, Goetz & O'Malia, 1979), suspiciousness (Walker, 1979), increased risk of suicide (Carmen, et al., 1984; Stark, Flitcraft & Frazier, 1983),

psycho-physiological complaints such as fatigue, backache, headache, general restlessness (Walker, 1979), and insomnia (Hilberman & Munson, 1977–1978; Walker, 1979). For these reasons, United States has placed domestic violence among the major national health problem (United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), 1990).

Sexual abuse often accompanies physical violence. Sex on demand or after physical assaults is very common in the victim population (Mignon, et. al., 2002). Women may fear that a refusal to engage in sexual activity will cause the abuser to react violently (Wallace, 2002). Sexual abuse is at the juncture of physical abuse and rape (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1995). Females sexually abused as children are at risk for later sexual victimization (Krahe, Scheinberger-Olwig, Waizenhofer & Koplin, 1999). In conclusion, Russell (1990) observes: "Rape and assault, both within the family and outside of it, are two of the most crude and brutal ways in which patriarchal societies' seek to maintain the sexual status quo" (p. 87).

The growing proliferation of literature and research related to partner abuse has not identified a specific risk profile for victims (Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1990). The effects of abuse extend beyond the marital relationship to negatively affect the children and adolescents exposed to such abuse (Buset, 1999; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson & Zak, 1986a; Moore & Pelper, 1998). Regardless of her racial/ethnic group, age, marital status, education, religion or income, any woman may experience violence (Sharps & Campbell, 1999).

Religion and spousal abuse.

Rates of violence are higher among spouses who report no religious affiliation (Straus, 1980). Among those who do report some religious affiliation, the lowest rates of violence are among Jewish husbands, while the highest rates are among husbands who are members of non-mainstream fundamentalist religious groups (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). Regarding the influence of religion on national policy, Baldry (2002) writes, "The Catholic religion in Italy has played a central role in considering the family sacred and keeping violence within the home an isolated, private problem rather than a social one" (p. 60).

Religion plays a very important role in shaping people's attitudes toward women, including a woman's self-perception. For instance, abused women who are Christian often have severe guilt feelings about marital violence. Van der Hoven (2002) suggests that the following beliefs contribute to such guilt feelings and continuation of the abuse:

- It is your Christian duty to forgive.
- The Bible instructs us to love each other. The family is very important to God.
- Sacrifice for your family. A wife is secondary to her husband.
- The Christian woman must keep her family together.
- Pray for a violent man. God can change him.
- Put your marriage in God's hands. (p. 132)

Having discussed the spousal violence in detail, next I will discuss the Catholic concept of marriage and family in-depth.

Catholic Marriage and Family

> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) teaches: "In creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has manifold responsibilities, rights and duties." (p. 532) Further it states: "The conjugal community is established upon the covenant and consent of the spouses. Marriage and family are ordered to the good of the spouses, to the procreation and the education of children." (p. 549)

The Church bases this teaching on the Second Vatican Council's (1965) position that "the well being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the health state of conjugal and family life" (p. 949). So the family is the natural society in which husband and wife give themselves in love and in the gift of life (Catechism, 1994). The family is a privileged community, called to achieve a "sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing" (Vatican Council II, 1965, p. 956).

On the nature of this relationship Pope John Paul II (1988) writes that "in the 'unity of two' a man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist 'side by side' or 'together' but also *to exist mutually 'one for the other'* " (p. 7, emphasis in the original). The Church emphasizes the priority of family because it believes in God's plan the family is the original cell of social life. In creating human beings The Church believes God intended that the first and basic human society would be a

natural communion in which a man and a woman come together as husband and wife. In love, they would give themselves completely to each other in both the gift of love and the gift of life (Wuerl, 2001). At the core of the Church's teaching on family life is God's plan for the human race that is set forth in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. There we see that God created them as male and female in the image and likeness of God. The Bible states: "God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good" (The New Jerusalem Bible, 1985, p. 18). This partnership is to be permanent so that both partners receive the mutual support, love and care they need to get through life, and it is to provide the enduring context of nurturing to each other.

Christian marriage is an occasion of grace for spouses because it expresses and participates in Christ's self-giving love (Crawford, 2001). In other words, Catholic marriage is an expression of the radical freedom of the individual to give totally and unconditionally himself / herself to the partner. So gender is irreducible and decisive for the person because the body expresses the whole person. The gender of the person reaches to the very core of his or her individuality and spiritual freedom. The very act of entering into marriage as an act of "total self gift" of the human person constitutes an entering into an objective form of love. As John Paul II, (1981) writes: "Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being" (p. 822).

Rules for the relationship are based on the scripture and Church "stresses the equality and complementarity of man and woman. They complete each other….They see each other as equals….Marriage ought to be monogamous: one man and one woman are to become one in it" (Wuerl, et. al., 1995, p. 57). The nuptial blessing in a

Catholic wedding is the following; "….May her husband put his trust in her and recognize that she is his equal and the heir with him to the life of grace. May he always honor her and love her as Christ loves his bride, the Church" (Champlin, 2000, p. 85).

Hence, Catholic marriage becomes a covenant that is indissoluble: "Marriage as a natural institution, cannot be dissolved by the will of the partners or by any human authority" (Wuerl, et. al., 1995, p. 449). So the "marriage is a binding tie that endures for life, no matter what happens between the spouses" (p. 449). The only exception is the Pauline privilege that states if the marriage is contracted with two non-baptized persons, it is not binding.

Catholics can be married validly only in the presence of a priest and witnesses, and "divorce is forbidden by Christ" (Wuerl, et. al., 1995, p. 450). Since divorce is not an option, the Church clarifies the characteristics of the sacrament of marriage. No real marriage covenant took place if one (or both) of the partners failed to give totally or was incapable of giving free and irrevocable consent. Or if one or both did not intend a commitment and a bond of faithful love open to procreation. If for any reason the marriage was not genuine from the onset, it is possible to obtain an annulment from the Church (Wuerl, et. al., 1995).

The nucleus of the Church's teaching on sexuality is the respect and dignity for the human person. Hence, "preserving the full sense of mutual self giving and of human procreation" (Wuerl, et. al., 1995, p. 286), must be the intent in each and every act of sexual intercourse within marriage. Thus, the Church teaches that, "they [the couple] will rule out any and all forms of artificial birth control" (p. 447). The

Church's further teaching states, "no one should seek to bring about pregnancy by any method, such as artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization, which substitutes some sort of technology for the marital act or alters that act's nature as a mutual gift of complete sexual communion open to new life" (Congregation for Doctrine of Faith, 1987, p. 2). In a feminist perspective these teachings are interpreted as controlling and abusive.

In a message on the occasion of the General Assembly of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organization, Pope John Paul II (2001), wrote:

> In today's world there exists a growing awareness of the need to affirm women's dignity. This is no abstract principle for it involves a concerted effort at every level to oppose vigorously "all practices that offend woman's freedom or feminity…so called 'sexual tourism', trafficking in young girls, mass sterilization and, in general, every form of violence. (p. 1)

On the status of women and sharing future plans for a gender equal society, Pope John Paul II (1995) reminds the world:

> Certainly, much remains to be done to prevent discrimination against those who have chosen to be wives and mothers. As far as personal rights are concerned, there is an urgent need to achieve *real equality* in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State. (p. 3)

In spite of the teachings of the Church, the translation of these words into action depends on priests. It is the priest who by ministering and teaching the families unites the people and facilitates a community of faith. So next I present priesthood and ministry.

Priesthood and Ministry

The Catholic priesthood is the second of three ordinations of the Church (Bishophood, Priesthood, and Diaconate) and one of the seven sacraments. Wuerl, et. al., (1995) state: "once ordained a priest, a man remains a priest forever" (p. 387). The priest, a prudent cooperator, support and mouthpiece of the bishop, is called to serve the people of God (II Vatican Council, 1965).

The Second Vatican Council (1965) teaches that the priestly office "is conferred by that special sacrament through which priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are marked with a special character and are so configured to Christ the Priest that they can act in the person of Christ the Head" (p. 865). Priests are called to be co-workers of bishops to share in the priesthood of the bishops in subordinate degrees (II Vatican Council, 1965). By the consecration and ordination, they will preach the Gospel, sustain the people of God, and celebrate sacred rites, especially the Lord's sacrifice. Priestly ordination is to continue the saving action of Christ in and through the sacraments. A priest gathers the faithful for the Eucharistic sacrifice that only a priest can offer in the person and in the place of Christ. He forgives sins in the sacrament of penance, again acting in the name and person of the Lord. His other specifically priestly functions are preaching, praying for the Church, anointing the sick, administering the other sacraments, and caring in every way for Christ's flock

(II Vatican Council, 1965). As a minister of God's love a priest's life is a witness to holiness and a sensitive response to the weak and poor. Priests are anointed to "teach the Christian message or explain the Church's doctrine or endeavor to treat contemporary problems in the light of Christ's teaching" (p. 869).

Priesthood is a vocation to service, and it is a ministry of unity. In order to bring about unity, a priest must have authority. This authority (Wuerl, et al., 1995) falls into two categories: the teaching of truth with authority and the directing of the community in the path of unity. Teaching requires that the priest authoritatively interpret the word of God for his people in ways appropriate to his day. The second – directing the community -- is centered in the priest's mission to maintain and build Christian community. "The proper mission entrusted by Christ to the priest, as to the Church, is not of the political, economic or social order, but of the religious order" (II Vatican Council, 1965, p. 942). Yet in the pursuit of his ministry, the priest can contribute greatly to the establishment of a more just secular order, especially in places where there are serious problems of injustice and oppression. He must always, however, preserve ecclesial communion and reject violence both in words and or deeds (Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 1971).

As shepherds, priests live in proximity to the parish church so that they can be accessible to the people. The Second Vatican council (1967) expects priests to be equipped to provide adequate answers and guidance to people on current issues of life. So the Church exhorts the seminary faculty that the priestly training has to be adapted to the circumstances of time and place. Priestly training must always answer

the pastoral requirements of the particular area in which the ministry is to be exercised (II Vatican Council, 1967).

Available studies

While many have written about the Church's stance on spousal abuse, no one has written on Catholic priests' response to spousal abuse. In general, the available studies on clergy share the bitter experience of victims in their futile attempts to get help from clergy and their inadequate responses (Stacey & Shupe, 1983). Walker (1979) reported that clergy either denied help to victims and or sent them home to "preserve the family." Langley and Levy (1977) found as a result of the clergy's emphasis on keeping the family together and wifely submission, women who sought help felt trapped. Horton and Williamson (1988) reported on a study of 5, 700 Protestant pastors from the United States and Canada. Although less than ten percent of the questionnaires were returned, the study found that, "pastors' lack of interest in and even denial of the problem of wife abuse" (p. 166). Analyzing the low return of questionnaires, Alsdurf and Alsdurf (1988) write:

> Interestingly enough, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), an organization of pastors from 44 conservative Protestant denominations, surveyed its members on family concerns in 1984. The response rate to that organizationally endorsed study was almost identical to ours. (p. 166)

Lee Bowker (1982) reported the largest study, where a significant number of participants are Catholic priests. In that study, an in-depth interview of 146 battered wives from Southeastern Wisconsin 59 women (40 %) sought help from the clergy in connection with wife beating. These women initiated a sum total of 132 contacts

seeking clergy's help. Thirty-five percent of the sample were Catholic priests. The Milwaukee wives rated the services received from ministers and pastors as much more successful than services received from the Catholic priests. The Catholic priests provided more sessions per incident over a longer period of time. The main difference in the content of the service offered was that Protestant ministers were twice as likely as Catholic priests to command or direct the battered wives who sought out their help: "They forcefully told them [the victims] what they should or must do to combat their husbands' violence" (p. 232). The reaction of husbands to the clergy's contacts initiated by their wives was different too. Responses from Protestants (51 % positive and 39 % negative) and responses from Catholics (neutral in 70 %, positive in 22 %, and 8 % negative) are sharply polarized.

The (above) Milwaukee study was expanded as the Woman's Day (Lake, 1982) of a sample of 1,000 women. Thirty-one percent of respondents were Catholic. Findings contradicted the Milwaukee study on the most helpful clergy. This study reported that the most helpful clergy is in non-Christian religions (41 %). The study also contradicted the Milwaukee study and found that the Catholic priests were the next helpful group (40 %) followed by Protestant clergy (30 %). One third of the participants had received help from the clergy. As a group, the clergy were rated lower on effectiveness than most other formal help sources.

Another study reported in *Violence Update* (1992) and cited in Fisher (2002) is an Arizona State University study. In the early 1980's a research team conducted 30 interviews with church officials to understand the nature of the church response to problems of domestic violence. Following the interviews, a questionnaire went to

1200 church officials in the Phoenix area, and nearly 300 responded. They repeated the survey in 1988 - 89. The study reported that in 1982, 70 % of the ministers indicated they had received no specific training on domestic violence in their formation as spiritual advisors. In the 1988-89 study, participants said they had met an average of 8.5 actual cases of domestic or family violence in the past year. Less than 50 % of the clerics indicated that they had received no training or instruction at all on spousal violence.

Recently, Miles (2000), making a case for the clergy's inadequate response to spousal abuse, writes: "So many clergy lack training" (p. 56). A catalogue analysis of the syllabi of the Catholic seminaries in the United States found only eight out of 70 had specific courses on family issues such as domestic violence, divorce and grief counseling. Owens (2000) reflects: "I think there's been a conspiracy of silence in the church regarding domestic violence…. Many pastors choose to believe that there are no abused women in their congregation" (p. 21). The silence and indifference to a wide spread problem of spousal abuse make the priests and the Church alienated from the realities of life.

Identifying reasons for pastoral silence and neglect, Fortune (1995) concludes that lack of preparation in seminary training on domestic abuse and violence, denial and minimization of the victim's experience, and overburdened and overwhelmed clergy contribute to the problem. By ignoring the issue of spousal abuse and violence, the priests may think that they are taking a neutral stand in response to the problem of spousal abuse because it is private or for lack of details. But Owens (2000) observes: "I think we are afraid of being partial… Nowadays of course there is also the fear of

litigation" (p. 70). Exploring this indifference of clergy, Adams (1994) states that, "neutrality results in ignoring or dismissing the problem" (p. 115). Assessing the clergy silence, Herman (1992) reminds us that, "all the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing" (p. 7). Bystanders by their silence side with the perpetrators by allowing violence to go unchallenged. Freire (1972) observes that "to exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it" (p. 61, emphasis added). The shame and guilt associated with the victimization make it harder for the victims to label abuse as abuse. Hence, it becomes the social and spiritual responsibility of the clergy as shepherds of the community to label the abuse as abuse.

The issues of spousal abuse and violence are natural issues of pastoral care since they are issues of repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth. Leehan (1989) writes: "families are the most violent institutions in our society" (p. 73). The N.C.C.B. (1994) observes: "our families are torn by violence. Our communities are destroyed by violence. Our faith is tested by violence. We have an obligation to respond" (p. 1). Parishes are natural and appropriate places to deal with issues related to family violence. They are frequent gathering places for families. Most are in residential areas, and family schedules are organized around parish schedules. The compelling statistics make it practically impossible to have a congregation without domestic violence. Yet many pastors report that they never hear about family violence from their parish. In the pews of every church -- every Sunday -- sit both perpetrators and victims.

One of the many pastoral response programs the Church provides to its priests and members is given here (Figure 1) as an example of the comprehensive strategy of the Church.

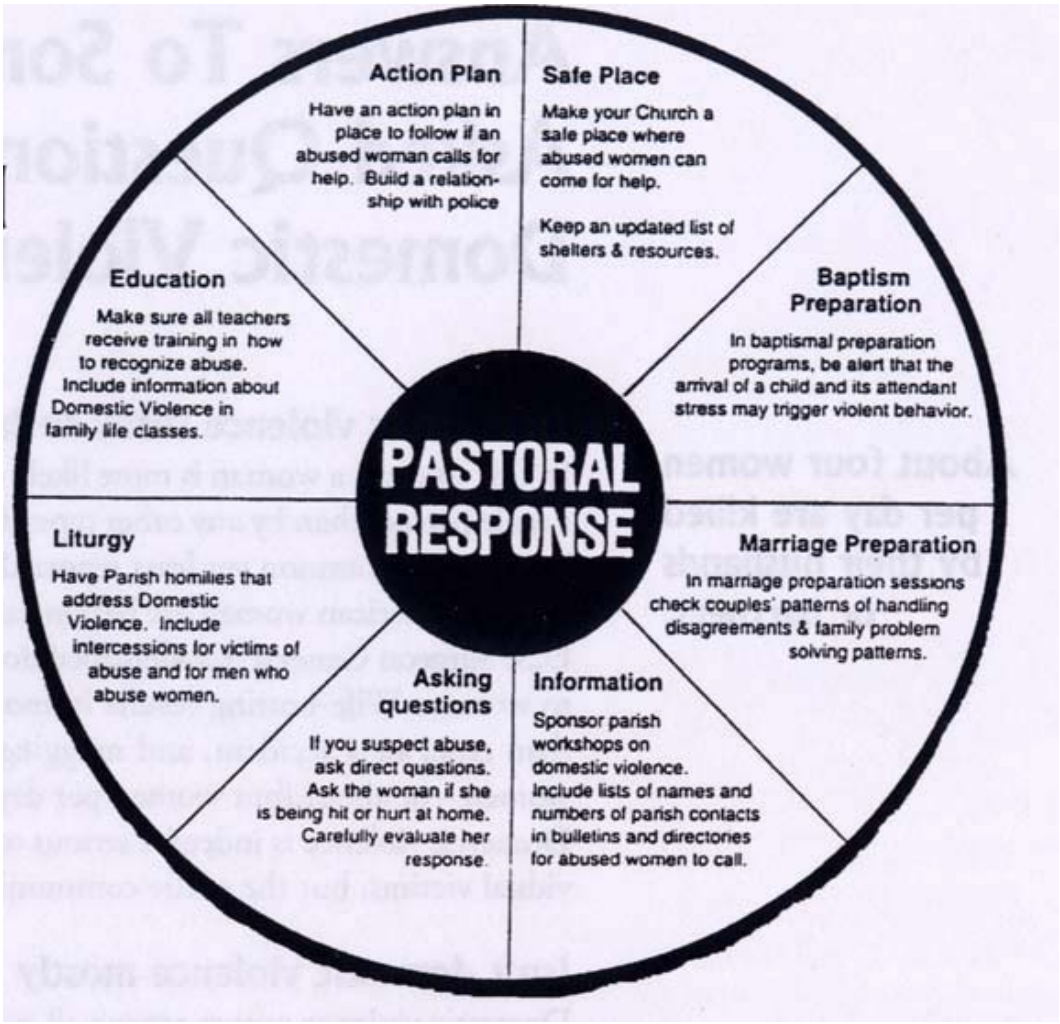

Figure 1. Pastoral Response Circle

"Pastoral Response Circle." The Family Life Apostolate, Archdiocese of Boston, 2121 Commonwealth Ave, Brighton, MA 12135

Priests, chaplains, pastoral counselors, and deacons seek to be available to help others, and often they are helpful. Yet battered women ranked the helpfulness of the assistance they received from clergy at the bottom of the list (Bowker, 1988). Women

who turned to their clergy for marital guidance stayed longer with their abusers, and the abuse did not subside (Pagelow, 1981). Actual responses of clergy to the victims were very limited (Horton, Wilkins & Wright, 1988; Wood & Hugh, 1994). Victims cherish their faith but fail to appreciate clergy's role. Miles (2000) writes:

> While many women affirm the overall value of their religious faith, few say that spiritual leaders have supported their struggle to leave an abusive situation. In fact, several women have told me that their pastors' responses have stifled their healing process. (p. 23)

The gender of the minister may be another barrier to naming and sharing the experience. Adams (1994) suggests: "a woman may not feel safe telling a man. Many woman who suffer violence may fear that clergyman will identify with their partner, not with them, and dismiss the seriousness of his behavior through identification with his good characteristics" (p. 30).

The authority and power of clergy enable the clergy to be in a unique position as counselors. Many families who are dealing with abuse and violence have active affiliations with their religious community. Switzer (1986) explains, "Quite apart from their own being as persons, clergy are perceived by others as being the physical representation to the community of faith and, at least to some extent, to the larger community of the reality of God" (p.16). Still they fail to be sensitive to the abused. Miles (2000), summarizing interviews with survivors, writes:

> Most of the fifty-two survivors I interviewed were angered, disappointed, and hurt by the ways in which clergy-people responded to their reports of abuse. The survivors believe that ordained ministers do not provide appropriate or

> consistent care to victims, misinterpret Scripture to support male dominance and female subjugation, blame victims for their abuse, hesitate to confront perpetrators, deny the prevalence of domestic violence within their own congregations, and pressure victims to stay in dangerous marriages. The survivors also said that clergy-people refuse to educate themselves about domestic violence and don't take advantage of the myriad resources available on the subject. (p. 93-94)

This review of spousal abuse studies, Catholic teachings on marriage and family, and priesthood, ministry and related clergy studies leads to certain conclusions. Even though spousal abuse is a well-researched area of science, no one has thoroughly studied the impact of Catholic priests' involvement and interaction. This study can fill the gap in research by understanding how Catholic priests perceive, understand and respond to spousal abuse and violence. Although there are clear and distinct teachings of the Church on marriage and family, no one has assessed the implementation of the gender equal dignity and worth of the spousal relationship.

The face of the priesthood is changing (Cozzens, 2001) with societal changes. All available Christian clergy studies concur that the clergy are overwhelmed and overburdened. The lack of training, intentional attempts to be neutral to a "private problem," and silence are some of the common traits of overworked and overwhelmed priests.

Theoretical Framework

An appropriate theoretical framework for this study is social constructionism. Gergen (1985) defines social constructionist inquiry as primarily concerned with

explicating the process by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. The theoretical perspective of social constructionism maintains that an individual develops his/ her sense of what is real through conversation with and observation of others (Berger, & Luckman, 1966).

According to Shweder and Miller (1985) social constructionism argues that "the way individuals perceive, describe, and explain each other's behavior is decisively influenced by received conceptualizations of the person in relationship to the moral-social order and the natural order" (p. 56). Cultures, communities, and institutions influence the way we see and understand the world. As identities are socially constructed they are subject to constant change based on the contextualization of meaning. Perceptions, life stories, and the process of memory are all constituents of socially constructed reality.

I intend to explore and understand how Catholic priests interpret and respond to spousal abuse and violence. These interpretations and responses are located within a reality constructed in time and space. The constituents of that construction are from a particular socio-economic-religious-political moment in time for both the priest and the abused. My exploratory investigation attempts to understand priests' particular realities and constructions of spousal abuse and violence. The abused approach their priest seeking healing and meaning. The interaction of priests with the abused is therapeutic and it is likely that both will construct a new meaning of the phenomenon of domestic abuse. Social constructionists propose that realities are constructed and

problems are not "out there" as realities independent of us. Realities emerge to be what they are by virtue of the way we negotiate reality.

Several authors have promoted social constructionism as an important theory for social work practice (Franklin, 1995; Goldstein, 1990; Laird, 1993; Witkin, 1990). Contextual analysis of clients' problems are inherently consistent with the foundations of social work profession. So in this study, social constructionism will provide a frame to understand the priests' perceptions of and responses to spousal abuse and violence.

In summary, Woman's Day study (Lake, 1982; Bowker, 1988) -- the only study with a large and national sample -- one third of the battered women received help from the clergy (p. 231). That figure indicates the importance of the clergy's role in reducing spouse. However, in the same study, as a group, the clergy rated as the lowest help sources in terms of effectiveness (p. 232). In addition, all the available research on clergy effectiveness and response to abused women has been based solely on the reports of the victim (Martin, 1976). The Catholic Church on a documental level teaches that spousal abuse is not only a crime but also a sin (NCCB, 1992). In the order of service and authority priests are the last link between people and hierarchy. There are over four million Catholic priests in the world. They serve as the teachers of the parish community. Priests could be either the weakest or the strongest link in the transformation of the Church teachings into action. Hence, a study on the perceptions and responses of Catholic priests on spousal abuse can be informative, useful, and should help to herald the picture of a tremendous societal problem.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Catholic priests understand and respond to spousal abuse and violence. This chapter presents the methods that were used to explore the ways Catholic priests perceive spousal abuse, and how they respond to the individuals, to the parish community, and to themselves.

Design of the Study

According to Van Maanen (1983), qualitative research is an "umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (p. 9). As a tapestry, "Qualitative methods represent a mixture of the rational, serendipitous and intuitive in which the personal experiences of the organizational researcher are often key events to be understood and analyzed as data" (p. 10). Moreover, qualitative research, in contrast to the pre-planned and standardized paradigm of quantitative research, is a method that can be called "evolutionary, with a problem statement, a design, interview questions, and interpretations developing and changing along the way" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 6). Miles and Huberman (1994) note, "Qualitative designs are not copyable, off-the-shelf patterns, but normally have to be custom built, revised, and choreographed" (p. 431).

Patton (1990) suggests that the research design should match appropriate methods to the questions and topic of the investigation. The emphasis in qualitative research is on process, meaning, and understanding. Qualitative designs are investigative in nature and are used, as Creswell (1994) states, to "explore a topic when the variables and theory are unknown" (p. 146). In this investigation I described and interpreted Catholic priests' perceptions of spousal abuse and their responses to it. An exploratory qualitative design provides the most useful framework for this study.

Several authors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Silvermann, 2001) have addressed the fundamentals of qualitative research. Merriam (1998) describes qualitative investigation as "emergent and flexible, and responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress" (p. 8). She proposes five fundamental characteristics of qualitative research:

1. *Qualitative researchers engage in understanding the meaning people construct.* Understanding meaning from the viewpoint of the participant stands as the cornerstone of qualitative inquiry. Thus, my goal was to figuratively "crawl behind the eyeballs" (Reeves, 1998, p. 88) of the participant – to examine how he perceives, understands and responds to spousal abuse and violence. In my attempt to understand the world from the point of view of Catholic priests I tried to identify with the meaning of their experiences, to walk in their shoes. Since I am a priest myself, I recognize the busy schedules, and single and lonely life styles of priests in a patriarchal, traditional structure. The Church trains seminarians and ordains them as priests -- the custodians of absolutes. The Catholic Church appears to have more

absolutes and dogmas than do other religions. Yet, the world of the Catholic priest is rarely so neat and tidy. "Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities – that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception" (Merriam, 1988a, p. 17). Revelations of abuse and violence are the personal experiences of many priests as they navigate through the struggles of parishioners' daily lives. Meanings are co-constructed in the process of interaction (de Shazer, 1994). I anticipated that the meaning of suffering in abuse and violence would vary for each participant because of the uniqueness of the individuals and their differences in worldview.

2. *The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis* (Wolcott, 1975). In a qualitative investigation the researcher becomes a "human filter" for the data, functioning as the chief research instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The human instrument "can process data immediately, can clarify and summarize as the study evolves, and explore anomalous responses" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 136). This flexibility and sensitivity exists as both a privilege and a responsibility for the qualitative researcher. As a privilege it helps the researcher to "encounter and utilize…responses for increased understanding" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 138). As a responsibility, the researcher has an ethical obligation to remain aware of one's subjectivities. The qualitative researcher interacts in a sensitive and adaptive way to understand the unique life situation that informs the participant's worldview.

I am attuned to the verbal and nonverbal "shifts" in responses that people sometimes make when I disclose that I am a Catholic priest, or that I am a social

worker. I was aware how my presence might color the elicited information. The fact that, as a Catholic priest, I am an "insider" might have helped to reduce my centrality and weight in the role as a human filter. Yet my being a Catholic priest also helped to put the respondents at ease and gained their trust, which largely influenced the richness of the data I collected. I took seriously the qualitative principle that the researcher should demonstrate exquisite sensitivity to participants' personal biographies and stories. As the researcher I was fully aware that I was acting as the human filter and that if not carefully monitored, my biases and assumptions can color the findings. I have been reverential of the expectation that information shared with me would be handled with care and the maximum possible respect and compassion.

3. *Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork*. The participant -"the field of the study"- becomes the sanctuary into which the researcher enters with awe and curiosity. According to Parker (1997),

> In addition to gaining entry to a physical setting, the researcher tries to gain entry into the conceptual world of the participants in an attempt to understand the subjects from their point of view…one wants to learn from the participants and hopes to leave the field with an understanding of what it is like to be them. (p. 70)

My investigation of the perceptions and responses of Catholic priests has been a journey during which I strove to understand the meaning of their experiences, to feel as they felt, and to explain things as they explained them. I embarked upon this journey as both a "pilgrim" and a "miner" (Kvale, 1996, p. 3). The pilgrim is on a journey that leads to an experience to be told upon returning home. He explores new

realms and asks questions that lead the participants to share their own stories of their lived worlds. The researcher as a miner probes the participants' interior worlds for the knowledge and experiences to be uncovered, and to be shown to the world. In order to understand what an abused person might feel when she or he comes to a priest's office, and for the convenience and privacy that the office affords, I conducted the interviews in the participant's office setting.

4. *Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive approach*. Patton (1990) suggests that qualitative research "begins with specific observations and builds toward general patterns" (p. 44). The researcher endeavors to make sense of the circumstances in an unassuming manner, not promulgating preconceived notions on either the participant or the issue under investigation. As a priest for 13 years, I consciously attempted not to impose my ideas and feelings on participants but to be a prism for their worldviews. Moreover, my personal theory of life helped me to realize each participant's unique social world and to respect it. The researcher works as an open-minded pilgrim. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) notes, "You are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (pp. 6-7).

5. *The yield of a qualitative study is richly descriptive*. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) caution that in qualitative research, one must approach the field of study with the assumption that nothing is trivial. They caution, "Nothing is taken for granted, and no statement escapes scrutiny. Description succeeds as a method of data gathering when every detail is considered" (p. 6). Reeves (1998) observes, "Words or

pictures, not numbers, are used to convey process, meaning, and understanding" (p. 90).

In summary, even though many have studied spousal abuse using both qualitative and quantitative methods, there is a dearth of research with regard to clergy response to spousal abuse, especially Catholic priests' perceptions of and responses to spousal abuse. This study was designed as an in-depth examination of how Catholic priests perceive, understand, and respond to spousal abuse and violence. My intent was to "get inside" the perspectives of the priests in order to understand how they perceive spousal abuse and violence. Consequently, the approach I used to identify and interpret the priests' perceptions, understandings, and responses called for an in-depth study rich in description, best achieved using a qualitative research design. Peshkin (1993) assesses that "Many types of good results are the fruits of qualitative research. Its generative potential is immense…" (p. 293).

Sample Selection

In order to procure a rich sample I formed a focus group of six priests to identify a potential sample. I enhanced the potential sample group with snowball sampling. In qualitative research sample selection is purposeful, whereas in quantitative research it is primarily randomized. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to access "*information rich* cases for study in depth" (Patton, 1990, p. 169, emphasis in original). It "…permits *logical* generalization…" (Patton, 1980, p. 105, emphasis in the original) of the findings. Purposeful selection of participants insured access to individuals who offer substantive information regarding the issues of primary importance in this study: 1) how Catholic priests perceive spousal abuse and

violence, 2) how they personally understand spousal abuse, and 3) how they respond to revelations of abuse. Selection criteria for inclusion/exclusion of participants evolved from purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). Current Catholic priesthood is not confined to any particular race, or socioeconomic class. As the Church is universal, so is the priest and priesthood. Hence a varied sample best reflected the diversity and catholicity of priesthood. In this study I used a particular kind of purposeful sampling, maximum variation sampling. According to Patton (1980),

> By attempting to increase the diversity or variation in the sample the evaluator will have more confidence in those patterns that emerge as common among sites, while at the same time being able to describe some of the variation that has emerged…(p. 102).

In maximum variation sampling, data serve two purposes (Patton, 1990): (1) to provide high quality case descriptions useful for documenting uniqueness, and (2) to identify shared patterns of commonalities existing across participants (Morse, 1998).

To select Catholic clergy in this study in such a way as to achieve maximum variation of the sample I used the following criteria in participant selection: participants 1) represented different ethnic groups; 2) represented as many nationalities as possible; 3) were graduates from different seminaries (of training); 4) differed in their theological and theoretical approaches; 5) worked in a parish setting; 6) had considerable exposure with family issues; 7) were located and actively involved in the southeastern metropolitan area of the U.S.; and 8) had been living in the U.S. at least for last 5 years. In addition, participants consented to a follow-up interview if needed.

The rationale for these criteria was obvious. This was a study of Catholic priests' perceptions, understandings and responses to spousal abuse. In order to be ordained in the Church as a priest, the candidate has to be a male and at least 25 years of age. Hence the age and gender were obvious criteria for inclusion. By having priests from different ethnic groups and nationalities as participants, the sample was representative of the population served by the Church. This process enabled me to understand that priests of different cultures and ethnic groups viewed spousal abuse and violence differently and that they responded differently. In a recent convocation of priests, a senior priest who works as a military chaplain commented, "It [the group of priests] certainly looks like the United Nations." It was this diversity that led me to study priests in this specific geographic area. The available pool of priests in this metropolitan was sufficiently multinational to represent the worldwide Catholic Church. I interviewed priests who came from many countries and continents. By selecting priests trained in different seminaries, I included a variety of priests whose backgrounds on theological and theoretical approaches would represent the Catholic Church. I intentionally sought both conservatives and liberals to comprise the sample. The priests were working in a parish setting where people have access to them and where they directly interacted with their parish community. In order to procure Catholic priests' understandings and responses, I included a wide age span of priests, and they ranged between 30 to 76 years of age. By having experienced and involved participants, I procured pithy and rich data that enhanced the study's relevance. Individuals from a wide variety of ethnic groups and nationalities, as well as the priests themselves, come from many parts of the world to populate the southeastern

metropolitan area of United States. Having participants who have been in the U.S. for at least five years increased the likelihood that they are familiar with cultural taboos as well as diocesan systems and structures. Requiring participants to work and reside in this area, I was able to assess their familiarity of local resources. Having participants agree to have follow-up interviews – if needed -- helped to clarify the post-transcription. In addition, selecting priests who lived in the southeastern U.S. enabled my easy geographical access to participants. In short I was able to conduct face-to-face interviews within the state where I reside. I believe that face-to-face interviews are likely to yield the richest data.

There are various types of purposeful sampling and chain or snowball sampling is the one I used in this study. Patton (1990) describes this method as identifying "cases of interest from people who know people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples of study, good interview subjects" (p. 182). Snowball sampling provided the easiest and most practical way to gain participants' trust since someone they know recommended them. Additionally, participants were recommended for their depth of experience and involvement in the families of their parish so they were likely to provide the richest data. Finally, snowball sampling obviously saves time, money, and effort (Patton, 1980).

In December of 2001, I approached the archdiocese and contacted the Office of Family Concerns to discuss my research plan and to elicit input and feedback. Following this first step, in January 2002, I made an appointment with the administrative office of the archdiocese and met with the Vicar General of the archdiocese to discuss the research and its purpose, and to request permission to study

the priests' understanding and responses. Two days later the Vicar General of the archdiocese granted me permission in a telephone conversation, stating, "You are free to approach any priest in the diocese and ask for cooperation. If in any case you don't get enough priests to participate, let me know, we will contact the priests and solicit their cooperation for you."

After procuring permission from the Archdiocese to approach priests, I began my search for study participants. In order to identify participants, in early August 2002, I formed a focus group of six priests who worked in the geographical area of the study. The focus group members were priests who were actively involved in the diocese and know all the priests of the diocese. Because, in the focus group discussions, we extensively talked about the topic, I did not include any of the focus group members in the sample, for fear of my influence on their responses to the interview questions. In September 2002, the focus group identified 15 Catholic priests who met the criteria of this study. In September 2002, I contacted those 15 priests -- who were purposefully selected for the maximum variation sampling -- in short telephone interviews. Later I called the 15 priests and invited them to participate in the study, and explained the purpose, the written consent form, audio taping the conversation, and the methods of the study in detail. These telephone conversations were 30 – 40 minutes long. I intentionally tried not to influence perceptions in anyway or fashion in the telephone conversations or later in the face-to-face interview. At this point, two priests wanted to be excluded. I encouraged the remaining 13 willing participants to have any material that could assist them in the

process of the interview. The interviews were scheduled at their convenience in their personal offices.

In October 2002, I began this incredible journey of interviews. The interviews were candid and friendly conversations; two withdrew their consent during the interview. One talked about 45 minutes and stopped, and said, "I am having a headache." The second participant, who appeared to be very much concerned about the confidentiality of the study even though he began the conversation, withdrew consent after 15 minutes. It appeared to me that both of these priests were uncomfortable with the phrase "confidential unless otherwise required by law." The remaining 11 were interviewed face-to-face for one and a half to two and a half hours. All of the interviews took place in the participants' offices, and were tape-recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. At the completion of the interview, each participant received an honorarium of $10 with a thank you card. Later all participants received a hand written note expressing my gratitude for their participating in the study. One of the criteria for inclusion in the sample was that participants agreed to have a follow-up interview if necessary. After reading the transcripts, I contacted two participants for verification of demographic data.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) write: "If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus *redundancy* is the primary criterion"(p. 202, emphasis in original). When I began the process of this study the original plan was to interview 10 – 15 respondents. The constant comparative method helped me to feel the direction of the study throughout each interview. The sample achieved maximum variation in age,

ethnicity, years of priesthood, seminaries of study, and focus of ministry. I felt I had reached a saturation point with the seventh interview, but in order to have maximum variation and ethnic and national representation I interviewed four more priests.

Data Collection

Merriam (1998) suggests that data are "…nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment" (p. 67). If the researcher fails to notice and treat the bits and pieces of information for the purpose of research, the data never transcend their ordinary characteristics (Dey, 1993). Merriam notes that in qualitative research, "the data collection techniques used, as well as the specific information considered to be data in a study, are determined by the researcher's theoretical orientation, by the problem and purpose of the study, and by the sample selected" (p. 70).

Qualitative studies primarily use three sources of data: interviews, observations, and documents. Interviews which are the most common source of data according to Merriam (1998), served as the primary source of data in this study. Interviews are best described as a purposeful conversation (Dexter, 1970). Kvale (1996) believes that the "purpose [of the interview] is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 5-6). Patton (1990) adds:

> We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe…. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot

> observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 196)

Dexter (1970) provides another rationale for collecting data through interviews: They often generate "*better* data or *more* data or data *at less cost* than other tactics!" (p.11, emphasis in original).

I encouraged participants to bring any documents or materials they use in their intervention with the abused to the interview: Only one participant – Matthias – brought a nonviolence pledge card, which he uses in his nonviolence group. I also used three documents in this study. As a secondary source of data, they served to triangulate (Mathison, 1988) the findings. Merriam (1998) notes that any type of document can be of help to expose meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem. Documents are written or printed papers furnishing information or evidence; they can be factual or informative in nature. They also include correspondence between individuals as well as the official teachings of an institution. Holsti (1969) defines documents, "in the broad sense of any communication," (p. 1) and includes any written materials. Guba and Lincoln (1981) note that, "the first and most important injunction to anyone looking for official records is to presume that if an event happened, some record of it exists" (p. 253). In this study the documentary data reflected the official position of the Church on spousal abuse and violence and include three sources: 1) *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women* (1992) by the National

Conference of Catholic Bishops; 2) *Speaking the Unspeakable: A Pastoral Letter on Domestic Violence* (2001) by Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces, New Mexico; and 3) *Breaking the Silence: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence* (2000) by the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, Ohio.

Observation, a third source of data in qualitative studies, was not used for a number of reasons. For one, I was able to collect in-depth information more efficiently through interviews than through observations. Secondly, interviews better reveal priests' understanding and responses. In the pilot study that was conducted, my attempt to observe a priest counseling a spousal abuse victim was not successful because both the priest and victim experienced discomfort in discussing their life stories in my presence. Thirdly, many priests were not receptive to the idea of being observed.

Given that interviews constituted the primary source of data, I have examined various ways to elicit information that is especially rich. I seriously considered videotaping the interviews, but in the pilot study the priests and victims who were being counseled experienced too much discomfort, so I decided against it. When I compared the audio-video interviews with the exclusively audio interviews, I found the content of the latter to be much thicker and richer, with the exchange more relaxed and authentic.

Selecting the best format for a face-to-face interview is also a concern. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggest three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured or conversational. Coyne and Gottileb (1996) prefer the semi-structured format for investigating the "personal significance of what has

transpired in the lives of respondents" (p. 985). Because the semi-structured format provides the interviewer with freedom to explore what is revealed by the participant, and at any point during the interview, it is most commonly used in qualitative research. In semi-structured interviews one uses questions that are not precisely worded, nor asked in a predetermined order.

I used a semi-structured interview guide so that I would have the flexibility to respectfully explore a priest's understanding of and response to the issue of spousal abuse. This format also helped me to guide the participants through the interview in a friendly atmosphere of discussion and conversation. The interview guide was structured around the following areas:

1. Socio-demographic information;
2. Participant's perceptions of spousal abuse;
3. Participant's understanding of spousal abuse;
4. Participant's responses to spousal abuse.

These areas of interest evolved from my own pilot study, observations of fellow priests, and my experiences as a social worker and priest. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.

As a result of the pilot study, I chose to audiotape the participants in a face-to-face interview because this method was more conducive to establishing rapport. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, I used as pseudonyms the names of the apostles of Jesus Christ. The names are used in the order that they appear in the scripture. I interviewed 13 priests and two priests did not complete the

interview. I destroyed the recorded audiotapes at the end of the study as I had promised to the participants.

I contacted the participants and collected interview during the months of September and October 2002. I transcribed the interviews verbatim immediately after each interview was conducted. I transcribed all of the interviews in order to become immersed in the data. Personal transcription of the interviews also allowed me to be thoroughly familiar with the content and facilitated constant comparative analysis of the data. It was a sweet and sour experience. It was sweet to get encircled by data; at the same time it was sour in that it was tedious and suffocating. Additionally, this process informed changes needed in the format of subsequent interviews. The collection and analysis of the data were an ongoing and interactive process; an evolving model of collection and analysis directed and informed subsequent data collection. This process helped me to avoid collecting excess data. I continually watched for "indices of saturation, such as repetition in the information obtained and confirmation of previously collected data" (Morse, 1998, p. 76). The data saturated with the 7th participant; still in order to have sufficient data and ample representation I continued the interviews through the 11th participant. After re-reading transcripts, I contacted two participants by telephone to verify discrepancies on their ordination dates and seminary years. Once saturation was accomplished, data collection ceased and the more in-depth process of analysis began.

Data Analysis

According to Kvale (1996), "The analysis of an interview is interspersed between the initial story told by the interviewee to the researcher and the final story

told by the researcher to an audience" (p. 184). The goal of data analysis according to Taylor and Bogdan (1984) "is to come up with reasonable conclusions and generalizations based on a preponderance of data" (p. 139). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe the process of data analysis as:

> Systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others. Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others (p. 157).

Reeves (1998) wrote: "In qualitative research the process of data collection and analysis is dynamic and recursive" (p. 104). Merriam (1998) emphasizes that "[D]ata analysis is one of the few facets, perhaps the only facet, of doing qualitative research in which there is a right way and a wrong way….[T]he right way…is to do it *simultaneously* with data collection" (p. 162, italics in original). She (1988b) writes:

> Analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection which in turn leads to refinement of reformulation of one's questions, and so on. (p. 88)

I employed this simultaneous collection and analysis procedure of data analysis. Specifically, I used the constant comparative method, which involves inspecting and comparing all data fragments that arise in a single interview within the interview and

between the interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Explaining the constant comparative method, as it is used in grounded theory research, Glaser and Strauss (1967) remark:

> We shall describe in four stages the constant comparative method: 1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, 2) integrating categories and their properties, 3) delimiting the theory, and 4) writing the theory. Although this method of generating theory is a continuously growing process – each stage after a time is transformed into the next – earlier stages do remain in operation simultaneously throughout the analysis and each provides continuous development to its successive stage until the analysis is terminated (p. 105).

Today, the constant comparative method of data analysis is widely used in qualitative research and is not limited to studies with the express purpose of building theory. Utilizing the constant comparative method of comparing specific perspectives within the same interview and between the interviews, I was able to provide an in-depth understanding of priests' perceptions of and responses to spousal abuse. I compared a particular incident from one interview with another incident in the same or in another set of data. This method of analysis facilitated the emergence of categories and properties that reflected the purpose of the investigation. Qualitative research involves different levels of analysis and interpretation. Merriam (1988a) writes: "At the most basic level, data are organized chronologically or topically and presented in a narrative which is highly descriptive" (p. 140). The next level of analysis, level two, involves the description of a phenomenon using concepts. This process is a

systematic classification of data into some sort of schema consisting of categories, themes, or typological constructs. Hence in this process the categories describe and interpret the data. The third level involves making inferences and developing theory (p. 140). This three-step data analysis process facilitated the development of a conceptual framework that highlighted participants' experiences and perceptions. I anticipated that data analysis in this study would center on level two.

I learned from the pilot study experience that data analysis (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Holsti, 1969; Hycner, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998) could be enhanced by the following a nine-step procedure which I employed:

1) Leave three-inch margins in the line-numbered transcripts;
2) Review the research proposal and carefully read and reread the transcripts;
3) Pencil in the memos and emerging common threads in the margins;
4) Arrange the common themes that are mutually building;
5) Organize the emerging patterns, regularities, and themes;
6) Compare commonalities of units within the evolving categories;
7) Respectfully look for convergent and divergent categories;
8) Define categories and properties; and
9) Revisit those categories that address the questions of the investigation.

As I was carefully reading and re-reading each piece of data, and going back and forth within the same interview and between the interviews, emerging patterns, regularities, and themes were organized. In this process the line numbers of the transcripts were the greatest blessing. In each step of this process I looked for

commonalities and at the same time I was open-minded to the possibility that new insights may emerge. Merriam (1998) suggests multiple ways to enhance the data analysis process, including the use of index cards, file folders, and computer software programs. I made a data logbook and charts of each category, which gave me a visual effect. I used the "cut" and "paste" functions of my word processor, which was a strategy I used in my pilot study, and it was both helpful and organized.

After multiple readings through transcripts, I created a computer file for each of the categories I had noted. Then I would "cut" and "paste" the significant data to the respective file. I read the contents of each file to see the commonalities. I found incongruent pieces of data a few times, which I removed to appropriate files or deleted. This worked better as I continued with the analysis of the transcripts, and more and more data were added to each file. If none of the existing files received a data piece I created another file for it; data analysis became an evolving process. This process was good and interesting but at one point I had so many files, it slowed down the computer. I had to borrow a laptop so that I could use two computers simultaneously. This process provided a more useful visual effect and a safer back up.

Throughout the process of analysis I kept a detailed research journal, which logged my thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and judgments. In short, I recorded whatever I thought would help in understanding the Catholic priests. This record helped me to further identify my own subjectivities and assumptions. I learned a lot about myself reading these journals, especially of the two interviews that were incomplete.

In summary, as the analysis began data slowly transformed a classification scheme into categories and properties, which reflected the purpose of the study. They were mutually exhaustive and exclusive, conceptually clear, and meaningful. This whole process of data collection and analysis was an experience like witnessing a sunrise on a winter morning.

Validity and Reliability

Merriam and Simpson (1995) state: "We want to feel confident incorporating research findings into our practice, for what we do affects the lives of real people" (p. 51). In the practice sciences, research becomes meaningful only when it enhances practice and provides greater understanding. For research to be meaningful and useful, it must be trustworthy. Reliability and validity checks stand as the most effective methods of ensuring trustworthiness. One trusts research "to the extent that there has been some accounting for validity and reliability, and the nature of qualitative research means that this accounting takes different forms than in more positivist, quantitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 198). In the sections that follow, I address two types of validity, internal and external, as well as reliability.

Validity

Kvale (1996) states: "Validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship during investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings"(p. 241). The quality and validity of emerging knowledge finds credibility not only in the methods used but also in the person of the researcher (Salner, 1989), including his/her moral and ethical integrity (Smith, 1990). Thus, validation in qualitative research is not based upon a final verification, or

quality control of the end product. Rather, verification is built into the research process with continual checks on the credibility, plausibility, and trustworthiness of the findings and the "finder." Denzin and Lincoln, (1998) state: "Validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation, and whether or not a given explanation fits a given description" (p. 50).

Internal validity.

Internal validity is the "truth value" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the study. In qualitative research, reality is considered to be multiple and is socially constructed through individual and collective definitions of the phenomenon under study. Merriam (1995) suggests that there are many interpretations of reality and in a sense the researcher offers his or her interpretation of someone else's interpretation of reality

(p.101). So the researcher becomes the instrument. Miles and Huberman (1994) offer strategies that may enhance internal validity. These strategies include: checking for representativeness, checking for researcher bias, triangulating, weighing the evidence, checking the meaning of the outliers, using extreme cases, following up on the "surprises," checking for negative evidence, replicating a finding, checking out rival explanations, and getting feedback from informants. Additionally, Merriam (1998) emphasizes the strength of peer evaluation in the validation of qualitative research. Peer evaluation is a method where a research colleague or professor checks the data and comments on the evolving findings. I checked and monitored researcher biases, which I discuss in a later section of this chapter, triangulated data to increase and

enhance internal validity, solicited feedback from the informants, and utilized peer evaluation.

In naming and claiming my own biases, subjectivity, and naïveté in this investigation, as well as stating my assumptions, the theoretical framework of this study, and my worldview, I enhanced the internal validity of the study. I employed triangulation to enhance the internal validity of the study. I used two types of triangulation: methods and data source (Mathison, 1988). That is, I used both interviews and documents and multiple sources of both (11 participants and 3 documents). Additionally, I solicited feedback from two informants regarding tentative findings. This is called a "member check" and helps to establish the plausibility of the results. I sought the input of two participants in the findings and implementation chapters. Finally, I used peer evaluation by seeking feedback from my major professor, methodologist, and a priest who is not a participant in the study. They examined the findings during the various stages of analysis.

External validity.

In qualitative research the term "external validity" does not refer to generalizability in the statistical sense. It is concerned instead with the transferability of the findings. Merriam (1998) suggests multiple ways of conceptualizing external validity: working hypothesis, concrete universals, naturalistic generalization, and reader or user generalization. Merriam and Simpson (1995) write: "The most common conception is *reader or user generalizability*" (p. 103, emphasis in original). The individual (reader or user) decides the extent to which findings from a study can be applied to one's own circumstances. This way of thinking about external validity is

more empowering and less patronizing. It is also consistent with the notion of self-determination, a core value for social work practice (NASW, 1999).

Merriam and Simpson (1995) suggest four strategies "to strengthen this aspect [external validity] of rigor" (p. 103): thick description, multi-site designs, modal comparison, and random sampling within the phenomenon of study. I used thick description and multi-site design. Thick description involves providing sufficient descriptive information so that the reader will be able to decide how closely his/her circumstances match the research circumstances and thus the extent to which the findings are transferable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the researcher "must specify everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings" (p. 125). Thick description establishes "the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). I made every effort to provide a detailed and comprehensive description of the findings. Another external validity enhancer is multi-site designs. Merriam and Simpson (1995) define multi-site designs as the use of "several sites, cases, situations especially those representing some variation…[this] will allow the results to be applied to a greater range of other situations" (p. 103). I used multiple cases (11) and maximum variation in the sample to promote applicability of the findings to a range of situations.

Reliability

The core of reliability (in qualitative research) pertains to the consistency (Holloway & Jefferson, 2001) and dependability of the research findings. According to Hammersley (1992) reliability "refers to the degree of consistency with which

instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions." (p. 67). However, the primary purpose of the investigation in a qualitative study is not to produce stable or replicable findings because reality is understood to be multiple, contextually and socially constructed, and ever changing. Merriam (1998) emphasizes that the issue of reliability in qualitative research is not whether another study will yield the same results, but "*whether the results are consistent with the data collected*" (p. 206, emphasis in the original). Thus, in qualitative research reliability is understood in terms of the dependability of the findings, which are derived from the data (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985).

The reliability of the interview schedule or protocol is a central debate in qualitative research. The primary data collection method that I employed in this study is the face-to-face interview using a semi-structured interview schedule. In order to enhance the dependability of interview data, Silverman (2001) suggests that interview data satisfy the criterion of using low-inference descriptors. Low-inference descriptors include tape recording all face-to-face interviews, carefully transcribing these tapes, and presenting long extracts of data in the report – including the questions that were used. I used all three low-inference descriptors.

Reeves (1998) recommends several ways to ensure the dependability of the findings: "a statement of the investigator's position, triangulation, and an audit trail" (p. 109-110). In order to enhance the reliability of the study I employed these three strategies as well.

I will provide a statement of my own position (theoretical stance and worldview) to explicate the role that I, as the researcher, play as the human instrument (Powdermaker, 1966). Eisner (1981) explains that, "Although the investigator might use some formal instruments to collect data, the major source of data emanates from how the investigator experiences what it is he or she attends to" (p. 8). Therefore, stating my theoretical position provides the reader with an understanding of how data have been mediated through me.

My theoretical stance and worldview incorporate my identity as a theist. I believe in the worth and dignity of human life. Human life is not accidental, and life is a journey toward a goal beyond this world. Every individual has the right to be autonomous and self directed. Moreover, multiple perspectives inform my theoretical stance, particularly those of social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. They most closely communicate my worldview. My beliefs with regard to this study are that marriage is a covenant not a contract, and that the sacramental relationship exists only as long as it is mutually complementing and empowering. Thus, abuse and violence in any relationship is a sin and a crime against the institutions of marriage and family. Priests, as spiritual leaders of the family, are obliged to provide nonjudgmental listening and guidance.

The second way I ensured dependability is through triangulation. The data are triangulated with multiple methods (both interviews and documents) and multiple sources (11 priests and 3 documents). The documents that I used reflect the official teaching of the Church.

And finally, an audit trail was also used to strengthen the reliability of the findings. An audit trail consists of "deliberately leaving sufficient evidence so that someone external to the inquiry could review the processes and results of the inquiry and ascertain whether the processes were appropriate and the results were reasonable and credible" (Owens, 1982, p. 13). I kept a detailed audit trail in which I recorded the decision-making processes, gut feelings, and logical perceptions that shaped the study. One of the major components of the audit trail is the research journal. Although I have been keeping a spiritual journal for over 20 years, I have also been keeping a research journal since the beginning of this research study. My journal has evolved to include theoretical, methodological, and personal memos in addition to entries about my subjective and objective experiences. I also included field notes and detailed memos of the research experience in the audit trail.

Limitations of the Study

I am a Catholic priest who works in same geographical area as that under investigation in this study. This fact is both a strength and a limitation. It is a strength in that I had an entree to a population that is not easily accessed. Additionally, it is a strength in that as an "insider" the participants were more comfortable with me during the interviews. They agreed that my being a priest made the interview conversation candid and friendly. However, my position as a priest is a limitation as well, especially with regard to my subjectivity. I have been mindful of my subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988) and carefully checked for and monitored it throughout the research process. Another limitation may be the participants' desire for social conformity. The study was based on a one-time interview; thus participants may have been more

inclined to "tell me what they wanted me to hear" than what they would if they had participated in multiple interviews. I have provided rich, thick and pithy descriptions and wherever possible to let the participants speak so that the reader can be the judge of the transferability of the findings. Another limitation may be the current media attention on Catholic priests, precipitated by the recent, highly publicized sex scandals. This attention may have inhibited priests' willingness to talk candidly and openly. A final limitation may be the geographical area that is the focus of this study (one of the major southeastern metropolitan city of U.S.). The international nature of the city and its cultural view may have an influenced the participants' responses.

Researcher Biases and Assumptions

I actively sought an awareness of my subjectivity and monitored it so that the rigor of this investigation would not be compromised. Subjectivity is "the quality of an investigator that affects the results of observational investigation" (Webster's New International Dictionary, 1986, p. 806). Since the researcher was the lens that filters the data, subjectivity was naturally present in the research process. It was also present in the non-research aspects of daily life. Cheater (1987) writes: "We cannot rid ourselves of this subjectivity, nor should we wish to; but we ought, perhaps, to pay it very much more attention…" (p. 172). Peshkin (1988) suggests that because our subjectivities enable us to make unique contributions with regard to the phenomenon under study, we should not strive to "shed" them. Rather we should be aware of them – of how they both press us toward and away from particular individuals and situations. Consequently, subjectivity can be a researcher's blind spot (Rubin, 1985) and must be constantly monitored.

Merriam (1998) notes that the interviewer must "assume neutrality with regard to the respondent's knowledge; that is, regardless of how antithetical to the interviewer's beliefs or values the respondent's position might be, it is crucial…to avoid arguing, debating, or otherwise letting personal views be known" (p. 84). As both a social worker and Catholic priest I have worked extensively with families. My experience with families is that women take their faith and allegiance to the Church more seriously than do men. Women tend to share their relationship issues and seek help from priests or other sources more so than men do. In my experience, it appears that abused women's coping mechanisms include prayer and church attendance. What they hear from the pulpit is likely to influence their decision-making and may affect their views of the clergy and the Catholic Church. They may interpret the sermons as God's message for their specific problems. Because messages from the pulpit tend to highlight tolerance, sacrifice, and covenant commitment in family and church life, they may inadvertently contribute to the problem of domestic abuse against women.

As a member of the clergy, I am a likely candidate to manifest Peshkin's (1988) "Defensive I." That is, I may unconsciously defend the Catholic Church and its clergy. While I have strove to avoid doing so, it is important to remember that the Catholic Church's patriarchal system may lead individuals prematurely to conclude that priests' support and perpetuate male privilege. The "Justifying I" for me appreciated the complexities of this situation. A plausible explanation may be that seminaries are not preparing priests to be sensitive to issues of domestic abuse and

violence; rather priests unconsciously give the impression that they condone violence against women.

I have worked in the Archdiocese for more than six years. It was my assumption that I had sufficiently strong rapport with the participants – rapport that facilitated candidness and comfort in sharing their experiences with me. As a foreign priest who is not trained in North America, I hold several preconceived ideas, which may have influenced the investigation. For one, it is my belief that the Catholic Church is not doing all that it could in regard to the issue of spousal abuse and violence. I believe that spousal abuse takes place in both directions: male to female, and female to male. I also believe that the Catholic Church as a patriarchal system fails to address women's issues and concerns in an adequate manner. I believe as an inherently pro-life institution, that the Catholic Church places so much attention on pro-life issues that it overlooks the quality of the spousal relationship, the place where life originates. Moreover, I believe that priests "play it safe" instead of adopting a preventive, proactive stance in regard to domestic violence and abuse. It is my personal experience that many priests fail to preach against domestic abuse and violence. I am also concerned that some celibate men may not be sensitive to the existence of spousal abuse in families.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1981), the best approach to biases is to be aware of "how they slant and shape what we hear, how they interface with our reproduction of the speaker's reality, and how they transfigure truth into falsity" (p. 148). Aware of this vulnerability and conscious of being the human instrument and

filter, I made every effort in this research journey to be sensitive to my own actions and reactions, both in word and deed.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore Catholic priests' perceptions and responses to spousal abuse. The following questions guided this study:

1. What are Catholic priests' perceptions regarding spousal abuse?
2. How do Catholic priests personally understand spousal abuse?
3. How do Catholic priests address the issue of spousal abuse within families and the parish community at large?

The study followed a qualitative design using a semi-structured interview protocol and the respondents were 11 Catholic priests. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used. Throughout this chapter the words priests and participants are used interchangeably. Also the words victims and abused are used interchangeably.

This chapter has two sections. The first presents individual profiles of the participants in the order of the interviews. As I promised the participants in the consent forms, I assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. The pseudonyms are the names of Jesus Christ's apostles. The second section begins with an overview of the findings, followed by data that supports the categories and properties. I derived the findings inductively from both interview data and documents, using the constant comparative method of data analysis.

The Participants

Eleven Catholic priests who live and minister in a large metropolitan area in the Southeastern U.S. participated in this study. All the participants are male. The sample reflects diversity in age, ethnicity, race, education, seminary of formation, and number of years of ordination. The participants' ages span a 46-year period, raging from 30 to 76. The ethnic and racial backgrounds of participants are as follows: three are North American Caucasian, two are Irish Caucasian, and one each is African American, Haitian African, Slovakian Caucasian, Italian Caucasian, Indian Asian and Vietnam American. Three of them work in Hispanic populations. Educational achievement ranges from undergraduate degrees to Master's degrees. All the participants work in parish settings. One of them is a part-time graduate student and another one works part-time at the tribunal – which is the Church court system. Six of the participants are pastors, and five are associate pastors. One has been a priest for 46 years and one has been a priest for only 3 months. The following table (Table 1) provides a summary of information regarding the individual participants.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Information

Participant	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Seminary of Formation	Focus of Ministry	Years of Service
Peter	44	North American Caucasian	Mt. St. Mary's, MD	Whole parish	6
Andrew	65	Irish Caucasian	St. Patrick's, Ireland	Whole parish and Immigrants	36
James	37	North American Caucasian	St. Mainrad, IL	Whole parish	7
John	59	Irish Caucasian	St. Patrick's, Ireland	Whole parish	34
Philip	39	Haitian African	Chicago Theological Union and St. Vincent's, PA	Whole parish, specially Hispanics and Haitians	6
Bartholomew	76	North American Caucasian	Josephinum, Ohio	Whole parish and Pilgrims	46
Thomas	30	Slovakian Caucasian	Notre Dame, LA	Whole parish	2
Matthew	50	Indian Asian	St. Peter's, Bangalore, India	Whole parish specially Hispanics and Asian Indians	25
Thaddeus	48	African American	St. Mainrad, IL. and Josephinum, OH	Whole parish specially African Americans	22
Simon	31	Vietnamese American	N. American College, Rome	Whole parish and the tribunal	.3
Matthias	55	Italian American	Chicago Theological Union	Whole parish and Latinos	.11

The individual descriptions of the participants of the study follow. Whenever possible, participants' own words are used to make them heard.

Peter

Fr. Peter (44, North American Caucasian) has been a priest for 6 years. He is of Irish descent, born and raised in North Carolina, worked as a middle school teacher in Georgia, studied at Mount St. Mary's seminary in Maryland, and was ordained for a metropolitan diocese. Currently he works as pastor in a small urban parish where he is the only priest. He describes his parish as one which "70 % are colored families consisting of many ethnicities and nationalities…from all over the world and primarily Africa. The remaining 30% are Caucasian families, many of whom have been residents of the area for generations." The Church is in a lower middle class neighborhood. He is involved in programs for young adults and school children. He is very articulate and personable. He considers himself as "orthodox to the teachings of the Church and faithful to the ministry and people." He wears his black clergy suit always and claims that he "is proud of his identity as a priest and enjoys it."

His perception of spousal abuse stems from his "experiences as a teacher…breakdown of family systems…morally fragmented society…and his own family upbringing." The wholeness of life, brokenness, and suffering in life have all been great influences on how he perceives life and relationships. Lately a book entitled *The Theology of Body* has shaped his view on the sacredness of the individual person. He estimates an average of 13 spousal abuse cases in a year. As a priest he understands human suffering in his encounters of people in their day-to-day interactions. Reading and writing are his hobbies.

Andrew

Fr. Andrew (65, Irish Caucasian) has been a priest for 36 years. He was born in Ireland, and after high school he joined the seminary and was ordained in Ireland for a metropolitan diocese in southeastern metropolitan city of United States. Since his ordination he has been working in the same diocese. Currently he has two assistant priests and is the pastor of a very diverse and vibrant large parish in an upper middle class community. He is actively involved in programs like *Welcoming the Strangers* and in assimilating immigrants. *Welcoming the Strangers* is a document of the National Bishops' Council encouraging pastors and parish communities to welcome immigrants. He also is involved in the marriage preparation programs of the diocese.

He is very defensive about the Church. During the interview he was slightly angry and did not hide his displeasure over some of the statements to which he was asked to respond. Over all he was very engaging and open in his remarks. He introduced himself as "a balanced and moderate priest in theology and reactions." He indicated that he used to have an "Irish temper," but age has mellowed him. He dresses in his "Roman collar always as suggested by the Church." He believes his perception of spousal abuse is formed by his "life experiences especially of his 36 years as a priest" and his "respect for all forms of life and teachings of Church." His hobby is carpentry, and its impact was visible in his conversation, especially in his desire for precision with words.

He understands the delicate nature of spousal abuse and remarked "because of its private nature even though you may see the symptoms you cannot invite yourself

into it." He showed sensitivity to relationship issues and described himself as a "delegator." He estimates dealing with an average of 6 cases of spousal abuse in a year.

James

Fr. James (37, North American Caucasian) has been a priest for 7 years. He was born and studied in the same metropolitan city of the diocese to which he belongs. Upon his graduation he worked a few years as manager in an import furniture store. Later he joined the diocese and studied in St. Mainrad Seminary, Illinois, and was ordained for the diocese where is working. Currently he is serving in a small suburban parish where 99.5% of members are white middle class families. He is the Vicar for Forane, the dean of pastors of a geographical region, and also serves the diocese on various committees.

He is very articulate and pleasantly engages in conversation. He describes himself as a "moderate priest in his theological and liturgical views." He did not appear in his clerical dress and he says that he uses it only for official occasions. He says he "is happy to participate in the study. We need mores studies of this sort that we need to get some feedback." He believes that "the primary responsibility of any person is to be safe and to live without fear." He understands the complexities of spousal abuse issues and does not want to enter into it due to the lack of training. His responses were compassionate and caring. He said his perception of spousal abuse is influenced by "an abusive relationship in my own extended family and stories we hear and read in news." He states that "Church teachings, values, and dignity of

human life" are equally influential in the formation of his perception. He believes that abuse "can happen anywhere to any one due to its behind-the-closed-door nature."

He estimates that he is approached by an average of three abused spouses in a year. His hobbies are watching movies and playing the violin.

John

Fr. John (59, Irish Caucasian) has been a priest for 34 years and he is a Monsignor. Monsignor is an honorary title awarded to a priest by the Pope recognizing outstanding contributions to the Church. He was born in Ireland and after his high school studies, he joined a seminary and was ordained for this diocese in the United States, in which he has worked since his ordination. Currently he is working as the pastor of a large and very diverse parish with three assistant priests and two deacons. He serves the diocese in various capacities especially as consultant to the Bishop.

He is a very thought provoking but unassuming person. In the interview he was very engaging and personable. He describes himself as a "moderate and obedient priest of the Church." Commenting on his own appearance, he says, "I always present myself in clerical dress, " adding, "it is the identity." He is a jovial person who can make anyone comfortable in his well-arranged office. "Spousal abuse," he says, "is one of the areas where I need to teach myself a little more." He attributes his lack of knowledge to his busy schedule.

His perception of spousal abuse is shaped by many events like "seminary training, life experience and ministering to troubled families in various parishes." He expresses his appreciation for individuals who suffer in relationships. He also

expresses his concern that "he may be little distanced from issues like spouse abuse and relationship problems since he has three assistants." He refers to the possibility that parishioners may approach his assistants more than him on non-administrative issues. In spite of his busy schedule he calculates that he sees an average of ten cases of spousal abuse in a year.

Philip

Fr. Philip (39, Haitian African) has been a priest for 6 years. He was born and raised in Haiti, where he joined a seminary. In his undergraduate studies he majored in social work and philosophy. He joined this diocese and came to the United States and continued his seminary studies at Chicago Theological Union Seminary and further moved to St. Vincent Seminary Latrobe, Pennsylvania, where he graduated and was ordained for this diocese. Currently he works in a parish as a part-time parochial vicar and is completing his graduate studies majoring in political science at one of the metropolitan universities. He describes himself as "not orthodox and not too legalistic [a] priest." He works with the Haitian community, the Hispanic community, and the mainstream community. He used to have a radio talk show on faith and social issues once a week for the Haitian people around the city. He canceled the program due to lack of time and funds.

He says, he "is very involved and vocal about women's plight and social justice issues." During our interview he suggested I switch off the tape recorder while he shared how he feels on issues of equality, male superiority and church politics. He is very personable and interested in this study. He appears in non-clerical casual dress and indicates that he uses clerical dress only for official programs of the Church. He

believes his passion for social justice, family values and the Biblical equality of gender are the most influential driving forces of his priesthood with regard to relationship issues. He compares the three ethnic groups with whom he works (Hispanics, Anglo Caucasians and Haitians) and suggests that each of them is entirely different. He assesses, "an average of 20 spousal abuse cases in any year, and would be more if I had time." He continues, "People are looking for someone to discuss their relationship problems [with], and if you make yourself available they overwhelm you."

Bartholomew

Fr. Bartholomew (76, North American Caucasian) has been a priest for 46 years. He was born in Wisconsin, where his parents were immigrants from Poland. He is the youngest of 7 children and the only child of the family born in this country. After his high school studies he worked on the family farm and in the timber industry for a while. Later he joined a seminary and was ordained from Josephinum Seminary, Ohio, for a diocese in Mississippi. He worked all his active ministry years in the Mississippi diocese. Since his retirement he has been very involved with charismatic retreats. Currently he works in this diocese. For the last 5 years he has been an administrator of a small and developing suburban parish adjacent to an apparition site. Apparition site is a place where people believe that Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to someone. Believers consider such space as holy and visit and pray at the place. He is very involved in his parish and in giving missions, charismatic retreats and inner-healing retreats. He is well traveled in the United States and known for his inner-healing missions.

He states, “I may be the most experienced priest in the diocese on this research topic.” He appears in his clerical dress and remarks that, “priests should always use it because it is our identity.” He describes himself as “orthodox in the teaching of the Church, moderate in theological issues and liberal in practice-oriented issues.” He indicates that he is the only one in the diocese with bi-ritual faculties. (A bi-ritual faculty is a permission to celebrate the liturgy and sacraments in two rites of the Church.) His perceptions of spousal abuse were shaped by “growing up with his six sisters as the only boy in the family, on a rural farm in the North Wisconsin…working in university student centers as chaplains…being [a] pastor in parish churches, and preaching missions and conducting many inner-healing retreats.”

He is very articulate and relishes talking. He is very authoritative and compassionate at the same time. The interview took two hours and fifteen minutes. I had to stop him four times and bring him back to the interview questions. He believes “many divorces could be avoided if there is a system or person to intervene.” He estimates that he sees eight spousal abuse cases in a year, and those are outside the missions and inner-healing retreats he conducts, where he asserts “the numbers are way, way up.”

Thomas

Fr. Thomas (30, Slovakian Caucasian) has been a priest for 2 years. He was born and raised in Slovakia in a city the borders Poland and Germany. After high school, he joined a seminary but he took a break and worked as a nurse assistant in a hospital for a while. Later he rejoined a seminary and continued his studies. He joined this diocese and came to the United States and later went to Notre Dame Seminary in

New Orleans, where he graduated and was ordained. Currently he works in an urban parish as an assistant parish priest. All his family and relatives are in Slovakia.

Fr. Thomas is very philosophical and analytical in his answers. The conversation was much more comprehensive than others, and he asserts that "he has a different scale of measurement which is influenced by his upbringing and culture." He is very articulate and engaging. He appears in clerical dress and says, "people like it, so I use it, and it is convenient if there is an emergency call from the hospital." He describes himself as a "moderate if not liberal priest," but further expresses his displeasure of labels. He emphasizes that he is a spiritual person and his role is spiritual. Though he is the youngest interviewee in age he shares a comprehensive approach both to spousal abuse and intervention.

His perception of spousal abuse is shaped by many factors such as "his family and cultural upbringing…politics and life experience…and the teachings of the Church on the dignity of the person." Looking back over his two years of priesthood he estimates he sees an average of 8 cases of spousal abuse in a year. His perception of abuse ranges from abusive conversations between individuals to abuse between countries. He is sympathetic to all who suffer and regrets the Church's lack of recognition and expressed concern for the victims of abuse and violence.

Matthew

Fr. Matthew (50, Indian Asian) has been a priest for twenty-five years. He was born and raised in South India, where after high school he joined a congregation of priests who work in parish ministry. Upon completion of his seminary formation, he was ordained for the congregation to which he belongs. After his graduate degree in

sociology, he taught in a seminary in India. Later he came to this diocese, where his congregation ministers to a parish. He went to Chile to learn Spanish language in an immersion program. He has been working in this diocese for 12 years in different parishes. He is in a parish as an assistant priest, currently along with three other priests. He works with Hispanics, Indians and mainstream communities. He presents himself as a "priest who listens and is always available to people." He is dressed in clerical suit and says, "I am always dressed up in clerical suit, and ready to respond [to] any need as a priest." He clarifies that "there are no office hours for the priesthood, and there are two big hospitals in this parish, and we get called very often." With all the ethnic and race comparisons he was making, the interview was very engaging and interesting. He describes himself as an "orthodox and loyal priest of the Church."

Formation of his perception of spousal abuse is influenced he says by "Church teaching on the holiness of life…life experience…personal reading and observation." He encourages every one who comes to him with family problems not to make major decisions in anger or frustration. He believes that a priest should not preach from the pulpit against spousal abuse because it may hurt the parishioners' trust and confidentiality in him. "Moreover," he says, "we should not preach one against the other." He estimates an average of one case per day of the year, and he clarifies that "it doesn't mean that I work with all of them; I do what I can." Answering why such huge numbers he says, "Partially it is the fact that I work with three ethnic groups of people, and people test the waters in the confessional; if they feel safe they come to you later to discuss relationship issues like abuse."

Thaddeus

Fr. Thaddeus (48, African American) has been a priest for 22 years. He was born in Chicago, where he finished his high school education. He came to the South for his undergraduate studies in engineering at Georgia Tech. Upon graduation, he joined the seminary for this diocese and studied in St. Mainrad, Illinois, and later moved to Josephinum, Ohio, where he graduated and was ordained. Since his ordination he has been working in inner-city parishes. He works as a pastor and as the director of the Office of Black Catholics of the diocese. He has worked with AA groups and at shelters for the homeless. Currently he is working as pastor of a small parish where the majority are middle class African American families.

Thaddeus is very jovial and a pleasant person, he is very approachable and funny in his comments and remarks. The interview with him was very interesting, taking two hours and 25 minutes. He appears in casual non-clerical dress and indicates that he uses clerical dress only for official programs. His 22 years of priesthood has been in inner-city parishes primarily with African American families. He is articulate, challenging, and at the same time compassionate in his judgments. He considers himself as theologically moderate in approach.

His perception of spousal abuse "is heavily influenced by observation, reading and experience as a priest." The most influential event was living with an alcoholic pastor and going for Al Anon so that the alcoholic pastor would go to Alcoholic Anonymous meetings regularly. He says, "Going to Al Anon changed my perceptions of human suffering and opened my eyes to see the woundedness and brokenness many live with." He has a month-long program in October against all forms of abuse.

He says, “I invite all parishioners to take a pledge of nonviolence with me.” His hobby is the playing piano and watching movies. He estimates seeing an average of 8 cases of spousal abuse in a year, but he knows there are many abused who do not come to him but are known to many others in the community.

Simon

Fr. Simon (31, Vietnamese American) has been a priest for only 3 months. He was born in Vietnam, when he was 10, his family moved to this country where he completed his school studies. In both countries he was in boarding schools. At the completion of high school he joined a university in New Mexico, where he graduated in computer science. He worked for IBM and later joined the diocese. He did his seminary studies at the American College in Rome, Italy. Since his ordination he has been working in a parish as an assistant priest and two days a week at the Tribunal of the diocese.

He is a pleasant but serious looking-person and uses words very cautiously. He presents himself in clerical suit with a blue jacket. He uses more legal terms and phrases than any other interviewee. He is very defensive of the Church’s views and practices. He describes himself as an “orthodox priest” and indicates his “faithfulness to the magisterium.” He explains his work in the Tribunal as “assessing the cases and writing judgments on annulment cases.”

“Reading, family values, and the teaching of the Church on dignity of the person” form his perception of spousal abuse. Within the three months of priesthood, he has encountered “three cases of spousal abuse related issues” both in his parish and in many of the annulment cases, about which he says, “I cannot comment.” He

believes that “any one who makes the choice to enter into a relationship should also be responsible to keep it.” He also insists that any spouse who wants his counsel on relationship issues or abuse should come together with the partner for efficiency of time and process because “every coin has two sides.”

Matthias

Fr. Matthias (55, Italian Caucasian) has been a priest for 10 months. He was born in Italy and lived there until he was 8 years old. The family moved to Canada and later to Detroit. Upon his high school graduation he studied law and practiced 22 years as a successful attorney of international law. He joined a congregation of priests who work in parish ministry and continued priestly formation. He studied at the Chicago Theological Union and was ordained. As an associate pastor, he works in an urban parish with three other priests.

He presents himself as a moderate and passionate priest. His office shows his interest in sports, he also has calming water fountains and plants. He sees himself as a bridge between people and God. Hence, he does not have any office hours, always takes calls and is available to people at any time.

He believes spousal abuse is shaped by a combination of “life experience…Latin culture…family values and Biblical values.” He also says the brokenness of relationships and lack of dialogue in daily life is hurting everyone and he perceives himself as a bridge and an instrument of God. He estimates that within the first 11 months of his priesthood, he has seen at least nine cases of spousal abuse. Sharing his approach he says, “I suggest to every abused person to consult a lawyer” so that she/ he may know her/his rights as a person.

Having presented the brief overview of participants, next an overview of the findings are discussed.

Overview of Categories and Properties

The purpose of this study was to investigate the understanding of and responses to spousal abuse on the part of Catholic priests. The analysis of both interview data and documents resulted in three major dimensions as answers to the research questions. The emerging categories are perceptions, understanding and responses of catholic priests. These categories of findings and their subsequent properties are presented next (Table 2).

Table 2

Categories and Properties

Categories	Properties
Perceptions	Common Forms Of Abuse Contributing Factors To Abuse
Understanding	<u>Personal Level</u> Psychological Social Church Related <u>Professional (Church) Level</u> Lack Of Training Lack Of Knowledge Of Resources Reasons Not To Preach
Responses	Priest To The Person Priest To Parish Priest To Self

Perceptions of the Catholic Priests

The first category of the findings is perceptions of the priests on spousal abuse. Findings in this section answer the first research question: "What are the Catholic priests' perceptions regarding spousal abuse?" Participants described an array of answers. From the answers, emerged the following two themes: common forms of abuse and causes of abuse.

Common Forms of Abuse

To the question "What would you consider spousal abuse to be and what forms does it take?" all the participants included physical abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, and spiritual abuse in their answers. Only three participants included sexual abuse in their answers. Participants stated that they are informed about spousal abuse and violence. They demonstrated their knowledge with examples and stories. Explaining the forms of spousal abuse, Bartholomew, the oldest of the participants, cautioned: "almost always all the forms of abuse may be there, but the victim may be presenting the one that is presentable to priest." He continues:

> Now, each case is different…. So is the response to it. The person who comes to share the problem presents a context, history…and it is only one side of the story. The form of abuse that sounds grave and severe to you, gets your attention, doesn't mean that [it] is the most severe from of the abuse she undergoes.

Physical abuse.

All participants described the common forms of abuse that they encountered. All the participants named physical abuse as the obvious sign. All are of the opinion

that if there is physical abuse and violence in a relationship, there may be other forms of abuse going on. Andrew shares his frustration in the face of abuse:

> What do you do? When it is between adults, you cannot invite yourself into it. When it is with children, there is an entrée. We had a child in the R.E [religious education program] who came with bruises and in shabby clothes. We called the parents, and as we were talking, it became clearer that there is abuse in the marriage too. They are Hispanics…. The guy had no idea about the rules and law. Because of the child…we could do something [intervene]. See, sometimes you see people with bruises and sad looks; if you happen to ask them the answer is evasive….You know something is foul….You are helpless.

Sharing another dimension on the prevalence of abuse Thomas says: "Even physical abuse is so common that people take it as a part of life…. They forgive, tolerate… attribute [it] to the stress and outburst of anger." Hence, it seems the priests are aware of physical abuse, its incidence, and its prevalence in their community. They perceive spousal abuse as an ongoing reality.

Psychological abuse.

Participants talked at length about psychological abuse. All of the participants were aware of the overt and covert nature of psychological abuse, and they use interchangeably three terms: psychological abuse, emotional abuse, and verbal abuse. Describing abuse Peter says, " [it] can be either an act of commission and or omission." He adds, "Manipulation of intellect, will, soul and body" together or any one alone could be as acts of abuse in any spousal relationship. Andrew perceiving

the use of authority to control spouse as abuse, states: “Actions of power and authority are abusive because the basis of a relationship is love”. “Any person living in fear and without peace,” says James “is abused.” Simon, who has been ordained the least amount of time among the participants, defines that as: “pretty much it [psychological abuse] includes everything that human cognition can plan against another person.”

Another finding regarding psychological abuse is that the participants recognize many forms of psychological abuse. John shares his view stating that “abuse happens in both ways,” as it takes the forms of “demeaning other persons, silence, ignoring the partner and making the partner guilty.” Philip, sharing on the forms of spousal abuse that he has seen says, “[it] can be both in word and action…terrorizing the partner, depriving the basic needs, mistreating, controlling and discouraging the partner are common in abuse.” He continues to say that in Haiti there was no concept of abuse: “Abuse was never named as abuse,” and so it was always ignored. Bartholomew, the senior among the participants says: “Abuse is like any other addiction. It manipulates…pulls away the partner from everything else including the faith community…removes [the partner] from all other relationships…and controls like a slave.”

Explaining how he has a different scale to measure abuse due to his cultural difference, Thomas suggests that “men widely use divorce as a tool to threaten and to control women.” Matthew sheds light on another area of psychological abuse, suggesting that “arrogance, a hurting attitude in actions and words, name

calling…lack of sharing and communication" are signs commonly seen among abusive spouses.

The third finding in psychological abuse is that participants know that the effect of psychological abuse is serious and could hurt an individual just like physical abuse. They shared Thaddeus' opinion that "verbal abuse is as equally damaging as physical abuse" because "the weapons are intimidation, control, damaging a person's character and belittling." Matthias, who practiced as a lawyer for many years prior to ordination says, "People using other people is not acceptable…. At a minimum, [the effect of abuse] is lack of respect, care and appreciation." Hence, emerging from the data were three important findings regarding priests perception of psychological abuse. The participants appeared to be sensitive to, and knowledgeable about psychological abuse, and its effect.

Sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse was another form of abuse that was identified by participants. The study found surprisingly only three out of 11 participants included sexual abuse as a form of spousal abuse in their list of abuses in the spousal relationship. Secondly, when probed to speak about marital rape, eight of the participants were evasive. Finally, at least one participant rationalized the presence of sexual abuse in the marriage relationship. Describing the complexity of sexual abuse as a form of spousal abuse Matthias says,

> No matter what or how, when the rights of any person is violated it is abuse…and that is true of sexual needs and sexual relationships of the partners. Love is expressed in bringing out the best of the person whom we

love. If there is love, a no has to be a no…if no is not accepted as no, and is not respected, it is abuse.

In the same vein of thought, Philip says: "There is so much sexual abuse women take in Hispanic and Haitian culture. The expectation to be subservient to the husband in these cultures perpetuates the lack of respect for the needs of women." Sharing the same notion, Matthew said: "In Mexican and Indian ethnic families because of the patriarchal system, sexual abuse is not considered as abuse." Simon, providing another angle, says: "Any time sexuality is approached as an entertainment, it is abuse." Discussing sexual abuse and its prevalence and intensity, Thomas says: "People do not want to reveal about the sexual abuse and so [there is] not much discussion about it…but there is so much abuse going on." Referring to the shame and stigma of sexual abuse he shares this painful story:

> One day a woman came to my office with a question regarding contraception. She appeared so ashamed and defenseless. I tried to make her comfortable and calm. …She said, when her husband gets drunk or high with drugs, he brings all his friends home and forces her to have group sex with all of them. Her husband thinks that he has a right to do whatsoever he wants to do with her. She does not want to have children from this chaos…and brutality. She is uneducated…no skills…and nowhere to go. She knows that she is abused…she knows that there are others who do these things. What you can do? She is sad about it…hates it, but consoles herself that at least she has a place to live and food to eat.

Concluding his thoughts on sexual abuse Thomas says: “Sexual abuse from the husband can take many forms. Sometimes people do not want to reveal the intensity of abuse that is going on in their lives.”

It appears that participants were uncomfortable in discussing sexual abuse issues in spousal relationships. The reason for the priests’ evasiveness could be their consciousness of their own celibacy. Reflecting the question of why priests do not include sexual abuse in marriage as a form of spousal abuse, Andrew says: “This is an area we do not know much about, so leave it to the professionals.” Or it could be due to the concept, as expressed by Matthew that it is the couple’s private life’s issues. Even though only three participants included sexual abuse as forms of spousal abuse in their discussion, all participants hesitantly agreed that it is a serious form of spousal abuse. The evasiveness of these priests could be due to the private nature of the abuse and to the increased sensitivity to sexual issues since the recent publicizing of sex scandals in the Church.

Rationalizing the possibility of sexual abuse in a spousal relationship, Bartholomew, a 76 year old priest, says: “Hey, I don’t think we have any idea how hard it will be to live with a person forever…and be careful enough…not to take the partner for granted. When you take [the partner] for granted, bingo…there you go, the abuse begins.” Further Matthew, a 50 year old priest, says that it is “their [the couple’s] personal and private issues; if they are old enough to get married they should know how to live without using each other.” In summary participants knew that sexual abuse can be a form of spousal abuse, but a majority of priests were evasive about it.

Spiritual abuse.

Another form of abuse all participants are aware of and are willing to discuss is spiritual abuse. Participants brought forth spiritual abuse as an important form of spousal abuse even though there is not much literature available. The ideas of the wholeness of the person, the sacredness of the body, the lack of prayer in a relationship, and using another person were all recurring themes. Talking about spiritual, abuse Peter:

> This is an area where the same act can be mutual abuse and self-abuse. It could be mutual abuse if they fail to treat each other with respect regarding their food…what they eat, how and when. How much sleep they get…what they drink…It is spiritual abuse because their body is the temple of God. Failing to take care of yourself is self-abuse…so when you fail to take care of each other it is spiritual abuse.

Explaining his perception of spiritual abuse in a slightly different way, John says:

> When you deprive the spiritual needs of a partner it is abuse…. Down the road it will hurt the relationship. Another tendency I have seen is…using each others' faith to intimidate and control. In mixed marriages and inter-denomination marriages, Catholics are being abused with the 'Sunday obligation', confession and the phrase 'no divorce' and so on. These are used as bargaining chips in some marriages.

Expressing the same concerns, James says: "Ridiculing and belittling the faith of their partner happens in some relationships, and it is used with intention and severity." Matthias, sharing the same approach, says: "Isolating your family or partner from the

faith community is a form of spiritual abuse that is prevalent and unnoticed." Bartholomew states the same opinion when he says: "Pulling away the partner from faith and cutting away all socialization that is related to the Church is a form of abuse of relationship." This study found that participants identify spiritual abuse as a form of abuse in the spousal relationship. It can take different forms and it can impact severely as a tool of isolation from the family and the faith community.

In summary, all of the participants are aware of the many forms of spousal abuse and its signs and symptoms. Thaddeus is of opinion that if the priests as shepherds of family do not look for signs and symptoms of abuse they would miss them because it is so common. Sharing how in spite of its prevalence he happened to misread signs and symptoms of physical and psychological abuse, he told this story, "[it] startled me…the sad spin to it is that everybody else knew it except me." Describing the experience, he continues:

> A white elderly couple, he is 74 and she is 72. They come every Sunday, and both of them are happy people…especially he is very jolly person. I have noticed bruises on her hands and face; sometimes those marks are blue and yellow and fresh. I asked once; she gave me the common answers. You know, 'I fell…tripped on the edge of the rug in the living room.' I noticed he always intercepted the conversation. But you know at their age, I did not doubt. One of their daughters died, out of state and the family wanted to do [a] funeral here…I am sitting with them, in their home to plan the ceremony…as we talk…he is continuously drinking…not one or two. Weeks later I shared the weirdness of his drinking in a men's group meeting on the abuse of

> alcohol…and the people in the group go, 'Oh!, you didn't know that? Why do you think Ruth has all these marks and bruises? I was dumb...couldn't speak. At their age, in a marriage of 52 years? Abuse and violence are more common than we think.

Overall, all the participants are informed of the various forms of spousal abuse, and they perceive spousal abuse as real and prevalent. Participants also are aware of the possible signs and symptoms of spousal abuse. They know both that the manifestations of spousal abuse and what constitutes abuse even though they blame their absence of formal education for their indifference to it. Another area the participants discussed at length was the causes of abuse.

Contributing Factors to Abuse

All the participants appeared to be concerned more about the causes of abuse than the victims. They linked abuse and its causes even though I did not ask them to do so. They perceived the mutually reinforcing nature of abuse. Ten of the eleven participants believe that spousal abuse precipitates abuse and the emerging outcome could be a cycle of abuse. In this section of the causes of abuse, the major themes that emerge in the conversations are the cultural impact, the contractual view of relationships, the cycle of violence and the lack of communication and dialogue.

Cultural context.

Cultural context was a major theme in the discussion of all the participants; all of the participants identified it as one of the causes of spousal abuse. Explaining his view on the causes of spousal abuse, Peter:

> The cultural context of today's family life has tremendous impact in a family's breakdown…. Given the fragmentation of the culture…there is no support system of family and neighborhood. For many people…in the real life…the only connection to the community is the Church or parish. Social connection is gone. There is no way to check and balance the accountability to family and other relationships. An average individual is left alone, so there is a sense of phenomenal vulnerability and a complete vacuum of support and self-resistance. The outcome is survival of the fittest. It breeds abuse at all levels.

Participants' concern could be summarized that we live in a very fast-paced society, and we expect everything to be quick and easy. The social pressure to keep up social standards and to live way beyond one's means creates tremendous stress in the family, and it may cause abuse in relationships.

The participants seemed annoyed at the naïve expectations of people in relationships. Following this line of thought, Thomas says: "This culture wants everything to be simple and quick. See, life is not that simple. Because of this eagerness people take individual actions and words out of the context." This tendency to take actions and words out of context also creates abusive relationships. Expressing another impact of culture as the cause of spousal abuse, Thaddeus says: "The cultural expectation of a woman about a man is a breeding ground for abuse…Men and women allow the stereotype [of gender roles] and if man doesn't behave in the expected aggressive way, women have a problem with that and vice versa." Adding to the same thought Philip states: "The hip hop culture, which is hyper masculine, is

equally promoted by young ladies. …They buy this image of extremely aggressive behaviors and choose to enter into relationships with such persons…so they are approving it." Peter added a slightly different view to this thought when he said: "Violence is adored and dignified in the society through gangs, movies, music and TELEVISION programs. There is no counter culture." Participants identified family breakdown, the fragmentation of society, loss of accountability and checks and balances in relationships, social pressures to live way beyond one's means, trying to live up to the social stereotypes and the hip-hop culture that dignifies violence as the causes of abuse in marriage and families.

The participants presented a consensus on the perception that spousal relationships and traditions are different depending on the country of origin, socio-economic status, education and current income. Although all the participants live and work in the study area, they have an international perspective. The ethnic and racial make up of participants is as follows: five of the participants are from five different countries (Vietnam, India, Italy, Slovakia, and Haiti), two are from Ireland; and the remaining three are North Americans. Within the latter three, one is of Irish American descendent, one is of Polish descent and one is of German American descendent. Their own ethnic and racial background constitute both a catholic view and an international perspective of spousal abuse.

Philip, who works in a white middle class neighborhood parish, has a big Hispanic population and a small Haitian population within the boundary of the parish; he says, "Man, oh man…each ethnic group is different, and each community is different, and each family is different, and each individual is unique. I have a very

diverse group to work with…the baggage with which each comes to the relationship is different too. …You cannot serve these people without knowing their culture and heredity." Speaking on the same issue, Peter says:

> Since I have been noticing the diversity in the parish community…I thought I should offer something for the people. I have above 70 % black families…. Seeing the need for multicultural approach in ministry, I offered to the parish council a workshop on African American spirituality. Oh brother…did I open a can of worms. I have Jamaicans, Haitians, Nigerians, Ghanians, Zambians, you name it…. Each one them think theirs is the right way, and so the program has to be in that way.

Talking about the ethnic significance in spousal abuse and its causes, Matthew says: "There is spousal abuse in every culture, but there is a difference in their view on it and of course in their response to it. The Americans have a much more open lifestyle…. If something does not work, they will try to fix it, and if it does not work, they will move on and either ignore it or sideline it…. Indians and Hispanics are very traditionalistic people. They hide and keep family as a private and personal issue…. They try to do things based on what they have learned in their cultures even though they live in a different country and culture."

Sharing the same idea, Philip says, "There is so much abuse in marriage caused by the cultural traditions and hereditary roles….The tragedy is that the extended family, which would have checked on spousal abuse in their own home countries, is not here. The cultural hereditary becomes a burden for women, and they are being abused with it." He continues to say that in the Hispanics there is so much

suffering, not only due to the "macho system, but also due to lack of language and the legal issues the women may end up with if they call 911. So they are locked in the abusive relationships. " Expressing his view on how ethnic identity could be a cause of spousal abuse, Matthias says: "Every religious practice I know is embedded with some ethnic context and meaning. Any family from a patriarchal culture directly and indirectly supports male superiority in its operation…. Things that are culturally okay in those countries will not be acceptable here…. Can those traditional practices and gender roles be abusive when they come to this country? Yes, you bet."

Analyzing the contribution of ethnic groups to spousal abuse, Matthew states: "Many ethnic families I know dress, drive and go to work here, just like the main stream society. But they return from the work they recede to their own home country styles of dress, food, gender rights and authority…. It is very hard for those women to live a double-culture life everyday." Thaddeus, on the same issue, says:

> I know a 93year old Polish guy, who [has] lived here since the First World War; he has seen many changes and changed much, but not the way he was treating his wife…. I wonder what makes him do that. I know another Bulgarian family; they are in their 80's. When they are outside, he will treat her just like any other man…. [He] will open the door for her, take the coat, you know all that, go home, she is a slave and he has to be served…. He won't even go to the kitchen she has to serve him.

All the participants agree that the ethnic women suffer more abuse and have less freedom and equality compared to their counterparts in this country.

Contractual view of relationship.

Participants named a contractual view of the relationship as another cause of spousal abuse. In a fast-paced society life has certain problems. Much of our actions are contract based. Contracts are mutual agreements built on conditions. All the participants believe that one of the causes of spousal abuse is the tendency to view everything in life on a conditional scale. When conditions are ignored or violated due to the lack of societal and/or a family support system, everything becomes personal. The outcome is the tendency to get even in a relationship, which initiates the use and abuse of the other.

In the Catholic Church, marriage is a covenant, not a contract. Hence, looking at the marriage as a contract based on conditions waters down the covenant nature of the relationship. Peter, talking about the contractual view of relationship as the cause of abuse, says,

> "In the North American context there has been no even understanding of how marriage works as a covenant. Everything is looked at more in a contractual view.… Legal understanding, as opposed to personal and God's grace, love and mercy in relationship, is the focus. A legalistic approach to life cannot be based on love…so there is nothing that prohibits abuse in relationship."

In a covenant relationship, family, friends and neighbors take part, and so they have a role to play. Thomas, looking into the dynamics of a contractual relationship says, "In a contractual relationship as it is a private…and personal agreement of the two people, when something goes wrong, no one is to step in because it is private business." John suggests another issue that causes abuse adding, "Because some

women are in a conditional relationship they want to be in control. I hear men saying women are so nagging and create an abusive situation. It cannot be generalized; still such women can create an abusive relationship."

Matthew suggests another cause of abuse related to the contractual view of a relationship: "The absence of security in a contractual relationship could cause damage to the relationship because security is a characteristic of covenant. Lack of security and a sense of forever adds to the resentments in the relationship." The participants share the Church's view that marriage is a covenant and that it is a relationship that involves family and God, so the societal and communal aspect of relationship cannot be ignored. Neglecting or denying such components create a vacuum where a marriage deteriorates into a mere contract, causing total chaos to all the people involved.

Cycle of intergenerational abuse.

The cycle of violence is identified as another cause of spousal abuse. All the participants agree that there is a cycle of abuse in families and the consequence is a vicious perpetuation of abuse. Referring to the reality of the cycle of abuse as both a cause and effect in the intergenerational cycle, John says:

> I have seen this in my close families and in the parishes, when I had to involve in family problems…. A cousin of mine once said to me that she would never scold her children in a hurtful way, or raise her voice as yelling. When she became mother of a two years old, she agreed that she happened to catch herself occasionally becoming angry and using the same gestures and words her parents used to her….Yes, I believe there is a cycle of abuse.

Looking at the cycle of abuse from another angle how parental expectation become an unnamed abuse for children and for family, Thomas says:

> Some parents abuse their children by making them achieve all that they [parents] failed to achieve, and what they could not become. I had parents sitting here remorsefully accepting that they were too demanding…. Now, [their] children say that they are abused. In a hard way some parents are realizing the cycle of violence.

Sharing his experience in inner-healing retreats, Bartholomew, says: "My experience is that the cycle of abuse is hard to break and heal, especially, when and if that person was an unwanted child, or if the mother ever planned or wished an abortion on that child. The impact of such thoughts by the mother is deep and severe in the life of the person."

Three participants who work with ethnic communities agree that the cycle of abuse is much more powerful and prevalent in patriarchal cultures. Reflecting on the cycle of violence, Matthew says: "In Mexican and Indian families, the learned model of operation of authority is autocratic. There is no dialogue…. It is abusive, and yet, they continue what they learned and have seen as children. It creates a vicious circle of violence." The cultural acceptance of such behavior perpetuates the cycle of intergenerational abuse.

The participants link the cycle of violence not only as the cause of abuse but also as the effect of abuse. They also agreed that because the intervention of government, in the lower socioeconomic levels the cycle of abuse is intercepted, but

they were skeptical whether such programs have any effect on the middle class and above socioeconomic levels of families.

Lack of communication and dialogue.

Another finding as a cause of spousal abuse is the lack of communication and dialogue. Participants agree that the lack of communication and dialogue in relationships is a serious problem in many families. Concluding his thoughts on causes of abuse John says: "The stress of being a partner and parent is huge enough that it overwhelms anyone and it could make anyone vulnerable to abusive behavior. Needless to say, what happens if there is no proper communication between all of them." All other participants share John's remark on lack of communication and dialogue.

Matthias in a prophetic tone says the new role of the Church is to be a mentor in dialogue and communication. Explaining his rationale he says:

> You see all around you, the relationships are falling apart. Personal relationships, family relationships, Church relationships and international relationships are suffering….There is a lot of woundedness and brokenness in relationships and the infrastructure is broken. So, there is no system…to mend the brokenness. Silence and ignoring the other erects walls of abuse. One of the major reasons for brokenness is the lack of communication. Part of the problem is that there is no system to foster dialogue.

Expressing his opinion Matthew says: "[A] major part of the abuse and violence is caused by money and then the lack of communication. In some families no active face-to-face communication takes place….Then, how do you expect such relationship

to survive? Sticky pads and refrigerator notes cannot mend a relationship." He continues, "refusal to speak is used as a tool of communication in some relationships, but it impacts… negatively the little contact they would have." He thinks the root cause of abuse in a relationship is an over-emphasis on possessions, and overspending of money, with which they do not have to begin.

Adding another dimension to the lack of communication and dialogue, Peter says: "Part of the problem is that we do not communicate to the Creator. Prayer is not part of many spousal relationships. Lack of prayer will certainly reflect in the lack of dialogue at home with all the significant people." All the participants agree that the lack of prayer both in the personal and in the family life reflects the lack of communication between the family members. Matthias suggests another reason why there may not be effective communication in many relationships: "The cause of abuse is lack of establishing respect for the other, which causes the tendency to use the other person…. The sense of the wholeness and holiness is absent in many persons' life plans."

Overall, the participants are concerned about the factors that contribute to spousal abuse and its impact on the marriage and family life of the community. They linked both the forms of abuse and the contributing factors and effects as two sides of the same problem. They identified the contributing factors of spousal abuse as follows: cultural context, ethnic hereditary, contractual view of the relationship, the cycle of violence and lack of communication and dialogue. In each interview, the participants had powerful observations shaping their perceptions. Yet their perception of spousal abuse is elementary and common sense based (Arriaga & Oskamp, 1999;

Mignon, et. al., 2002; Wallace, 2002). Their observations and assessments appear rich in experience. Their consciousness of what they witness day and night as shepherds of the people gives them a unique objective perspective in their observation of the causes of spousal abuse, however their understanding of the factors that contribute to domestic violence is still elementary or common sense. They are aware that the context of modern society results in high stress, materialism and a fast paced life style, and that in general such factors as these create a climate where family relationships receive less nurturing attention than they need to sustain their well being. Thus, according to the participants, conditions are ripe for abuse. Interestingly, several priests commented on how the break-down of the societal infrastructure including the Church contributes to a society that does not foster healthy dialogue among family members.

In summary, the perceptions of Catholic priests on spousal abuse reflect a lay approach and elementary level of knowledge of domestic abuse. All of the participants, sharing their perceptions on spousal abuse, discussed the forms and contributing factors of abuse. They are aware that it can be physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual. Their sense of psychological abuse focuses primarily on overt forms of verbal abuse. It is doubtful that they are sensitive to more subtle forms such as male privilege and withholding emotions. They seemed uninformed about both economic issues and sexual abuse. Interestingly, they did identify spiritual abuse, which is a form of abuse not common in the professional literature.

Having discussed priests general perceptions on spousal abuse, its forms and contributing factors, the second category of the findings—the personal understanding of the priests on spousal abuse -- is presented.

Understanding

The second category of the findings is titled as understanding. In this second category I present the major findings on the understanding of the Catholic priests about spousal abuse. This section answers the second research question, "How do Catholic priests personally understand spousal abuse?" The findings are presented on two levels: personal and professional (Church) level. On the personal level there are three major themes: first, understanding that is based on the psychological realm of the participants; second, understanding that is socially overarching to the priests and priesthood; and third, understanding that is related to the Church bureaucracy and institution. On the professional level there are three major themes: first, lack of training causes priests to refer them to someone else; second, there is a lack of knowledge of resources, and third, they don't preach against spousal abuse because priests believe it is not liturgical.

Personal Level

In the personal level there are three major themes and they are psychological, social and Church related issues. All the participants agree on three things: they are very busy; they are working hard to keep up with their daily schedules; and the paper works hinder them from the people and pastoral caring time. One of the consequences of the overwhelmed and overworked life experiences of priests is that they have to prioritize with what they want to work. All the participants stated that their strategy is

to "avoid anything controversial and messy." The participants identified many reasons why they should not intervene in spousal abuse: evidence of "burned out priests", the "ugly and messy" nature of the spousal issues, "legal issues involved", the "quick fix", "personal and private" nature of issues, "safer to keep a distance", "lack of jurisdictional power", and the possibility of "scandal" vis-à-vis the priest's spiritual role. The following three sections will discuss these issues in detail.

Psychological

Participants' personal understanding about spousal abuse seems to be highly influenced by their psychological environments. There are three major themes that influence their understanding of spousal abuse and they are; priests are very busy; they are burned out; and the quick fix approach to the spousal abuse issues. The following sections will discuss them in detail.

I am busy.

Although the participants shared how burned out they are, at the same time they were happy to continue to do whatever they can in the ministry. They all agree with Bartholomew's, observation that priests are, "exhausted and the only way of survival in priesthood is to slow down and do only what you can do." Peter says: "(showing the appointment book) this is full…I want to make some follow up calls and visit some people who are having relationship problems, some who are sick and some others hospitalized…you tell me, who gets priority. The little time you have…you have to use for healing, not for controversial issues." In the same vein of thought James says: "Time is a real big issue. You have your plans for the day but then, you get an emergency call from the hospital, the whole day gets reshuffled.

When you call and cancel the appointments….nobody is happy." Responding to same question, Thomas, says: "We are so busy here in the office seeing people and answering calls. If in case you do not answer the calls the same day, you know how that works. I do not know how our senior priests work…. It is so exhausting." Talking about the busy schedules and the sufferings and brokenness that are being encountered everyday, Thaddeus says:

> I should say that I am very poor in making follow ups…I want to do it…I have told them [victims] how I care for them and so on…but once they leave the office…you care for the things that are at your face…I pray for them and wish I can do all the things that are to be done in the parish. Our people, they are so good and great but I don't think that they know how overwhelmed we are.
>
> *Burned out.*

Sharing the same concerns of Thaddeus, but from a different angle Bartholomew, the senior of the participants says:

> Now, burning out is a serious problem…. There are things that add to it; the sense of diocese as a team, is missing…. The fellowship of priests is also deteriorating, workload is increasing because of the shortage of priests…. I think all these [things] and the diminishing prayer life of priests are also another cause for the burning out of priests.

Expressing the same concerns Andrew, another senior participant, says: "I do not think our men [young priests] are prepared for the work and types of problem they encounter in the parish life. The seminary has to do a better job in preparing them."

Quick fix.

Another understanding of these priests on spousal abuse is the "quick fix." Explaining their understanding on spousal abuse, participants agree on the notion of "quick fix." People are busy and so much is going on in their lives. Everyone is looking for quick and fast solutions within the least possible time. Philip, sharing his own experience says: "People want quick fix on all their problems. We are trying to quick fix everything…or give fast answers to the person….Respond to the person as quick and short as possible and get away from them. Because nobody has time." Sharing on the same issue, Matthias, analytically says: "To be honest, I am answering even before the person stops…. You know, we are busy…want to solve the problem quick and the people want to do it fast too."

Another disadvantage according to Andrew is the "lack of the whole story…you only have bits of information that are completely one-sided, and you have only a few minutes. People want you to quick fix all their problems." Andrew continues to state what really happens in the day-to-day life. He says: "There is always someone coming to [the] office for a quick fix of problems. And sometimes it is a miracle what happens; one prayer, or few minutes of attention to the person…. They are able to change or accept the problem…so it can be corrected." Looking further into the expectations of quick fix and how priests are doing the quick fix, Thomas says:

> Actually, I tell you, people are not quite interested in solving their problems but generally they are interested in postponing them. It is like the medical system….Many of the medicines that are given, is to suppress symptoms

> [rather] than to cure. People want medicine to be immediately effective…so they get high dosage…. Are they cured? No, they didn't expect to be cured either. They come to a priest looking for a quick fix…and they get it. Will the problem change, maybe not.

Another repeated theme was the understanding of spousal abuse issues as personal and private. This theme appeared to be the connection between the psychological and social understanding of the participants.

Personal and private.

The participants see spousal abuse issues as private and personal issues of the person. They appear to use this belief as a justification for their detachment from it. There is a sense of privacy and independency that are characteristics of modern life. Respecting the privacy of another person is considered as a minimum sign of quality and integrity. All the participants were concerned about respecting the privacy of family and the personal nature of the relationship issues.

Talking about the private nature of the spousal abuse, Simon says: "Each family has its own systems and structures for problem solving…. I respect the private and personal life of people…. Just the way I would expect them to respect mine… I don't like to intervene in other people's personal problems." Expressing the same restraint and rational Andrew says:

> We have to remember that it is their private and personal life; until we are invited to discuss…or asked to intervene, we have no business with it. It is not safe either until both of them are ready to sit with you…and discuss the problem. We cannot invite ourselves into it…no matter how zealous the priest

> is. It is one thing to be a caring priest and another to be a nosy priest. We don't want to be intruders [in their privacy]…and do not want to over involve in relationship issues of people…if they really need help there are professionals…we have to stay back.

Talking about the private nature of spousal abuse, Thaddeus says: "As a priest your authority is spiritual and it has significance only if they are willing to come and listen to you. Problems in marriage are private unless there is danger to the life of any or both parties. Until then I feel obliged to respect their privacy." Making his case for non-involvement, Thomas says: "We are single and celibates. These are marital problems…. What do we know about these issues, and people are capable to handle their problems. We cannot forget that these things are part of their private and personal lives." Further the participants identified three themes as social understanding of spousal abuse.

Social

The social environment of the issue influences the priests' personal understanding of spousal abuse. As leaders of the community, priests influence the people and consequently, the people's social context influences the priests understanding of the problem. The study found that the societal approach to spousal abuse has a great impact on the priests' understanding of the spousal abuse. The major themes are the following.

Ugly and messy.

Another understanding of priests is that the spousal abuse issues are ugly and messy issues of relationships. Life is never tidy and neat as any one would wish and

hope. Ministering to people is never about neat and clean relationships but about raw and actual lives. Priests' understanding on spousal abuse is shaded with a sense of detachment. Participants agree their reticence to deal with messy issues is actual and real. Discussing it James says: "It [spousal abuse] is very messy and there is no easy solution to these issues. Second, it may be my own selfishness that they are very complex issues and I do not want to get involved in the controversial issues especially when you know that solutions are not that easy and clear." Sharing the same concerns, John says: "You have to realize that there are many layers to the problem of spousal abuse. We cannot do anything in one sitting…it needs multiple sessions…. Needs both partners and many times some other family members…. You are entering a very demanding area of layers of problem." Describing why he is not involving with spousal abuse issues, Simon says: "These are very delicate issues…you have to believe and work with one side of the story…. When you enter into some one else's personal space, people are not that nice and easy." Explaining another aspect of the messiness of spousal abuse issues, Peter says: "there is an ugliness to the whole issue…once you get involved in it. It is messier than it appears…there is a huge tingle tangle and a whole lot of obligations. It is not something that you try to unearth or bring forth."

Legal issues.

The legal issues are another set of concerns of priests regarding spousal abuse. Participants appear to be very concerned about legal issues that may be involved in spousal abuse issues. Explaining his willingness to be a part of healing and solution, Matthew describes one of his experiences:

> I was trying to help this couple and things were working in a positive direction. Both of them said they were willing to give another try…. Next thing what I hear is a telephone message saying 'we have a court case coming.'…. The next startling thing is that I am summoned to the court….I learned a lesson in that. I still work with the people but I let them know, if they plan to go to court I am not available for intervention.

Sharing another dimension of the messiness of the problem, Peter, says: "Legal issues are so overwhelming….I do not want to get entangled in the legal issues, so I try to keep away from abuse issues." Thomas, describing his view of the complexities of the issues, says: "I do not want to get involved in people's relationship issues because of two reasons. It is impossible to satisfy both parties…. So you end up creating an unsatisfied person for no reason. Secondly, when you deal with these problems, people want to possess you. They think they can speak for you…. So I do not want to [become] involved in personal relationship issues." Sharing another aspect of the problem, James says,

> There is a heightened vulnerability in these things. No matter whether it is male or female contacting you, you are leaving an open door to accusations…. Especially in these days. Family relationships and spousal abuse problems are very touchy subjects.… And they can make you vulnerable for accusations.

Talking about his understanding on the topic, John, says: "Our ability to solve these things depend on peoples' goodwill. But the potential damage it can bring to us is very serious. Especially now with the zero tolerance policy [of the Chursh] there is a severe vulnerability to our life. So I tell my assistants to be cautious." Simon adding

another face to the legal issues says that there are confidentiality issues involved in priests' involvement in spousal abuse. Explaining further he says, "These problems are so complex, and at the same time there is so much in common…. Your involvement in spousal relationship issues puts the trust you earn as a priest at stake."

Keep a distance.

Another approach presented was to "keep a distance because it is not something you are called for", "there are trained people out there" "stay back, if needed they will come to you," "be cautious, they are messy," "personal-safety first". Expressing his concerns, John says: "I do not have the expertise to deal with family…spouse abuse issues…and it is true. So I feel that I better keep a distance from it, because I do not know how to deal with it." Describing his rationale for keeping a distance, Peter says,

> It would be great if I could help and make a difference…in all ailing marriages. Now that is an ideal situation…it really is; it is better to keep a distance because of time constraints. The complexity of the whole issues…the private nature of the issues, and current scandal. Let us face it…we have to protect ourselves.

Sharing why he should stay back and keep a distance from spouse abuse issues, Matthias says: "Not only are these issues private, but also they make us vulnerable. If the couple cannot settle their problem…it means they are looking [at] the weakness of each other. It demands from us extreme caution…so the conventional wisdom is…I am told is to stay back." Talking in the same vein Andrew says: "I stay back and delegate…I keep a cautious but open approach…. Married people in the staff would

be in much safer position than us to deal with these things." Talking further why he would stay back, Thomas says: "I think I will be more comfortable, you know, to stay back…. Because there are agencies and institutions to respond to such issues I think many priests would stay back than being proactive."

Church Related

The third personal understanding of the priests on spousal abuse is related to the Church as an institution. This study found priests are conscientious of their own safety. Their understanding of spousal abuse is compassionate but they approach the abuse with extreme caution. The following are the repeated themes.

Scandal.

Another concern participants share is that being involved in spousal abuse could be a scandal in the making. Participants present a gloomy picture regarding the vulnerability of their life. Their life style as single and always interacting with people and living alone in a house could make them an easy target for revenge and scandals. If once they are accused, any accusation will jeopardize their remaining life. Even though they know the odds of being falsely accused are remote, priests appear concerned to protect themselves first. Thaddeus, sharing the need for priests to protect themselves, shares one of his experiences:

> This happened with an African American upper middle class family. They [the couple] are not regulars. She [wife] approached me and shared the abusive relationship and how hard it is to continue to live and the rest of it. I asked her, would he respond if I call him to talk? She thought he might respond. So I called…he was not happy to come but he came…No sooner did

> we start talking than he became angry…threatened me with a lawsuit.… Sexual abuse…having an affair with his wife….Man, I did not expect it that way. He even threatened people who knew the problem of [the] abuse. Now what was the outcome? She lost her freedom to come to Church…which I learned later, that it [freedom to go to Church] was her only social outlet….Which is very sad. I gained an enemy. I learned from this how vulnerable we are. Scandals can come just like that.

Andrew, focusing on the same problem of vulnerability and the sensitivity of the time and issue, says: "You know that you have to protect yourself. Especially with all the current media focus on us, any artificial dirt will look and feel like real. So it is better to stay away from these issues…there are professionals…let them handle it." Peter discussing the issue shares another story:

> In my entire priesthood, I had two phone calls from my bishop. Both of them are verifying complaint letters against me. Both of them are from the same person….One time I am accused of chasing members away from the parish. Next, I am a feminist because I talked about the equality and dignity of every person, including gender. Look, I am very aware of the problems in many marriages…the suffering. The woundedness…but there is nothing I can do. I don't want to throw myself away or a complaint or scandal.

All the participants expressed a sense of helplessness and apathy. Words, like "woundedness" "brokenness" "so much suffering and pain" and "struggling to survive and keep relationships", are some of the expressions of problems they see in the community in which they minister. They qualified their responses, feelings, in the

same vein of thought using words like, “helpless,” “silent witness,” “all that you can do is to pray,” “people’s strength is amazing,” and “many dead men and women are walking here.” Expressing his helplessness and frustration, James says: “I see the pain and suffering in individuals, and in families. What can I do? I feel helpless. As a priest I see families very closely…I get frustrated…and I know that doesn’t solve anything.… I pray…I admire the endurance of some people.” Peter, sharing the same concerns and helplessness, looked back on many families and individuals and says: “Many are living on a day-to-day basis.…You look at them…it reminds [me of] the image of dead men and women walking. So sad…only very few people are happy.… But you know, [there is] nothing you can do about it.” Describing his experience Matthias says:

> I tell them up front that I do not have answers for their problem. I share with them what I see, the pain, suffering, grief and brokenness, and also my helplessness. I help them to see their strength and our spiritual power – the power of prayer and of God’s presence in our lives. It helps them…but you know it bothers me that I am not as helpful as they were hoping or wishing. *My role is spiritual.*

Another understanding of the participants themselves is that their role is spiritual. All the participants share the same awareness and the conscientiousness of their role and ministerial responsibility. They all agree that there are problems and with the broken family infrastructure, the severity of the problems is high. With the present generation of families where many young adults do not even have both parents in relationships, the future may be more gloom. Apparently an affirmation of

participants' spiritual role serves as a safety net for all participants. Based on this understanding one of the invariable responses of priests to spousal abuse victims is prayer. They prayed with the victims and continued to include victims in their personal prayer. Priests reaffirmed to the victims that as their priests they would do whatever they could. It appears by reaffirming their spiritual role as a person of prayer and as a person who is obligated to pray for his people, they were creating a self-created sense of satisfaction.

Simon, the youngest priest of the participants, clarifying his role says in an abrasive tone: "My intervention to any relationship problem is pastoral. I, as their priest, will pray for them…that is my role and that is what is expected of me. My training is not to be anything else." Responding to the same thought, John says: "I know my limitations, and I know all I can do is to be their priest…to pray for them…and to guide them. My approach is very fatherly." Answering the same question, Thomas says: "I think the role of our presence is spiritual. I know…and I understand the problems in marriage, abuse and violence and all. I am here to be a spiritual presence."

No jurisdictional authority.

Another problem or difficulty of the priests is their lack of jurisdictional authority in dealing with personal problems of parishioners. Participants share their helplessness and frustration with their inability to do something to help the abused in her/his pain and suffering. Priests believe that their ability to make change depends solely on the goodwill of the involved family members. "Many of the time such problems of abuse would not occur in the first place, if they had such goodwill to

listen to each other in a respectful manner" says Philip. John sharing an overall view of priesthood and its role in the society says:

> Clergy are spiritual people…we do not have any jurisdictional authority. All we have is the spiritual role…to guide and suggest. Our role in the society is very limited…we are not experts in these issues. Our access is only to the people who are willing to come to us…and share with us….The effect or outcome is up to what they are willing to change. There is no force there. Unless the person is open to grace…we are done.

Expressing his helplessness and lack of power to change things even when he knows what might be the best possible solution based on victims' life, Bartholomew, says:

> I don't think any priest will ignore…and minimize the abuse and suffering in the life of a person. When people, regardless of the Church affiliation or religion come to me, and share the abuse they are taking, I help them to see the whole story…in a balanced way. I show her God's love for her…and suggest all the alternatives. Now, if she doesn't want to listen and take action that is her call…you can't make anyone, or force anyone to take decision. We do not have any authority…sometimes it is sad…what can you do…you become a helpless witness to suffering.

Answering the same questions, Matthew shares another aspect of the helplessness and the futile attempts the Church as a collective entity has made. He says:

> All that the Church can do is to write, talk and give official teachings. It is up to us, the people whether to follow it or not. I look at spousal abuse in a different way. In this country people have choice…to walk out of it [abusive

> relationship] and still be able to build a life. It may not be easy…but it is possible. No matter what the Church says or writes on what all should be changed…people do what they want or like to do. Take the case of pornography or abortion, everyone knows what the Church teaches…how much money the Church has spent to eradicate them.… Everyone knows how these things diminish the dignity of women. I know that they are not that easy, but these are issues where women can make a difference. Our [the priests'] capacity to influence is very limited.

Speaking on the same issue, John presents another view:

> Domestic abuse or spousal abuse takes place behind-the-closed-doors. What we know…is purely what we are told. It is between two people and there could be two or more explanations to it. Regardless of the right and wrong what can we do? Our role is spiritual…our authority as pastors is territorial provided they are members…and [are] willing to continue to be members of the Church.

In conclusion, priests personal reaction to dealing with abuse is very complex and multifaceted. The understanding of the Catholic priests on spousal abuse is colored by their administrative fears and helplessness. On the personal level they know and they name the problems but they see it as a part of the landscape of marriage and relationship. They appear to struggle to balance the individualism of the culture and the Catholic family centered value system. The legal issues of spousal abuse, the messiness, the fear of scandals as well as the personal and private nature of spousal abuse intersects with the priests' busy schedules. Both professionally and personally,

priests are unclear, uncertain in their understanding of spouse abuse, much like a zigzagging shoreline. Next, the professional understanding of priests on spousal abuse is discussed.

Professional Level

In this section I will present the findings on priests' understanding not only as an individual of a specific parish but also as a team member of a diocese and of the universal Church. In the data analysis three major themes emerged and they are: 1) lack of training, 2) lack of knowledge of resources, and 3) reasons not to preach. The following is each theme in detail.

Lack of Training

All the participants shared this expression, "I am not trained for this." Generally the expression sounded desperate; at times, it served as a safety blanket, to few even as an escape. All the participants knew at least by referring the victim to a therapist, that they were becoming a part of the solution rather than denying the problem and colluding with it.

Lack of preparation.

The participants were unanimous in voicing that the seminary did not teach them how to respond to such issues. The pastoral counseling course they had addressed the theoretical aspects of symptoms. Talking about the lack of training Andrew says:

> Let me tell you how overworked and overtired are all the priests I know are. We are not exposed to the skill to deal with such [a] wide variety of problems. These [spouse abuse] issues were not discussed in seminary and I do not think

> that we are called to deal with these things either. These problems are more than we priests can handle. So it will be prudent to refer them, to professionals of which there are abundance out there for everything now.

Thinking back to seminary training, Bartholomew, who has been a priest for 46 year says:

> No, as far as I know I do not recall ever, that seminary taught anything of this nature. Sometimes I wonder why? This is an issue we priests encounter daily in different forms. What I can remember of the classes was…how to deal with abuse if you are abused. I never was abused and there had no abuse in my family as far as I know. No there was no training, whatsoever. I tell them [abused] to go to therapy because it makes them be serious about it.

Responding to the same question Matthias, who has been a priest only 11 months says: "We did not have any training on such topics. We were told to refer the person to the therapist. When I was in seminary, I never thought that these issues would be as important as now I feel…or the magnitude of it." Looking at the training issue in a different way, Peter says: "I think my call is to be a spiritual leader so the seminary focused on such courses…. It is true that I did not have any training on how to deal with these issues. My response to the abused is based on pastoral common sense."

Continuing education.

It was another concern of all the participants that they lack continuing education in their professional setting. Each parish's annual budget sets aside $700.00 for each priests' continuing education. It is important to know that all the participants knew that there had been no continuing education on spousal abuse topics, but they

were not complaining either. All the answers could be summed up in one sentence: "To my knowledge there had been no continuing Ed [education] on spousal abuse or family relationship issues." Thaddeus, who has been working in inner-city parishes all his priestly life made a point about why he thinks continuing education on spousal abuse is necessary and said: "They had no course on this either in seminary or in the diocese. The idea of referring sounds good. But many cannot afford a therapist. That is why we need to be equipped at least in a general way…to know basic skills and resources." Matthew, who works with Hispanic, Indian and Anglo communities looks at the issue of training not only as a necessity for the priestly ministry but also as an avenue of the Church's future mission, and he says:

> The seminary really did not teach these things…. Years ago these were not as common as today or there were extended family and other systems to intervene. This was not an area priests were asked to look at. Now it is a different story. I think in coming years with the Hispanic and Asian explosion in population, the Church and priests will be overwhelmed with family and relationship issues. The continuing education for priests on these issues is long due…. Many of these ethnic populations are not used to a therapist…they feel much more comfortable in with priests and the Church. If we don't take care of them some other Churches will.

Andrew, who has been a priest for 36 years, looked at the issue in a much broader view and he says: "It is true that there have been no continuing education class on relationship issues that I know. It is also true that the attendance in continuing Ed

[education] is very minimal. I guess everybody is busy and overwhelmed."

Incompetence.

Another understanding is their incompetence in dealing with spousal issues. All the participants as they expressed their incompetence together with helplessness and lack of training shared the same feeling as John, who has been a priest for 34 years, when he said: "In seminary we didn't have any psychology education.… I know we are incompetent to be part of such therapeutic decision…and help people in these issues.… I am not the expert in these areas. Working with family problems…I really do not know whether my incompetence is a limitation or a strength." Sharing his own observation of self-incompetence James says:

> When some one sits across the table and shares her suffering and abuse, I listen attentively and reinforce her strength…. You can see the face become more pleasant and body posture becomes little bit more self-esteemed. But when you suggest your incompetence in the subject…. You can't miss the disappointment on the face and in the body posture of the person.

Likewise, Philip sharing the same feeling says:

> I think I am little more helpful than others because of my social work training and the course I attended on abuse. I observe the expectation of the person when she -- normally it is a woman, very, very seldom a male—starts talking. When I suggest my limitations and why it is better for her to go to a therapist, you know, the discouraged face is a challenge to my incompetence.

Referral.

Another undertaking of priests in a professional level is for them to refer to therapists and other priests. All the participants share the understanding that they do not have the skill to deal with relationship issues, so they have to refer to the professionals, to a therapist, or to a counselor. Sharing their views on referring to a therapist, all participants, except one, agree that is the best they can do. They all felt comfortable in doing so because by referring they could provide some assistance by giving a direction to the person. Talking on the same topic James says:

> In seminary they told us to make referrals not to deal with them. I believe that suggestion was the best…and I really rely on that a lot, and do referrals. I have no problem in doing that because…I think that is one way of being [of] assistance to them. Sometimes I feel bad that I cannot help, but then it is an assistance to refer and guide to someone who is trained to help and to solve the problem.

Responding to the same question, Thomas says, "when things are deep rooted and beyond my capacity to handle I suggest [to] her or him to go to a psychologist or marriage counselor depending on the case." Validating his action he continues: "we are very busy and do not have enough time…and I have seen other priests refer them too."

Answering to a subsequent question whether they follow-up the case after making the referral, all the participants except two, said: "not really," "wish I can," "not easy due to the work load," and "no, wish I had the time." It appears that referral as a system may or may not work but it seems to be better than nothing. Since there is no follow-up, it may be worth exploring how those who were referred responded and

survived. The two priests who did follow-up at least once, "to make sure that the person is helped" are Peter and Matthew. Matthew makes referras only if necessary and if the person cannot afford a therapist, he will make sure there is some financial assistance available to the person. Matthew's referral is always to a therapist who is a full-time marriage counselor employed by the diocese in the parish staff as a regional counselor.

Peter was the only priest who was uncomfortable in referring to therapists. His first choice is other priests. Explaining why, he says:

> Professional counseling is expensive; many times people cannot afford it, if they are below middle class or even middle class…. Secondly, the therapist may not be sensitive to their religious beliefs…and moral stands. If I refer to a priest whom they [the family] may or may not know…and I trust on his [referred priest's] ability, there is a sense of confidentiality, a sense of prayer, and wholeness of life which you may not get from a professional therapist.

Overall, all the participants are aware of their limitations and incompetence in this area. On a positive note, most refer the victims and families to professionals. Only two priests ever tried to follow-up the cases they refer to, to make sure that they are helped. Consequently, one questions whether the referral is a desperate attempt to help or an escape and safety blanket. Another theme that emerged was the lack of knowledge of resources. The study found two interestingly positive aspects of priests understanding. All participants accepted that they never had any formal training on spousal abuse in seminary nor in the diocese. They are open about their lack of training. This openness is a positive sign of their willingness to learn. Secondly they

all wanted to learn more about it. They are looking for more information and said that they need continuing education on it. This is a hopeful sign for the abused and violated that priests are willing to learn. However, an understanding of the resources available to their parishioners might be a place to start.

Lack of Knowledge of Resources

Another theme that emerged powerfully about the priests' understanding is the lack of knowledge of resources, both of the community and of the Church. Irrespective of participants' age, ethnicity and theological views, they appeared to have a social disassociation to the society where they live and minister. The study revealed that priests are either overwhelmed with workload and are detached from community resources, or are uninterested to the extent that they don't even know the Church resources.

Family resources.

Knowledge of the resources for the family is one of the areas priests lacked basic information as ministers of family. The lack of knowledge also indicates their limited ability to refer a person to possible resources for assistance. None of the priests, -- except Thaddeus- could locate the nearest shelter or DFACS office. None of the participants knew the availability of United Way brochures or the minimal information that would be expected of a person in a community leadership position.

Community connection.

The connection of the priests to the community is also very minimal to none. Participants share a common excuse that either they are so busy that they are unable to attend the local ministers breakfast or meetings or they didn't care. These meetings

are conducted usually in the local hospitals or nursing homes where ministers from all churches would be visiting as needed. In these meetings clergy discuss issues that affect the ministry and resources and the programs they plan in their Churches. None of the participants, except one, knew any other community organization that helps and supports women or families in their needs. Lack of basic knowledge of the community resources both in the public sector and in the non-profit private organizations is a real surprise. The only person – Andrew- who works with the area ministers and is involved in community connection says: "I regret that I have not gone to those meetings recently…[I] have been very busy…it has been helpful in understanding the pulse of community and locating resources."

Church resources.

Knowledge of resources of the Church is another area priests lacked. All participants are asked about the availability of the Church resources. The discussion is focused on knowledge of documents and on the availability of helpful materials for programs. I asked two specific questions in this area. First, are there any related documents on spousal abuse from Pope, National Bishops Conference, or from any other individual bishops or dioceses? Second, are there any resources they use that are recommended by the Church? Answering these questions, four participants said: " there may be," and "they do not remember reading any." Five participants answered that they did not know. Out of the remaining two, one –Philip- says: "The document on social justice is what I use when I work with abuse issues." The second priest – Simon, says: "I do not remember the name of the document but it is about the dignity of women where the Holy Father upholds the dignity of the equality of gender."

The office of the family concerns of the archdiocese recommends a list of documents and three were used as a supplemental data source in this study. None of the participants were aware of either the existence of such documents or the availability of those documents as aids for their ministry. The National Catholic Bishops Council has programs and resources for use in parishes. But no participant knew either the content of the program or where the materials were available. The National Bishops Conference together with the President's Task force against family violence has declared October as anti-abuse month. Out of the 11 participants, six participants did something special in their parishes in October the majority of the action was based on "Project Aware," a diocesan program against child abuse. Two participants took leadership in programs in the parish in the month of October. One participant – Thaddeus- invited everyone to make the pledge of nonviolence in the Church. The second participant – Matthias- invited the parish to join a group he leads to learn nonviolence. The Pax Christi, a Catholic organization that works to promote nonviolence coordinates the program.

In summary, the study found priests are disengaged from the society where they live. Their social presence is limited to their church and people. The participants agree that their knowledge of resources is very limited. Additionally, it was discovered that the priests did not have an involvement or relationship even with the neighboring Christian ministers. Next, why priests do not preach against spousal abuse is presented.

Reasons Not to Preach

The participants provided rationale both in the liturgical and pastoral setting why they should not use the pulpit to speak against spousal abuse. Participants' individual personalities were visible in the issue of preaching against spousal abuse from the pulpit or even including the issue in the homily. All of the participants were asked: "Did they ever directly preach against spousal abuse? Out of the 11, two stated that they do preach occasionally directly to the issue of abuse. A third priest said: "I have done it once." Two others said they have alluded to and have had "one-liners" (they were short, pithy phrases) in their homilies. The answers are primarily justifications and counterpoints why they should not preach. Some of the pertinent themes are the following: not liturgical, people don't want to talk about abuse, Sunday is a day of celebration, confidentiality issues and the use of one-liners.

Not liturgical.

One of the common answers is that preaching against spousal abuse in Mass is not liturgical so it should not be done. Answering the question James says:

> According to the official document on liturgy guidance, we cannot do it. In the homiletics we are taught to expound the scripture of the day…if the scripture does not mention it, then the homily is not going to have it…. To keep the integrity of the liturgy, I am supposed to proclaim the Word only. Another reason I should say is that we are not preaching a sermon but a homily. If we were preaching sermons, we could have picked a topic and preached; but we follow the liturgical calendar…it is thematically arranged…you cannot change it. I think if we preach against it [spouse abuse]

> a lot of people may comment that what does the priest know about these things. The bottom line is, it is a messy situation…[it] will create controversy…. I have a budget to maintain…and these topics are not something everybody is excited about.

Giving slightly different answers to the same question, Andrew shares another reason and he says: "I have not preached against spousal abuse. I have to read more about it…it is very delicate to preach on controversial topics. These are not comfortable topics…they may create problems instead of solving [them]." Thomas added another dimension to the issue and says:

> No, I have not preached. My homilies are spiritual and I explain the scripture. My focus is the positive aspects of life. Mass is a prayer, and homily in the prayer has to be on spiritual issues not social or human relationships. Another reason is that mass is for all the people; there are children, adults, and old people…we are preaching to everyone. I do not know how parents would react if I mention these things in the Church because there are families sitting together with children, widows or divorced and people with all kinds of problems.

In addition, giving another reason why he has not preached against spousal abuse, John says:

> When you think all of life there are several issues that are important; spousal abuse, discrimination, justice issues to the poor, rights the of underprivileged, spiritual issues of the voiceless and so many other things in addition to feasts and liturgical relevance. All these things into 52 weeks of the year, so things

cram into each other…all these things are important but it is 7 minutes and all should relate to the integrity of the liturgy. So some never make into the top of the priority.

Similarly, providing another reason why there is no preaching against these issues that are concerns of the majority of the attendees who are women, Matthias said that "the occasions where people are for a specific purpose, what you preach has to be directed to the point of focus of the gathering" and it has to be for everyone in the congregation.

People don't want to talk.

Another professional level understanding of the priests is that people don't want to talk about it. Explaining why he does not preach, Peter, who preached once, says: "People don't want to talk about it, so what do you do about it, you know?" He preached the Sunday after September 11, 2001 and "connected the violence in each one of us, the abuse that is part of our behavior…the pornography, abortion, abuse against women. I told [them] there is terrorism everyday in us…inside us. Many were not happy to hear these things." Reflecting on the idea that the homily is an interaction with the listeners James says: "These are controversial issues, nobody wants to talk about them. So there is no preaching." He continues, "if you preach or say things that reminds them of the painful, negative aspects of life…it hurts again. Nobody wants to hurt but be a part of the healing."

Sunday is celebration day.

That Sunday is a day of celebration is another explanation priests gave against preaching. Sunday gathering is a time of celebration, socialization, and family time.

Participants appear to be making Sunday a happy occasion rather than a day of prayer and reflection on life in relation to faith and values and eternity. Explaining this idea James says: "Often times we want our Sunday liturgies to be joyful, happy times. We focus on the wonderful things God has done for us and be grateful to that rather than the grief, pain and brokenness." All the participants share the notion that the focus of Sunday celebration is on the reading of the day and readings are not selected by the celebrant, the liturgical calendar is preset. Giving an insight into the topic and how the reading is selected John says:

> The liturgy guidance is precise. Before the second Vatican council the liturgy guidance had options for the priest to preach sermons, where he could tie together administrative and moral issues of the parish…not necessarily to the scripture of the day. But now the council made it very clear that it has to be a homily based on the reading of the day as per the liturgical calendar.

Sunday is family celebration.

Another reason all participants agree is that Sunday liturgy is a family celebration. For many families Sunday liturgy is a time of unity and fellowship as a family. For some others, Sunday is the only time the family gets together. Priests appear to be concerned that if the Sunday gathering happens to be disruptive, it may have a deeper rippling effect in the society as such. So they tend to make Sunday as pleasant time of worship as possible. Another repetitive theme in the priests' response was the attempt to focus on the positive aspects of life in general. This affirmation based approach promoted the goodness in each individual and encouraged the

appreciation of each other, rather than focusing on the negatives and failures in the relationship.

Issues of confidentiality.

Another major reason that came up as part of the answers to why participants were not preaching against spousal abuse is the issue of confidentiality. Priests are concerned if they make reference in a homily to spousal abuse or to any relationship issues, that someone would relate it to what ever they have shared to priests in personal conferences or in private confessions. Priests were worried that it would damage the trust and confidentiality of those individuals. Adding to this fear Matthew says:

> We are not to preach one against the other…we cannot side with men or women…if we know a parishioner who has a marital problem and if they are present in the Church, you cannot talk about spousal abuse issues…because they might think that it is about them; then it becomes a breach of confidentiality. And it generates further problems. We preach for all and what we want is unity and love, not division. Because we give counseling, preaching against spousal abuse may betray the trust.

Thaddeus alluded to the theme of spousal abuse regularly and preached the whole month of October on different aspects of violence and abuse. He invites people from the pew to come to the sanctuary and speak against all forms of abuse. The last Sunday of the month of October, he together with the people, takes the pledge of non-violence. Although he is concerned about the sensitiveness of confidentiality issues he circumvents the concern and says: “I tell them often, that what ever I am referring

[to] in homily has no connection to any living human person. Often I relate it to a movie…and everybody knows that I go for a lot of movies." Philip, who preaches on women's plight and social justice issues occasionally, says: " I know that it makes some people uncomfortable…but it is okay; homily time is not a happy hour either. I try to make it a self criticism." Bartholomew, who is also concerned with the trust issue says: "I do not preach a whole homily on abuse…but I have one-liners that are good enough for the people to know where I stand on these issues and what the Church teaches."

Pithy phrases.

"One-liners" (short, pithy phrases) were another response that two priests shared they used. Bartholomew and John are two priests who use one-liners occasionally in their homilies. They both rationalized these one-liners. John says: "In order to convey a message you do not need to say a lot." When they are asked for the most used "one liners", Bartholomew said: "no husband ever a has right to hit his wife," "nobody should be in a marriage where she is abused and treated like a slave." John says: "God never wants any one to suffer unjustly," "God does not want any person to be treated in an abusive way."

To the question "What would happen if nobody speaks against spousal abuse?" only two participants directly responded. These are the two priests who occasionally preach against spousal abuse. They both share African ethnicity. Both of them shared the same thinking. Philip says: "People may think that it is okay to abuse." Thaddeus says: "It [spousal abuse] will be an acceptable behavior. It already is for many."

In short, the lack of awareness of priests about spousal abuse on a professional level is revealing both about the priesthood as an institution and as an individual's response to the call of God to serve His people. The participants appeared to be struggling between administrative pressure, political correctness and personal knowledge of the sufferings, and brokenness and woundedness they witness. In summary, the study found on a professional level that the priests understanding and reaction of spousal abuse is intertwined with the institution of priesthood and bureaucracy of Church. The participants reflected the struggle that they experience between their knowledge of suffering and their eagerness not to get involved in the controversial issues of family life. Following is the third and final category, the responses of priests to spousal abuse.

Responses

The third research question: "How do Catholic priests address the issue of spousal abuse within the families and the parish community at large?" is being answered in this third and final category. The priests' response to spousal abuse had many features in common. They tend to avoid if it is possible. Their overall approach to the issue was of caution and staying back. They were eager to justify this attitude via a variety of reasons; they are too busy, burnt out, self protection, there is no system to protect or support them, lack of expertise, do not interfere or intrude into the private matters of people, helplessness, limited authority, cannot do much in one session, silent witness, all I can do is to pray. On a positive note, priests use counseling skills they have acquired over time. They brought God into the counseling session. They do not talk the victim into staying the abusive relationship and they

make referrals to professionals. The three themes that emerged in the data analysis are the following: priest to the person, priest to the parish, and priest to self.

Priest to the Person

The answers of the participants are so similar that with the third interview, responses in similar words or with the same pattern were showing up. In this section, I present the responses of priests to the person who is seeking the priests' counsel. All of the participants used the same approach in asking further questions and in helping the person to think through the problem, making sure of the safety of the person, discovering the inner strength of the person, helping to differentiate momentum from the real issues, fatherly accepting and praying for the person, and respecting the decisions of the person. The most repetitive responses are as follows.

Listening and asking questions.

To listen and to ask questions are the first steps the participants identified as their responses to the victim. All the participants say they would attentively listen to the words and to the feeling of the person. Two of them describe the process of listening. The priests reassured them that they are there for the victims and avoided any judgments about the person or on the context. Generally as the first part of their meeting with the abused, all priests listened and asked questions regarding the victims' history and plans for the future. In order to provide a general response pattern, I am presenting four of them. Explaining his responses to the victim, Andrew says:

> I listen and listen to her…avoid judgments and I reassure her that I will be a pastoral advocate for her. I tell her that I will help her in whatever way I can. I

> let her know that I care for her. In the conversation, as I listen to the story, I would ask: 'How long this has been going on? Who knows this? Does her family know this? Why she is coming now? What is the intensity of the problem? What has she has done so far? What would she really like to do now?'

Describing his response and style, Philip says: "I will sit with her and listen to the type of problem or abuse she is suffering. As a priest, I would try to be sensitive and compassionate to the needs of the woman. I will ask questions to find out more of the characteristics of the abuse she is suffering…I console her and try to give hope." Matthias says, describing his response style: "I am here to listen to her or him. In general I tend to ask a lot of questions. By asking many questions they are helped to look into issues and find answers for themselves. I tell her up front that I am not here to provide answers or judgments." Matthew, explaining his response, says:

> I try to understand what is really happening in their lives and how open they are to my involvement. I check to see whether they really want my help. I try to get both parties together. I try to speak to and listen to them separately and together…then I get an idea where they come from…their willingness…and what are their expectations from me. I try to respect their privacy and do not refer to what they mentioned in the private session. This helps me to earn their trust…and they know the confidentiality is serious. I emphasize the way of life, communication, level of confidence in each other, level of intimacy and closeness in their relationship; I encourage them to think back not to the problem but to the beginning of [their] relationship. So I listen to them, and

try to understand their mindset, their purpose of coming now, what they plan to achieve.

Concerns of safety.

The issues of safety are the next concern priests discussed with the victim. All the participants were concerned about the safety of the victim. They made conscious attempts to convince the victim that her safety is the most important issue. Thaddeus, describing his response to the person in need says: "My first question is; Are you in a place that is safe? If the person is afraid of the abuser, I will help her to find a safe place. I am not trying to solve the problem in one sitting but to help the person to ask some questions to herself. Why are you here now? What is the history of the problem?" Responding to the same cue, Matthias says:

> I ask the person if she has a child and how the child is treated now. If badly what would she do? Would she protect the child and leave the abusive environment? That is what she has to do now. This person is a child of God and she has to protect herself first. Taking [accepting] abuse is against God's gift, which is our life.

James, sharing how he prioritizes safety, explains; "The priority is for the safety of women and children. I help the person to be calm…I listen to them…. No judgment and suggestions until she is ready to listen." Adding another concern, John says: "If there is a possibility of danger for her life, I recommend her to move away [so] that she protects herself."

Explore the options.

Helping to explore options is another type of response. All of the participants shared this notion of helping the victim to explore all the options. As the victim becomes open to talking and seeing things in a context of confidentiality and security, the priests begin to help the person to explore their options. Even though priests discussed divorce as one of the options, they did not encourage it. If safety requires divorce, two priests are willing to consider it as an option. Describing his further response to the victim, John says: "After listening to her and praying with her, I will talk about all her possible options and choices. I take time to listen and care for the person." Peter explaining how he sees things differently says:

> I ask the person to consider God's presence in her life, and pray to find out what would be the best for her in God's plan…I want her to consider the whole issue…to realize that the marriage is a covenant not a contract. If it is beneficial for both parties to have the marriage annulled. I want her to see that as a possibility not as an encouragement, because I want them to save their marriage.
>
> But I make sure that she understands that allowing herself to be abused is a sin.

Philip shares his views further and explains: "I discuss with her all the options she has. Even if some of them are a remote possibility, it is still a possibility. I try to make a balance…and help her to give a rationale why and how what she thinks are the best decisions for her."

Discover the inner strength.

Discovering the inner strength is another category of responses. There is greater commonality in this area of the priests' responses to the abused. Matthias, describing how he helps the victim to discover the inner strength, says:

> I help the person to discover her inner strength…. It would enable her to know her strength and defend it. I suggest that she sees a lawyer so that she may know the rights of all people involved in it. She can protect her rights only if she knows them….I suggest for her, if possible, to have a dialogue on the issue of abuse with the abuser…if she needs any help I will be there for her. Another aspect of inner strength is realizing the presence of God, so I encourage her to pray.

Explaining his responses on focusing the spiritual strength of the victim, Matthew says:

> I introduce spirituality…and I ask them to see the total picture of the issue. I suggest them the role of prayer and meditation in understanding the problem fully. I explain to them how forgiveness is needed in any relationship and how that strengthens the intimacy. I remind them that change is a very slow process and they should not expect it overnight.

Responding to the same question in another way, James says: "I focus on the strength and ask them to see the options and suggest alternative methods to approach." Answering to the same issue, Thomas says: "I talk about communication pattern, problem solving skills that have been used so far, sensitivity issues like their words,

gestures, and if they like to try, I recommend them the marriage encounter for the troubled marriage."

Thaddeus, further describing his response says: "I don't ask her to forgive any one but I suggest to her the power of forgiveness and the spiritual power it can bring to life." Peter answering to the same question says: "I suggest to her to consider living in the presence of God, a life in the grace, where God's plan for her has to be considered in decision making."

Differentiation of emotions from issues.

Differentiating momentum from real issues is another kind of response. This step is one in which priests are asking victims to consider alternatives. It is interesting they never told any one to postpone the decision but suggested alternatives to slow down and see the whole issue. Explaining his approach on the responses, Matthew says:

> I do not recommend divorce…. I think a lot of divorces that take place are decided on the momentum of hurt, pain, anger and frustration. Many divorces could have been avoided. I suggest to separate if needed…take time…don't be in a hurry…. Reconsider all options…and consider the issues and consequences as two separate levels…. I try to help them to differentiate the actual issues and the pain that is experienced at the time. When they do that…they realize there is more to life…and to this relationship.

Philip, describing his response, says: "Once the person knows all the options, I let her have some time to think about it, and chose a decision…. I will ask her to explain the decision and why…. It is a reinforcing process…. I support the decision and help her

to believe in her decision-making ability. If she is scared, I help to console and motivate." Matthias, sharing his response, says:

> By asking questions, I hope to open up their vision of the problem and of themselves. When we are hurt…betrayed or violated it is hard to see the whole.… By asking questions and helping [them] to have answers, the focus would be solutions based on the inner strength of all the people involved. This would reduce the hatred and anger they feel to the other person.

Fatherly acceptance.

Another set of responses is the fatherly acceptance of the victim. All the participants share the response of John regarding the attitude to the victim. John, delineating his response and the environment of intervention, says:

> My response to a victim is of a father…it is a fatherly acceptance…. No matter what the problem is…I am not to make judgments. I will always continue to invite them to come back and talk, and we can find out options. I encourage her to see her doctor, other professionals and therapists…and to talk to friends…to use all resources. I encourage everyone to be sensitive to personal issues. I try to be welcoming, sensitive, and develop trustworthiness. I tell again and again, that they do not, and need not go on with abuse, and it is not God's will for them. They need not take abuse and violence and it is not what the Church thinks about sacrifice and prayer. I try to give perspectives…understand their pain, and be sympathetic to their reactions.

When the participants are asked about their reaction to the suffering and pain the victims describe and share with them, the participants agree with John's attitude and response:

> I feel sad for the family and for the children. I also feel angry for the family especially if you know them personally…. When divorce or separation happens the family is ripped off, but at the same time there is no point in suffering abuse and violence in a relationship. I neither condemn anyone, nor condone anyone, but try to be there for them. I feel their pain and suffering but ultimately it is up to them…they have to make the decision and live it the rest of their life.

Answering the same question, Matthew says: "It is hurting…you try your best to be a part of the family as their priest. I approach the whole issue in a priestly response.… I will express how I feel about the pain." Thaddeus and Philip, the two priests who preach directly on spousal abuse, share the same feeling. They say they are "angry and furious," and they let the victim know how they feel about what the victim is going through. Matthias shares his reaction in these words: "I am here as a spiritual presence…to share the compassion of Jesus…. I have no problem in naming my emotions that she may know her feelings are legitimate."

Pray and respect.

Prayer and respect for the decisions of the victim are the priests' seventh and last set of responses. All the participants concluded almost in the same way saying that they will pray with the person and will continue to pray for the person. They

respect whatever decision she/he makes, they are there, and she/he can come [to see them] at any time. Bartholomew describes how he would conclude and says:

> I tell her, that she needs to be healed regardless of what decision she makes on the relationship. For the healing I give two rules. Rule one is this, everyday when you get up in the morning, look in the mirror and say, 'Lord I like the way you made me. I am so happy as who I am'. Then I explain it to her…if I don't like who I am, I can never let go my anger, and I can never forgive anybody. It is like I am locked up in a tunnel. The second rule is to look in the mirror and repeat, 'Lord if anyone needs to be forgiven for hurting me, I forgive.' Then I explain it to her…no matter what anyone did to me if I don't forgive, I make myself a slave of that hurt…. So I have to forgive across the board. I tell her to do this everyday and it will give her the strength to stand up and say no to abuse. I will pray with her and remind her that I respect whatever decision she makes.

Similarly, Matthew sharing how he concludes a session with an abused says:

> I appreciate her coming to me…I thank her for talking to me…and reaffirm the confidentiality of the discussion…. Will remind her to think in terms of this issue now, and to think the [of] solutions in terms of the context of the total picture and future. I will repeat what I said earlier that change is a process and she should not expect overnight change. Perseverance is the key and that happens only if there is a reason to do that. I affirm that she makes the decision and I will respect it. I will ask whether she has any questions, if not, we will pray, and I will walk her to the front door.

Explaining his pattern of concluding, Thaddeus says: "I will ask her to summarize our discussion…to make sure she understands me clearly.… And reaffirm that God loves her and this suffering is not a punishment but it is an opportunity.… I will pray with her and let her know that I care, and respect her decision and that she can call me any time." Sharing how he concludes the meeting with a victim, John says: "I will pray and bless her, and let her know that she has a right to call me if needed."

In summary, the study found that in spite of lack of formal training all the participants are compassionate and listen to the individual victims. The priests' response could be viewed as a seven-step process. Their intervention has a solution-oriented focus for the individual victim. Their approach was pastoral and caring for the person. Given the fact that the priests are not trained in counseling, the participants showed pastoral sensitivity to the ailing member of the Church. Overall the priests were there for the individual victim as their priest and shepherd. Next, the priests response to the parish community at large is discussed.

Priest to the People (Parish)

This second theme is priests response to the community at large to which they minister. There was no common program that priests did in all parishes. The findings demonstrate that individual priests responses that are not general activities in all parishes. Priests' responses are both supportive actions and preventive actions as shepherds of the people. The supportive actions are actions that are oriented to those who might be going through struggling relationships or abusive relationships.

Supportive responses.

The study found only four participants who had something to offer in this part of the research. In general, the priests offered little or no programs to the parish community at large especially to support abused or struggling families. The major themes are: marriage encounter programs, prayer groups, pastoral follow-up, and support groups for the divorced and single.

The marriage encounter program is one of the most used responses of priests to the struggling families. Out of 11 participants, four said that they would suggest and recommend to the struggling or abusive family to participate in marriage encounter weekend called "Retrouville." It is a diocesan program to rejuvenate struggling marriages. Both husband and wife have to participate together in a weekend retreat. This program is not one that deals with abuse issues, but is a spiritual weekend. None of the participants ever participated in this program nor know of the content of the program.

A prayer group is another program that is offered to the parish as a supportive action. Three out of the four who responded with the Retrouville suggestion also say that they suggest to the victims to participate in a prayer group so that they may have some social and spiritual support. Prayer groups are usually a small group of people of the parish community who gather once a week either at the Church or in one of the homes and they read the scripture and meditate and pray. Generally prayer group members offer mutual emotional and spiritual support to each other, so there will be a sense of solidarity and fellowship. Only three priests have such option in their parishes.

Another supportive activity of the priests to the parish community was to have follow-up chit-chats with the concerned families or individuals. Matthew says: "I make it a point to see them on Sunday and check with them." In the same line, Philip says: "I kind of look for them on Sundays or at the time they come to the Church, and they know it." Only two priests said they do some sort of specific follow-up with the victim.

The support group for the divorced and single is another supportive program that is offered in one parish. A divorced woman, who realized that there was no support from the Church for the abused and divorced, initiated this program. Matthew, who assists in this program, says: "We have a group for singles and divorced…. It is a great group for mutual support and encouragement. I encourage…and invite parishioners…. In Sunday announcements if they qualify, I invite them to participate in those groups." He continues that, "We have a full-time counselor in the staff that parishioners have access to with a reduced fee." Out of the eleven participants, only one Church had such program and it is a diocesan program to help troubled youth and their families.

Preventive responses.

The study found very little or no community preventive measures taken by the priests that would support healthy families and better communities. All the programs participants share follow.

Prayer in the mass is the only response that all participants report. All of the participants report that in the month of October they had included prayers for all those

who are victims of violence and abuse. Prayers are included for unborn children, sick and suffering, and priests assume spousal abuse will be included in those prayers.

Wedding preparation is another preventive measure many participants share. Out of the 11 participants, six say that they include spousal abuse and violence in their marriage preparation sessions with engaged couples. Explaining his method of marriage preparation, Matthew says: "I ask them to think and see what baggage they bring to this new relationship?…. The histories and heritages of their families of origin…and what they hate and like in their own parents'. I ask them, 'Are there any abuse and violence in their families and how do they respond to it?" To the same question, Andrew and Peter replied that they mention the issues of abuse and violence in relationships but do not discuss it in detail. Responding to the same question, John says: "I tell them to talk to me about their parents' marriage and what they like and dislike…so I get an idea. Depending on that, I discuss spousal abuse with them. Sometimes, if I don't see the compatibility in their relationship I explore it a little more." Bartholomew and Thaddeus share the same strategy as they explain their perspective. Bartholomew says: "I ask them, since they have been dating, were there any instances of outbreaks of anger between them? And how was it expressed and who did what? I make it very clear that dating abuse and violence is a clear prediction for future trouble."

Another area of the priests' community response is the baptism preparation. Three participants said that they use the opportunity of baptism preparation class and the celebration of baptism to talk about relationship and spousal issues. Three of them stated that they use either both sessions or at least one to include spousal abuse

concerns in the liturgy. Matthew says: "The baptized baby doesn't understand anything…then the next involved people are parents and godparents. So I talk to them and to those who are present. I make it a point that the child has a right to live in a loving and nonviolent home." Andrew and James share the same line of thinking. They both say that they do not teach baptism preparation classes, but they mention it in the homily of baptism. The responsibility of parents is to be loving and respectful to each other and to provide a home that is nonviolent and mutually enhancing to the baby.

Preaching in the mass is another preventive measure of response to the parish community. Unfortunately it is foreign to the participants, even though the National Catholic Bishops Conference (1992, 1994) has asked for it. Only two priests ever preached directly against spousal abuse at their Churches. One priest has preached once, in the context of September 11, 2001, on terrorism and violence. Two others have alluded to it. Philip says: "Spousal abuse is a social justice issue, so preaching against it has a healing…and preventive effect." Thaddeus, who also coordinates the one month program in his parish which concludes with a parish non-violence pledge, says: "Preaching in mass is preaching to the whole family together…and makes people realize that abuse in relationship is not okay." Bartholomew, the senior priest and mission preacher, is of the opinion that one-lines (short, pithy phrases) will do the job and uses single lines of message whenever he refers to the family.

The parish bulletin announcement is another preventive program some priests coordinate. Two priests said that they provide information on the counselors in the parish area so that the people or families may use them, if needed, in their

relationships or in their extended family. Mentioning the bulletin news, Andrew says: "I have this box news in the front page of the weekly bulletin, that some one who is in need may know where to go." He continues: "I have the Retrouville information available in the bulletin once every month."

A non-violence group is another preventive program one participant offers to his parish community. Matthias, who worked for 22 years as an international attorney and has been a priest for 11 months, coordinates a group every Wednesday evening to teach and practice non-violence. He had invited all members of the parish to join and take a pledge of non-violence as a preventive measure against violence of all sorts in the pursuit of discipleship.

These are the responses that priests as shepherds offer to the parish community. Surprisingly there is no coordinated effort either on the part of the diocese and or on the part of the priests. The study found that the priests are experiencing a dual dilemma in responding to the abuse and the woundedness they witness. They struggle at the pain and suffering they see as priests and as individuals, they struggle to cope with what they see and hear in their personal lives.

As a summary of priests response regarding spousal abuse to the parish community, the study found neither a collective effort to heal the wounds and prevent further harm nor any leadership based on what the priests know about the prevalence of spousal abuse. The researcher was curious to know how the priests respond to the knowledge of suffering, brokenness and abuse they encounter everyday. The next section discusses their feelings and responses.

Priest to Self

This section is the third theme of priests' response to spousal abuse which reports the findings of how priests respond to themselves at the knowledge of the woundedness, brokenness, pain and suffering they witness together with the pleasant and happy events of life they witness. The Catholic priest is privileged to be part of their parish members' family at the most vulnerable times as well as times that are trying such as sickness, hospitalization, death, funerals, and times that are exciting such as births and baptism, first communion, confirmation and marriage. These and other personal and privileged access to their members through confession and personal conferences provides them an inside view of life. How the participants respond and cope with this intense experience of emotions was of interest. In response the participants identified three themes as their coping mechanisms: prayer, escape route, and [I] don't take it as personal. It appears all the participants share the following response of Peter:

> The life of a priest is very interesting…I did not know this emotional aspect of the ministry until I was in a parish as a seminarian. It is very exhausting…and very demanding…but it is very, very rewarding. When you see a family resolving their problems…having fun…and surviving their relationship problems, it is very rewarding that you could make a difference. This life is certainly worth it…I do not know how to cope with every one…if you look at our priests many are physically sick or having health problems.

The answers to the question what do they do to cope with what they know, were very similar and again there is uniformity in perception and reaction. The responses are reported in four different groups.

The participants express prayer as the most important and powerful coping mechanism. Prayer for the involved people and prayer for themselves were the most used response of the priests. To the question "what do you do to cope with the emotional toll?" Simon, who has been a priest only for 3 months, says: "Priesthood expects a deep prayer life…. Priesthood is based on prayer for me and for the people whom I serve." Peter, another young priest, says: "I lift all the people whom I dealt with that day…to the Lord and ask him to take care of them. I am working for Him, and I believe He will take care of them.

Bartholomew, who has been a priest for 46 years, says:

> Well, this is why the priests have to be praying…. There has to be such relationship with the Lord that you feel for the people and be able to start the next day new. Let us face it that we are not God; we can do only so much…the rest, we have to hand over to him. We see that the priests who are not praying enough have serious trouble in their lives.

Matthew, who is in his silver jubilee year of ordination and works with Hispanic, Indian and Anglo community members, says: "Your prayer life, meditation are so important….Your purpose in life makes you do it [pray], no matter how busy you are." John, who works in a large parish with 4 assistant priests, says: "Prayer is the only way to reconcile with our limitations and the tremendous life stories we deal with everyday. I know ultimately I am not the person in charge…. Jesus Christ is in

charge." Matthias, who worked extensively as an attorney and who has been a priest only for 11 months, says: "I see the people who come to me as opportunities for me to be the bridge between them and God…. So prayer is the way I cope." All the participants shared the thought that without prayer, you cannot survive as a priest, but with prayer it is a wonderful life of healing and caring ministry.

Another major theme that priests shared is the escape routes they use to deal with what they see and hear. All the participants share different and personalized tactics to relax and cope with the stress of their daily life. Answering this question, Thomas says: "See the coping methods are very limited…. Like other professions we cannot go to friends after the work, and tell them what you had to deal with the whole day…because there is an issue of confidentiality."

The most used escape route is music, both listening and playing a musical instrument. All participants agree that listening to good music and collapsing into your sofa is very relaxing. Four participants agree that they play some musical instrument at least a few times a week. The participants agreed also that music helps them to cope with the stress of daily life. Thaddeus, explaining how music helps him to cope with the stress, says: "I love music and it is a great release for me. My mother made me to learn piano, and I hated it with passion until one day I played in public and the complements…turned me onto piano. It is a way of letting go and not holding in. A piece of music can do wonders for me in five minutes."

Out of the 11 participants, six had something in common as an escape route – the movies. They all agree that to watch a movie is so helpful. They know the movie is not about reality, and they do not have to deal with it. All the more, whatever the

problems are, there will be a solution within two hours. Explaining his views, James says: “I love movies. I go for a movie for myself…a kind of an escape and completely removed from everything. It gives me a distance from all the problems…. For that two hours, I have a different world…without responsibility and pain…by myself and for myself.” Thaddeus, sharing why he loves movies so much, says:

> I love movies…part of this is, I guess, you have to have a connection with something that has nothing whatsoever to do with the reality that you deal with everyday. In one sense my fantasy life is movies…. I never liked dramas but movies have no connection to what I deal with and they solve all problems within two hours…so you have a sense of finality.

Thomas gave another reason for loving movies as an escape route. He says: “movies are cheap and convenient and you have your selections…and options.”

Another most used medium is television. All the participants agree that television helps so much, “not for listening but to have some background noise in the house when you come home at night or [in the] evening after all the meetings [when you go] to the room,” declared James. Out of 11 participants, ten participants agree that turning on the television is one of the first things they do as they come back to their home from work. Another escape route is watching sports and games. All the participants agree that they enjoy watching games on television. Thaddeus explains how “what everybody calls the male zone –the Sunday football- helps me to relate to the people in a different level and let them know that we need them to relate.”

Another escape route used is physical activity such as walking, hiking and fishing. Three priests used those words as areas of interest for them as coping skills.

Andrew says: “On my off-day I go for a walk almost for the whole day…. I guess it is more than walking. One of my friends has a farm. He lets me use that for walking. It is very energizing and rejuvenating.” Explaining his strategy, Peter says: “eating properly, healthy food, drinking enough water, sleeping sufficiently and exercising are my primary coping mechanisms.”

Another approach is that they do not personalize the problems. The participants agree that one of the keys to survival is non-personalization of events. Priests agree non-personalization is second to prayer as a coping mechanism. Reflectively, James says: “We are called to enter fully into a lot of things, it is a vocation…. to live every moment in its fullness. I live in each moment. I think if anyone tries to make personal all that happens on a day, it is scary because so many things intrude…opposing emotions. In many you are the presider too. I do not personalize the problems…do whatever you can to help.” Explaining his strategy of non-personalization John says:

> I do not take things unnecessarily as personal…. I remind myself that there is a limit [to] what I can do, no matter what I want to do. I am just an instrument and that consciousness is my safety net. One another thing that I keep in mind is that one day, I will have to go, just like any other death…. I don’t overdo myself. I use the prayer of Pope John XXIII as my prayer; Lord now I turn this over to you, after all it is your Church and people so take care of it.

In the same line of thought, Philip says: “I try to participate in the problems of others but not to make them my own. The problems I hear and see are not mine.” Matthew, presenting his views on coping, says:

> You have a personal life, social life, and everyday you deal with different problems and contexts. You do not personalize the problems; the problem, and the individual, and you are not the same…. So you do not own the issues, but you try to be part of solutions. It is gratifying to be part of the solution. You don't hold on to problems. Your daily activities and spirituality helps you to recover from the pain that you have shared.

Overall, the participants of this study varied in their age span, years of ordination, education, and cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Yet the study found there is striking uniformity in how each priest responds to spousal abuse. The participants were compassionate and caring to the individual victims on a personal level. To the parish community as the shepherds, they were evasive and non-committing in their responses against spousal abuse. Even though the majority of the attendance and supporters of the Church functions and programs are women, the priests did little or nothing to address the plight of women in the parish community. The experiences of priests may actually demonstrate that priests are privileged to have access and information on spousal abuse perhaps more than any other institutions of society because of their access to homes of parishioners and the victim's access to the priests. It appears that priests are struggling to live the proclaimed mission of their lives and of the Church: "to bring good news to the afflicted…to proclaim liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free…" (*The New Jerusalem Bible*, 1990, p. 1964)

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory investigation of the understanding and responses of Catholic priests to spousal abuse. The research questions guiding this study focused on three areas of inquiry: (a) What are Catholic priests' perceptions regarding spousal abuse? (b) How do Catholic priests personally understand spousal abuse? (c) How do Catholic priests address the issue of spousal abuse within families and the parish community at large? A qualitative design was used to explore these areas, and data were analyzed inductively using the constant comparative method.

Thirteen Catholic priests were interviewed, but two priests did not complete the interview. Hence the study had 11 participants. They were purposefully identified and selected with the help of a focus group and snowball sampling. They were interviewed for one and a half to two and a half hours and the interviews took place in their offices. All the participants are actively working priests in a metropolitan diocese in an urban city of the Southeastern United States. Semi-structured interviews provided the major data for the study. Two priests were contacted for follow-up data clarification. Three documents of the Catholic Church, related to spousal abuse, were used as supplemental data. Throughout this chapter the words priests and participants and victims and abused are used interchangeably.

In the data analysis, three major categories emerged. They are perceptions of the Catholic priests, the priests' understanding of abuse, and their responses. In the category of the priests' perceptions, two major themes appeared. They are common forms of abuse and contributing factors to abuse. The category of understanding of Catholic priests on spousal abuse revealed two levels in understanding: personal and professional. In the personal level of understanding, three themes, psychological, social and church related, emerged. The priests maintained that spouse abuse's private and personal nature and the necessity of their spending a lot of time on the matter if they addressed it fully justified their non-involvement. In the professional level, three themes emerged: lack of training, lack of knowledge of resources, and reasons not to preach against spousal abuse. Further, in the analysis a third category of responses of priests emerged. The major themes evolved are priest to the person, priest to the parish community, and priest to self. This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from these findings, implications for practice and theory, and recommendations for further practice and research.

Conclusions and Discussion

Four general conclusions are derived from the findings of this study and they are as follows: (a) Priests' have a general understanding of spousal abuse; (b) Priests' responses to the individual victim are of pastoral compassion and "band-aid" solutions; (c) Priests' response to the parish community is limited and evasive; and (d) Priests lack basic knowledge of both the community and of Church resources and documents. The three documents used as supplemental sources of data clearly stated that the Catholic Church does not require women to stay in abusive relationships.

Further, the documents urged priests to help abused women find safe places to stay, however, the participants of the study were uninformed about these documents. The National Bishops Conference (1992) clearly states that the role of the priests is to shepherd the abused and help them to free themselves from abuse, however, there seemed to be consistent inabilities in the priests capability to help and shepherd abused women.

Priests' Have A General Understanding of Spousal Abuse

The participants were aware of the many forms of abuse that occur in the spousal relationship. They were also aware of the general nature of spousal abuse (Mignon, et. al., 2002). The participants were able to identify the common forms of abuse as well as demonstrating an elementary knowledge of spousal abuse and its effect (Clark, 1986; Wallace, 2002; Walker, 1979), but they did not have an elementary knowledge of the Catholic Church's documents on spousal abuse and family. The priests agreed that they are aware of spousal abuse and its presence in all ethnic and racial families and that no ethnic group is better than the other. This knowledge conforms to the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (1994, 2000) statement that domestic violence is statistically consistent across all racial and ethnic boundaries. The priests also understood, consistent with current research findings (Emery & Laumann-Billings, 1998; O'Leary, 1993), that there are different types of abuse and violence in families and it needs different types of intervention. Priests also agreed that there is common couple violence or abuse which never escalates into injurious or life threatening behaviors, which is also consistent with current research in the area of spousal abuse (Johnson, 1995). The participants maintained the idea that in the

majority of couple abuse and violence both partners instigate the actions. Participants shared the beliefs of Simon, the youngest in ordination, who says: "…every coin has two sides." This way of thinking is not vastly different from current popular thinking (Bradbury & Lawrence, 1999). The priests also agreed that, even though both partners may assault each other, male batterers more often engage in extreme psychological and physically abusive actions, thus concurring with available research on the subject (Arriaga & Oskamp, 1999).

Participants knew that when abuse occurs in a relationship it is not an occasional or sporadic event but it has a pattern. They are aware of the cycles of abuse. Walker (1979) identifies three phases of abuse and violence in relationships: tension building phase, an acute battering phase, and a honeymoon phase. Bartholomew, the oldest of the priests, could paraphrase the same three stages of cycle of violence.

The priests also are aware of the intergenerational nature of abuse. Wallace (2002) writes: "Children who are victims of child abuse or who witness violent aggression by one spouse against the other will grow up and react to their children or spouses in the same manner. The childhood survivor of a violent family thus develops a predisposition toward violence in his or her own family" (p. 21). Discussing the intergenerational cycle of abuse John, who shared his own family experience, reflected on his pastoral experience and acknowledged the reality of intergenerational cycle of abuse in community.

All the participants agreed that they are aware of the increasing diversity of their parish and also of the cultural context and impact on spousal abuse. They knew

that the cultural and racial heritage of the family has an impact on spousal abuse. They also understood that the ethnic and patriarchal background of the family might perpetuate spousal abuse in a hidden manner. But the participants failed to consistently address the issue in a sensitive and pastoral way in spite of their knowledge of witnessing both the cycle of abuse and the intergenerational nature of spousal abuse.

Priests are hesitant to include sexual abuse within the marriage as spousal abuse; they rather insisted that mutual responsibility and rights in the relationship were personal and private to the spouses. The study suggests that the reluctance of priests to include sexual abuse within marriage as abuse could be due to two reasons. First, as Adam (1994) suggests, the victims, who are women, might not be comfortable in sharing these experiences with a male priest as sexual abuse, because of the possible expectation or misunderstanding of gender roles in their marriage. Secondly, priests might not be paying attention to it because of their perceived understanding that within marriage the husband has a right to a sexual relationship. Bishop Ramirez (2001) acknowledges: "violence in any form – physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal – is sinful; many times, it is a crime as well" (p. 5). He continues, "Furthermore, we are aware that the Church ministers have failed, at times, to recognize domestic violence for what it is because of the way in which they, themselves, exercise power. *For this, we ask forgiveness.* (p. 7, emphasis in original) None of the participants shared such feelings of responsibility.

Participants identified the means of their knowledge of spousal abuse as follows: through individual appointments, phone calls, confessions, parish staff,

personal observation, retreats, and missions activities. Describing how he gets to know about spousal abuse issues, Peter says:

> Through contacts, via conferences with the individuals in the family, and through the confessions…. Through observing families, when they come to the Church for different activities, I get an idea of what is going on. As I talk to them…receive them and visit with them…. When I am invited to dinner in their home, I see and hear what is going on in their relationship. The occasions like wedding preparations, baptism preparations, and funeral planning, and funerals…you become part of the family and get to know the internal dynamics.

To this list Andrew adds another dimension: "Sometimes you hear the abuses in relationship in the confessional and you cannot do anything about it. I tell them they should get help and if they [would] like to discuss this, they have to call another time to the office and make an appointment. Many times you do not hear about it again." Hence priests, in contrast to any other institution of society, know spousal abuse with an insiders' view, but also may feel they cannot act upon it. When asked how the priest assesses the gravity of the abuse and the problem, the participants shared the answer of Andrew. Andrew, a 65 years old veteran priest, says: "If the problem is minor, both husband and wife are ready to come and sit with you. If not, [if it is serious], only the victim is wiling to come and discuss."

The concern Bishop Ramirez (2001) expressed in his pastoral letter that: "Our pastoral experience tells us that not only in the past, but even today, spouses – most often women – are exhorted to go home and try again…" are validated in this study.

The priests agree that almost always, the victims who seek their assistance are women and that they rarely support their leaving the home.

Overall, the Catholic priests in this study had a rudimentary knowledge of the forms and factors contributing to spousal abuse. While priests are aware that spousal abuse could be physical and psychological, sexual and spiritual, it is doubtful that they are sensitive to more subtle forms of psychological abuse such as male privilege, withholding emotions, and claiming the "truth". They seemed uninformed about economic and sexual abuse. In general, the Bishops Conference' (1992) statement mirrors the priests' response: "Abuse is a topic that no one likes to think about" (p. 1).

Priests' Responses to the Individual Victim are of Pastoral Compassion and "Band-aid" Solutions

Priests most often take a passive stance in addressing spousal abuse but when they are called upon to respond, they use pastoral compassion and "band-aid" solutions. However, this study also revealed that priests, in spite of their lack of training in counseling, are helpful to the victims, but their interaction is primarily a "band-aid" solution based on pastoral compassion. All the participants agreed that they do not delve into the problems and normally their intervention is a single session. The priests' response to the individual victim is pastoral as they manifest fatherly acceptance of the victim, non-judgmental listening, helping the victim to discover her inner strength, and they pray with her and subsequently respect any decisions the victim makes. Their response is to they help the victim to identify issues of safety, explore her options [although they have limited knowledge of options] and to differentiate the momentum of anger and pain from the issues of abuse and

relationships, often in a single session. There is no further exploration or solution than one session. Priests do not invite abused church members to come forward. They do not address spousal abuse issues in public. They respond only if some one comes to them. Even in those cases their interaction is of avoidance, thus creating only a "band-aid" for the problem.

The findings of the study, as an explorative investigation, provide a different perspective than the Milwaukee study (Bowker, 1982) regarding the number of sessions clergy provided to the abused as intervention. In the Milwaukee study, Bowker (1982) reports: "The average request for help resulted in eleven separate counseling sessions or other instances of help, extending over a period of four months" (p. 229). This study on Catholic priests finds participants provide single sessions only and ask the victim to call them if they needed to talk further. All participants agreed that they seldom call for another session, but some victims let priests know that there is progress and it is slow. This response also concurs with the only available study of pastoral responses to spousal abuse. Lake (1982) reported in *Women's Day* magazine study that 35 % of referred clergy are Catholic priests. It was further reported in this study that priests help was not effective in the long-term. If a priest's response were just band-aid solution and not based on systemic change there would not have been any long-term effect.

The Milwaukee study (Bowker, 1982) reported that victims rated clergy assistance as the lowest in usefulness. The study (Bowker, 1982) reported that: "As a group the clergy rated lower on effectiveness than most other formal help source" (p. 232). In contrast, all the participants assess their intervention as effective and

helpful to the victims. The participants interpret the victims' responses and conclude that since they were not called further for another session, that they were helpful and effective. Participants also agreed that the effectiveness of their intervention depends on the goodwill of the victim and all those involved and their church attendance, findings very similar to the Milwaukee study (Bowker, 1982) with regard to the relationship of effectiveness and Church attendance. "Members of the clergy tended to be most effective with families in which both husband and wife were frequent Church attendees…"(p. 232). The priests agreed that if victims and family were active members of the parish the outcome of their intervention would be better. Revealing the nature of the intervention, Matthew says:

> Since they [victims] are not paying [for the time] the motivation to use the time effectively may be less…but by [their particular] culture people [may] listen to us [priests] and take [us] seriously… respect our opinion. It is a privilege we have as priests. Regardless of our training, the little we do makes a difference.

Explaining further, Matthew continues: "we do not have the time to make a detailed intervention…we focus on a solution… I am glad to be part of the solution." Rationalizing his solution focused session with the victim, Philip says: "I try to quick fix the problems and the people only want a quick fix solution." To Philip's response, Thomas added his doubts and says: "I don't think people are interested in solving the problem…they want to manage it."

Although it seems priests are aware of their lack of training, they all agree that they are comfortable in dealing with spousal abuse. Priests appear focused not on the

cause but on the meaning of the suffering and the particular meaning the victim constructs for her situation in contrast to traditional interventions of domestic violence and spousal abuse which in particular are focused on the cause of abuse (Gergen, 1999; Wallace, 2002). This study also found that participants are trying to find an individual's particular way of constructing herself and navigating through abuse. Priests appear to construct the meaning of abuse and suffering together with the victims. On an individual level, priests did not impose their views on victims, but explored options together with them. Explaining how he makes sense of what he hears, James says: "I help the person to be calm…. I listen to them. I encourage them to speak. No judgment and suggestions until she is ready to listen…. I try to understand what makes sense to her." So the individual is given great latitude to speak, revealing possibly preferred constructions of meaning. Priests agree that they explore the options and discover the inner strength of the victims together with them. All the participants agree that they listen and listen until the participant is ready to clarify and answer questions. A further study on both why priests do not do follow-up of spousal abuse cases and why victims do not come for follow-up would reveal more on the polarity of meaning construction of priests and victims. Further study also may also expand the understanding of the avoidance strategies used by the priests due to the lack of training.

From a constructionist viewpoint, the reality of the mind is replaced with a concern for relationships (Gergen, 1999). It seems that for priests meaning is generated from relationships and the focus of decisions are based on relationships and family. This focus on family and relationship is clear in the response of all

participants. They saw their role not as cause analyzers of abuse but as John says: "I provide perspectives. I am there as the pastoral advocate… family is the context of our solutions." "My role is to bring balance," reflects Philip. "I do not have answers, answers are with the victims and all the involved people." "I am here to bridge them with God and others" says Matthias. Speaking similarly, Matthew said that he would ask the victim to place herself in the context of all her relationships; herself, children, family, extended family and friends and society.

The study revealed that the meetings of spousal abuse victims with the priests are short and single sessions. They are exploring options as temporary solutions; there was no exploring of feelings or talk about childhood experiences or analysis of causes of abuse or the past experiences of the abuser. All of the conversation is focused on a quick solution. Solutions create hope and goodwill, which constructs a new vision and meaning. The Catholic Church's concept of parish and priesthood converge into a pastoral compassion that helps the priests' co-construction of a solution as a response to the victim. The study reveals that priests' response to the victim is based on compassion and pastoral prudence. Priests agree the victims are helped when the conversation shifts to the goals and their potential resources for achieving these goals. All the participants agree that they affirmed both inner strengths and the possibilities for victims as they amplified the goals victims shared. They also agree that through conversation there emerged a plan for a better future - the aspired change. Needless to say, the lack of further sessions makes these responses a band-aid solution.

The priests' agree that victims' goals are vague and involve someone else doing something differently in order to make their lives more satisfying. Priests ask

questions and the questions help the victims and the priests to construct goal formulation. Respecting the victim but persistently asking questions and making reality-based observations of the inner strength of the victim to help them to expand their repertoire of strength. By admitting that they do not have answers, the priests encouraged the victim to be the expert about her own meanings and reality. The approach of priests to discover the inner strength of the victims also relates to the strength model of social constructionism (Franklin, 1995; Freedman & Combs, 1993). All the priests agree that the contributing factors and effects of spousal abuse are both personal and social, and that individual constructions can be reframed in a beneficial way for the well being all involved. The priests also claim to applaud the victim for her willingness to come and discuss the issue, to work for change in the victim's strength, and the victim's willingness to be a part of solution. It seems all the participants are inviting and helping the victims to answer questions beyond their problems through the process of co-construction of meaning but they in the second half of the equation, to nurture the newly constructed meaning and guide the victim to well being.

The experience of all the participants revealed how they respond to the victims. The priests share the words of Bartholomew, as he says: "Now each case is different… so is the response to it." The uniqueness of cases and the lack of priests training put them in an awkward position. They become caregivers to the victims while priests themselves lack emotional and social support, which adds to the complexity of the situation which arises from a lack of training and skill. In summary, the study found that priests' response to the victims is a process that is short-lived.

They do not use a cookie cutter solution, but they work with the victim toward temporary relief. This relief includes listening and asking questions, discussing the issues of safety, exploring the options, discovering inner strength, differentiating the momentum and issues at stake, fatherly acceptance, respecting the decisions victims make, and praying with the victim.

Priests' Response to Spousal Abuse in the Parish Community is Indifferent and Evasive

Although the priests are pastoral, compassionate and band-aid focused in their attempt to help the individual victims of spousal abuse, their response to the parish community, as shepherds, is evasive and ineffective. In their eagerness to be neutral and respectful to the private nature of relationship, they appear as both indifferent and evasive. In the chapter 3, I have extensively reported their perception of spousal abuse and their politically correct response to the abuse. Their responses might indicate that they identified safe and secure roles and excused themselves from controversial responsibilities. This playing-it-safe attitude of priests appears to be at the cost of victims' suffering. In their dual roles, priests are there also as shepherds to protect the sheep from harm.

Pope John Paul II (1981), reminding priests of their responsibilities, says: "every effort should be made to strengthen and develop pastoral care for the family, which should be treated as a real matter of priority, in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church" (p. 868). Urging the priests the Pope reiterates that: "no plan for organized pastoral work, at any level, must ever fail to take into consideration the pastoral care of the family" (p. 875). Yet the priests' responses largely ignored the concerns of the family and especially the needs of

women. The primary focus of the church is on the family, but the priests failed to respond to the needs of the family because of their concerns about meet the budget and avoiding controversies both in their parish and in their priestly life.

Although all the participants agree that they did not have any training on spousal abuse issues in seminary, there is a close similarity in their responses personally. The priests did try to intervene and all the participants had almost the same pattern of response to the victim regardless of priests age and experience. This finding could be a positive outcome and have a positive impact of the initial assignments of a new priest as a parochial vicar under the guidance and supervision of an experienced pastor. Explaining how he learned to respond to spousal abuse issues, Thomas, the youngest in age, says: " In the seminary we didn't have any practical courses on these issues…. What I have seen and observed other priests [do]…is my reference." If the seminaries began to address such issues in class, they new priests could serve as mentors for others.

Priests, as the leaders of their parish community, failed to have a common response to spousal abuse issues. Priests' response to their professional responsibility as shepherds was not only negligent but also displaced their own shortcomings on the system. All the participants showed some degree of eagerness to "play-it-safe." The priesthood is a sharing in the ministry and priesthood of Jesus Christ. Wuerl, et. al., (1994) writes: "Priests are ordained to continue the saving action of Christ in and through the sacraments" (p. 393). Further, Wuerl and colleagues continue: "In Christ's name he is to serve the word of God, bearing witness and evangelizing in His name, and to lead the Christian community and build Christian unity" (p. 397). By

being evasive and indifferent to spousal abuse priests challenge their own witnessing responsibility to be "another Christ." Ministerial priesthood actualizes in diocesan priesthood. When the priest who is a bridge between the people and God is disconnected and detached from his people, the existence and meaning of priesthood suffer.

Scapegoat

All the participants agree that they understand the existence of spousal abuse in the community, but they tend to displace their responsibility on the lack of training. The priests are blaming the system, the "lack of time," and "the lack of training," and so the seminary emerges as a "scapegoat" (Vanderhaar, 1997). Invariably all the participants shared their lack of training and how incompetent they felt as priests to help the abused. At the same time, they resisted the suggestion of the Bishop's Conference to preach against spousal abuse by presenting reasons for not preaching. Only two participants said that they self-teach by reading more on spousal abuse and violence and counseling skills. Lack of training as a façade protects the administrative interests of priests and serves also as a safety net to keep a distance from controversies. The priestly silence on spousal abuse has another negative ripple effect, the priests consciously or unconsciously create the divine nature of male privilege. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishop's (1991) reiterates: "The abused woman is often isolated; the church may be the one place she is still able to go. If she never hears a homily on this topic, her sense of isolation may be increased or she may not feel inclined to approach the pastor or a member of the pastoral team." (p. 2) All the participants had an elementary knowledge of the forms of abuse but

failed to know the sinfulness of abuse as taught by the Bishop's Conference (1992) or their responsibility for it as shepherds of the Church.

Over abundance of minor tactics

Another sign of evasiveness of priests is the fear of controversy. Concerns such as the budget to be met, lack of time, ugly and messy, legal issues, the personal and private nature of abuse, and the lack of jurisdictional power are all reasons priests presented to justify the indifference and 'playing it safe' approach. Explaining the vulnerability and why he cannot be proactive with spousal abuse issues, John says: "Our authority as pastors is territorial provided they [the family] are members…and are willing to continue to be members of the Church." The Synod of Bishops (1971) states that the priest must always, however, preserve ecclesiastical communion and reject violence both in words and or deeds. The National Catholic Conference of Bishops (1994) observes: "Our families are torn by violence. Our communities are destroyed by violence. Our faith is tested by violence. We have an obligation to respond" (p. 1). The priests appear in their avoidance of real responsibilities as shepherds to be evasive to this obligation.

Spousal abuse is not a spiritual issue

Participants reasserted that they are priests and so their role and presence is only spiritual. They distinguished spousal abuse as a social problem with its private and personal nature from spirituality. They all clarified their roles and justified a non-proactive stand because it is neither a spiritual nor an individual person's issue. All of the participants, except two, believe that since it is not a spiritual issue, it cannot be addressed from the pulpit. At the same time, all the priests expressed their concern on

the fragmentation of family and relationship. They all talked about the woundedness and brokenness in relationship. When asked about the forms of abuse they included spiritual abuse in the list. Peter's voice carried for all, when he said: "We are trained to be spiritual leaders." Further, Thomas clarified his position as he says: "I think the role of our presence is spiritual. I know and I understand the problems in marriage, abuse and violence and all. [Yet] I am here to be a spiritual presence." This approach appears as displacement – "transferring an emotion from its authentic object to a substitute" (Vanderhaar, 1997, p. 29). All the participants agree that the woundedness, brokenness, and pain they witness everyday is heartbreaking, but it appears they subjugate their responsibility so that their role is spiritual and escape to playing it safe.

Priests are part of the sacrament of marriage. The priest is the official witness in marriage representing the Church. For sacramental fullness, the presence of a priest is needed in a marriage. Thus the priest has a part in the actualization of the sacrament of marriage. He has a responsibility to intervene in spousal abuse. Bishop Ramirez (2001) states: "Violence, at its very core, is a spiritual malaise and can only be fully eradicated through personal conversion leading to ongoing transformation" (p. 4). The issues of spousal abuse and violence are natural issues of pastoral care, since they are issues of repentance, reconciliation and spiritual growth. It is also a spiritual issue because it affects the soul of the person.

Lack of support and incentive

The participants agreed that in navigating through the parish life they have little or no help. Another reason for evasiveness and indifference is the

lack of support and incentive. Priests are careful not to be involved in controversial issues because they may jeopardize their future life either by being accused of something or by being complained about by people to the Bishop. Peter sharing his experience of lack of incentive from his superiors, recalls: "In my entire priesthood, I had two phone calls from my bishop. Both of them are verifying complaint letters against me…. I have done so much…worked hard and there had no good word for any of that." Thaddeus, who openly speaks against any form of abuse, shared a second experience where a parishioner falsely accused him in revenge. He says:

> This girl and her fiancé were going through the wedding preparation here at the Church. As we discussed various issues…the issue of abuse in their parents' marriage came up. What came to light was, that there was a child physical abuse case in this family…. I called her dad and verified it, and told him the consequences of it, if it happens again. Obviously he was not happy…. Here pops up an accusation against me. Relating me to their own daughter, the girl who is preparing for marriage… that we are having a relationship…. In this day and time any accusation regardless of the context and content could be very difficult. Especially with the new zero tolerance policy, there is no support either vertically or horizontally.

Proving his point and sharing another example for the lack of support, Thaddeus says:

> In my first assignment, the pastor was an alcoholic priest…. She [the secretary] convinced me to go for Al Anon and…we convinced the pastor to go for Alcoholic Anonymous…. The pastor benefited a lot from this. He

> changed into a new person. But the Archbishop was mad at me…because I did not go to him first before going to AA…. I asked: 'Archbishop weren't you aware of this problem when you sent me there?' He was silent. When I insisted he said: 'yes.' And yet he called me there [to Archbishop's office] and was mad at me.… I tell you there is no support.

A recent study published in *Columbia* (2002) validates participants' opinion on the lack of systemic support. The study reports that U.S priests receive support from the Bishops (24 %), from the Vatican (13 %), other priests (29 %), parishioners (43 %), friends (non-clergy) (50 %) and their family (59 %).

The lack of appreciation for the suffering in the parish community is not only a human issue but also a theological issue for which the Church has to account. Ignoring the suffering, woundedness, and brokenness may reflect more the priests' struggle with being administrators rather than being shepherds of the people. Priests' evasive and indifferent response to spousal abuse in a parish community may add to the woman's struggle to overlook the abuse in a relationship in order to promote family harmony for their children and to be socially conformed to the Church's teaching.

Confidentiality issues

Providing the rationale for why they could not preach against spousal abuse the participants shared their concern on the sensitive nature of confidentiality of information. Participants appeared to have an ethical dilemma between their obligations to preserve confidentiality of communication and between the sacramental secrecy of their knowledge. Confidentiality is holding information in

trust and sharing the information with others only in the interest of the victim, with her permission (Fortune, 1988). Confidentiality is not intended to protect the abuser but the victim so that she may get help and prevent further harm. Secrecy of the confessional knowledge, on the other hand, is an absolute promise that never under any circumstance is to be shared. Zelizer (2001) wrote on an editorial in *U.S.A. Today*, "Confidentiality of the Catholic confessional is protected by law in all states…. Clergy, as citizens, are responsible for the collective welfare of society and preventing possible physical harm to others." In the confessional secrecy the priest asks the penitent to report the abuse to the concerned authorities. If the penitent is the abuser, the absolution is conditional that he gets help to stop the abuse. Preaching in the Church need not be a violation of confidentiality if there are no specifics of any context or person shared. The intent of the provision of clerical confidentiality is not to protect the priests or the abuser but the victim. Hence the priests' invocation of confidentiality issues against preaching on spousal abuse occurs for the wrong reasons and is not in the interest of the abused.

In general, the rational for being indifferent and evasive to spousal abuse in their parish community was self-serving rather than being the shepherd. This evasiveness in dealing with the issues that are important to the people whom they serve might suggests issues that effect the quality of the priesthood and their leadership on morality.

Priests Lack Basic Knowledge of Community and the Church Resources and Documents

Priests' little knowledge of the resources, of both the community and the Church, on spousal abuse reflects their lack of commitment to the issue. If such a lack of basic knowledge may indicate their detachment from the community and its concerns, the issue of spousal abuse may not be only a gender issue with the priests. They know that both genders happen to be victims and that abuse has ripple effects in all realms of society. Hence it is an issue of the family and the community. In the Second Vatican Council (1965) the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* teaches:

> Priests are ministers of the sacred mysteries especially in the sacrifice of the Mass, act in a special way in the person of Christ who gave himself as a victim to sanctify men. And this is why they are invited to imitate what they handle, so that as they celebrate the mystery of the Lord's death *they may take care to mortify their members from vices and concupiscences*. (p. 887 – 888, emphasis added)

In spite of this responsibility and mandate, all the participants except two, insisted that they would not talk about spousal abuse in the homily. The council (II Vatican Council, 1965) further taught that it is the responsibility of the priests to continuously educate themselves and their people as they state:

> Moreover, if priests are to give adequate answers to the problems discussed by the people at the present time they should be well versed in the statements of the Church magisterium and especially those of the Councils and the Popes….

> *Priests are therefore urged to adequate and continuous perfection of their knowledge of things divine and human.* (p. 897 –898, emphasis added)

The teaching of the Church clearly gives guidance to the priests to educate themselves constantly and invites the people to live the call to perfection. Adding further, Pope John Paul II, in his *Letter to Priests* (1979) writes:

> Our vocation demands that we be close to people in their problems, whether personal, family, or social. But it also demands that we be close to them in a priestly way. Only thus do we remain ourselves in the midst of these problems…. It is our task to serve truth and justice for men and women in this life, but always in the perspective of eternal salvation. (p. 353)

Participants agree that they lack basic knowledge of community resources and even Church resources. They also identified the lack of continuing education and their busy schedules as the causes. Bingham (2000) in one of the supplemental data source, *Breaking the Silence: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence,* writes to the clergy: "Unless you are clinically trained on the issue of domestic violence, refer a victim to someone who can be a healing resource leading her toward recovery" (p. 21). The study found all the participants are referring the victims, but the participants failed to provide any name or address of therapists or counselors available. All participants except Peter said that they would refer to a psychologist or counselor as needed. Peter said he would refer to another priest for the sake of spiritual presence. In conclusion, the study reveals that the Church has documents and directed teachings, but the priests who are the systemic coordinators are not even aware of the teachings and

documents. Moreover the lack of protocol impedes the implementation of the teachings of the Church into actions.

Community resources

All the participants, when asked to share about their involvement in the community where they live and minister, were silent. Hence they were asked about community resources where an abused spouse could get help. Again the answer was silence. Only two participants had the slightest idea of what the community offers for a struggling or abusive relationship both in the private and public sector. The participants showed a detachment from the community where they live and lead their people.

The participants' connection to the community was limited; their access was only to their people who come to the Church, and who request a visit in a hospital or at home. There was no forum where the priest had a social presence. There are local ministers forums where the Christian ministers' of the area gather regularly to discuss pastoral issues and to inform each other of programs in their Churches. Only one of the participants of the study ever attended such meetings. The connection to the community and involvement in the common programs have been lacking to the extent that participants' active presence in the community is limited only to his parish members.

Participants failed to have basic knowledge of the local Department of Family and Child Services (DFACS) on what services they offer and even where the facility is located. They also had no knowledge of the local mental health center or what services are offered there and who would be eligible to receive their services. Priests

neither knew the local shelter for battered woman nor the list of available safe places. All the participants were asked whether they knew anything about United Way facilities. The answer again was “no”. Only three participants have some network connection to a local police officer. The study found that priests work with individual victims but fail to have any knowledge about community resources where the victims could be directed to help.

Church resources

Not only do participants lack basic knowledge of the resources of the Church, they lack awareness of the documents of the Church. None of the participants knew any of the three documents that are used as supplemental sources in this study. These resources reflect the official position of the Church on spousal abuse and violence. The Office of Family Concerns of the archdiocese where the study is taking place provides a list of resources to its priests. From the list, three documents are used as supplemental sources and they are: 1) *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women* (1992) by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB); 2) *Speaking the Unspeakable: A Pastoral Letter on Domestic Violence* (2001) by Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces, New Mexico; and 3) *Breaking the Silence: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence* (2000) by the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, Ohio.

The NCCB document was prepared in the secretariat for Family, Laity, Women, and Youth under the supervision of the NCCB committee on Women in Society and in the Church and the NCCB committee on Marriage and Family and Church. It is a collaborative statement of the Church against spousal abuse. Bishop

Ramirez's *Speaking the Unspeakable* was meant "to raise consciousness regarding the tragic reality of domestic violence and to suggest [with] ways to attain greater peace and harmony in our families" (p. 1). *Breaking the Silence* is a manual compiled by the Office for Women in Church and Society of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, Ohio. Its purpose is to provide a handbook to pastoral staff so that they may be of maximum help to the victims.

The archdiocese where the study took place has a program to assist troubled young adults and their families. They provide regional counselors at reduced fees, but none except one priest was informed about the program. The only priest who knew the program has the regional counselor working in his parish. The pastoral response wheel given on page 38 provides a look at the ways a parish community, together with the pastor, can provide compassionate helpful assistance to a victim in need. The participants had no idea about the program wheel. Within the dioceses, there are programs like *Caminar Latino* – for the Latino population in Spanish language and *Mercy Mobile* for others on spousal abuse issues. They have programs for court-mandated men, together with programs for victims and family. None of the participants appeared informed of these programs.

Upon asking what resource the diocese or National Conference of Bishops offer all the participants answered in the negative. In summary, the reality is that the Church does offer resources to priests and parishes, but the priests failed to be informed about the resources and further failed to channel the information to the people in the parish community. The priests also lacked the community connection, which added to their inefficiency in directing individuals who are in need. It appears

the chain of information and application breaks when priests and the parish community become disengaged.

In conclusion, this study found that the lack of a systemic approach to the problem of spousal abuse hurts every community. The Church as a moral entity fails to have a systemic response to spousal abuse in seminary training, priests continuing education, at the parish level, and obviously in the diocesan level. The study found that young priests role models in pastoral ministry are older priests, hence the priesthood continues to fail to respond to its modern challenges. Which might be the reason for the conflict between the ascribed and actual roles of priesthood in the parish. Participants agreed that seminary prepared them for the ascribed roles of priesthood but in parish life, the actual roles are different. Thus a systemic change in seminary formation is essential so that the priests would know the teachings of the Church on spousal abuse.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Implications for Theory

All the available studies on spousal abuse are based on either victims' experiences or perpetrators' experience. Research on the religious component of abuse fails to get much attention, so much so that it is being left out of mainstream discussions. Available studies on religious leaders' interventions about spousal abuse are based on victims' perceptions. Hence, this study attempts to fill a gap and explore how Catholic clergy understand and respond to spousal abuse.

In this inquiry, a qualitative methodology was used. Social constructionism was used as a theory base because I believe that people categorize world the way they

live, based on their experiences and participation in social practices, institutions, and other forms of communication. I also use social constructionism because of its stress on the communal process of meaning making, or creation of meaning, and the transformative power of dialogue. Gergen (2001) states: "Social constructionist theories of human action…grow from a community of engaged interlocutors. It is the conventions of intelligibility shared within one's professional enclave that will determine how we interpret the observational world" (p. 98). To the same problem, different solutions are possible, depending on the meanings constructed by the involved people. For example, to the same spousal problem, a psychodynamic therapist, cognitive therapist, or family system therapist may be drawn to different realities, because their theory base serves to construct the world in their terms. In the same way, a Catholic priest, a teacher, an entrepreneur, and a politician may have different solutions, based on their perception of reality. Hoffman (1990) states: "Social constructionism theory is really a lens about lenses" (p. 4).

The reality between the priest's lack of knowledge of Church documents and the church's complete lack of programs for the parish community but their active involvement with the individual, may indicate that the priests may be constructing meaning on a person-to-person basis, based on what is really going on in the family (Berg & De Jong, 1996; Berg & de Shazer, 1993). For social constructionism, people interact with and observe one another, so much so their perceptions and definitions of what is real frequently shift, sometimes even dramatically (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Sharing one of his experiences about how his perception of spousal abuse dramatically changed, Thaddeus says: "Going to those [Al Anon] meetings…hearing

the stories of those people were [wives of alcohol addicts] eye-opening times for me. It changed my view of relationship issues."

Social constructionism maintains that people change through their discovery of new meanings' construction. The event of the epiphany creates new meaning and consequently new purpose. The response of priests to the individual victims shows that they did not assume an expert role; the victims were the experts. What became apparent was that the participant's experiences, the brokenness and woundedness they witnessed everyday, and their subsequent conclusions served to construct a meaning for the abuse simultaneously for both victims and priests.

On an individual level, the priests' interaction with the victims is pastoral and band-aid focused. On a wider level, their construction of the reality of the spousal relationship in a patriarchal structure needs further exploration. It appears that the priests' meaning construction takes place within a contextualized (Gergen, 2001) knowledge. The participants share a contextualized knowledge: a sense of knowledge relative to time and place and individual. Wuerl, et. al., (1994) write: "….ordination is an 'eschatological sign', that is, a sign pointing to the coming of Christ's kingdom" (p. 388). These issues might indicate the struggle priests' deal with as shepherds; a struggle to balance between the absolutes of Church and the constant meaning making based on contextualized knowledge.

While Social Constructionism's acceptance that individuals are fundamentally enmeshed within a social, cultural and historical process (Gergen, 1999) is important, I do not believe in reducing individuals only to the process. Social Constructionism is helpful as a theory in understanding the way in which the priest approaches the issue

of spousal abuse. It further helps to illuminate their lack of knowledge, understanding, and action regarding the abuse. They appear to have reduced the individual to a process of meaning making, not one of understanding or intervention.

Implications for Practice

All the participants except two (both are of African ethnicity) found many reasons not to preach against spouse abuse. This reluctance can be understood that by 'playing-it-safe,' and being politically circumspect, controversial issues could be ignored. Theoretically and practically preaching is essential. Immink (2002) writes: "Preaching is a communicative act and as such [is] an act of human discourse." It is a face-to-face communication and there is an interaction. It is also divine discourse because it is in the context of the greatest mystery of the Church, the Eucharist, and it is in the context of the reflection of the Word of God. Preaching is also important because of the communal aspect. The journey of a life always intersects with the stories of people with whom one interacts. Because of this interrelationship, of listening, reflecting and belonging, the identity of each person is derived and drawn from the community and with the community. If so the communal relationship is important because the community where a person belongs partially determines who he or she is. The process of individual and community empowerment through listening, reflecting and belonging can be enhanced through the preaching. Gergen (1982) states: "It is not the internal process of the individual that generates what is taken for knowledge, but a social process of communication. It is within the process of social interchange that rationality is generated…interpersonal colloquy is

necessary to determine 'the nature of things'"(p. 207). Hence the implication of priests preaching against abuse shapes the communities consciousness as shepherds.

Another implication of this study can be the validation of previous studies. Fisher (2002), citing the Arizona State University study, reports that in 1982, 70 % of the ministers indicated that they had received no specific training on domestic violence in their formation as spiritual advisors. In 1988 – 89, in a repeat of the same study, participants said that they had met an average of 8.5 actual cases of domestic or spousal violence in the past year. The report also stated that less than 50 % of the clerics indicated that they had received no training or instruction at all on spousal abuse. Those findings are reaffirmed in this study on the Catholic priests. All the participants agree that they did not have training on spousal abuse or domestic abuse issues. All the participants except Matthew reported an average of 8.5 cases, while Matthew reported one case a day. These numbers validate the Fisher report. The recent observation of Miles (2000) when he stated: "Clergy lacks training" (p. 56) is also validated. Further, Fortune's (1995) observation that lack of preparation in seminary training on domestic abuse and violence, denial and minimization of the victim's experience, and overburdened and overwhelmed clergy contribute to the problem was upheld. Clearly, seminaries need to include domestic violence in their curriculum. I feel that both knowledge about abuse as well as at least a beginning understanding of intervention protocols should be taught at the seminary level.

Seminaries should address the issue at three levels: information, reformation and transformation.

Information

Seminary as the word means is a nursery where the young plants are raised. All the priests agree that they did not have any training on how to deal with an abused person other than referring them to a professional. Surprisingly, six of the participants have been in the seminary since the publication of NCCB document (*When I call for help: A pastoral response to domestic violence against women*) in 1992. They all claim that they never heard in the seminary about these documents. They all agree that they were taught documents only about immigration issues and dignity of work and wages. If the seminary fails to teach these documents on spousal abuse the words of Owens (2000) makes sense. He reflects: "I think there's been a conspiracy of silence in the Church regarding domestic violence" (p. 21). These findings have implications for the curriculum renewal in seminaries, that the issues that are important to families be included and discussed in the classrooms.

Another practice implication of this study addresses priests. Priests are the link between the people and hierarchy of the Church. When priests failed to have any idea of the existence of the Church's official stand on spousal relationships, the failure has implications resulting in mediocrity in practice. Effectiveness of a document depends on the accessibility of it to all the concerned population. For an effective implementation, the information has to reach the laity. Discussing the functions of a priest, Wuerl, et al., (1994) writes: "In brief, those ordained to priesthood are sharers in the functions of the sanctifying, teaching, and governing" (p. 387) power of Christ. Priests as teachers of the people in the church have the responsibility to teach what they are given to teach. The information that the Church

provides to the people is through priests. When that link fails to connect, the people who are on the bottom suffer. This negligence and silence about the issues of family abuse is a form of oppression (Freire, 1972). This research shows that the abused populations suffer because the information is not passed on to them and to the community. Hence the implication is to renew the channel of information -- priests.

Another implication of this research is that more sensitive priests might help to reduce the number of divorces if they intervened in the family issues. Matthew claims that he could avert many divorces through his interventions. Only Matthew realized that the abused would test the priest's responses in Confessional and might later come for an appointment to discuss with the priest. If the Church can have priests who are willing to work with spousal issues in spite of its messiness, they can be of help to struggling families. Those priests who self-taught themselves in counseling skills appear to be involved more in family issues and obviously report a higher number of abuse cases. This study, hence invites a rethinking of the role of priesthood in the issues of family problems.

Continuing education of priests is another area of implication of this study. Participants report that they never had any training on spousal abuse issues in the diocese. Every year there is a diocesan convocation of priests and a regional conference of priests to discuss current issues related to the ministry. Yet the diocesan convocation had no session on spousal abuse issues. Priests have to be informed about the issues that are important for their parishioners. This study identifies continuing education as one of the great opportunities to provide all the

priests of the diocese with the same understanding about the teachings of the Church. Information, if properly passed on, gives way to reformation.

Reformation

The study identifies areas that are to be reformed both related to the Church and the abused. The NCCB (1992) state that they address the statement "to pastors, parish personnel, and educators who often are a first line of defense for women who are suffering abuse" (p. 2). The Bishops continues: "Violence in any form – physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal – is sinful; many times, it is a crime as well" (p. 1). The participants of the study agreed that spousal abuse is a crime but they did not say that it is a sin. The findings of the study invite the priests to re-examine their learned ways of dealing with spousal abuse issues. Priests have to reform their view of spousal abuse and realize that abuse is not only a crime but also a sin so it cannot be accepted for any reason. If it is a sin, the sinner has to be accountable. Bringing justice to the oppressed is the prophetic responsibility of the priest.

Another reformative implication of the study is priests' belief that "abuse is not a spiritual issue." The abused are hurting, not only physically, sexually, and psychologically, but also spiritually. It is a spiritual issue so it has to be attended to by priests. Another implication of the study is that spousal abuse is not only a controversial issue but also a human-rights issue (Beasley & Thomas, 1994). Reforming priests understanding of spousal abuse as a social and spiritual issue in contrast to the private and personal view, will help them to understand the depth of the suffering involved. In this reforming process, priests could be helped to perceive

that the alternative to the common term "domestic violence," is the term "domestic terrorism" (Marcus, 1994).

Another reformative implication is to decentralize and diversify priests administrative power and service to the families, get others involved, and develop support groups for the abused. Participants agreed that in the existing system the priests are tied up with administrative responsibilities so that the pastoral responsibilities become secondary. Having more lay people involved in the programs priests would be able to do more what they are called to do. By reforming their consciousness on spousal life and relationships, priests could be better shepherds. The awareness of the suffering of the abused and the interconnectedness of human existence would enable priests to be a witness to the sensitivity of Christ and to be compassionate. Reformation leads to transformation in action.

Transformation

Another set of implications of the study is on the transformative level. These implications could transform the parish community in a process of renewal. NCCB (1992) has suggestions for the pastors on an action plan:

> Join in the national observance of October as "Domestic Violence Awareness Month." Dedicate at least one weekend that month to educate parishioners about abuse and its likely presence in your parish. Make sure that parish homilies address domestic violence. If abused women do not hear anything about abuse, they think no one cares. Describe what abuse is, so that women begin to recognize and name what is happening to them. (p. 9)

Additionally, priests can use the opportunity of marriage preparation sessions to educate the parishes. By having an open discussion of spousal abuse issues and its warning signs and symptoms priests are capable of transforming one marriage at a time to a safe and happy home and relationship. Another similar area that can be impacted is the baptismal preparation program. As the arrival of a baby into the family demands reconfiguration of roles and privileges, abuse and violence often tends to increase. Baptism preparation can transform this stressful time into a realistic partnership based parenthood. Priests can also coordinate and offer workshops for adults and include issues of nonviolence in youth programs. Priests have been given a clear role to be catalysts rather than merely the status quo keeper.

Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions, understanding and responses of Catholic priests to spousal abuse. As an explorative investigation, a qualitative methodology was employed. Personal, family, social and psychological pressures a priest encounters, is beyond the scope of this study. Based on the researcher's findings and what needs to be addressed, what needs to be further studied and what Church has to do to help the priests, the following recommendations are offered:

1). Repeat this study as one guided by grounded theory with multiple in depth interviews. Such a study can shed further light onto priests' responses to spousal abuse and the institutional systems of the priesthood. In this study the participants were interviewed in a single session for one and a half to two and a half hours. If I were to conduct multiple sessions, the answers and examples might have been fuller

and thicker because the participants would have given more thought to the process. In the second study, I would suggest having permission of the priests to interview one victim / family with whom the priests have worked where spousal abuse is the issue. This process might bring forth a panoramic view of the priests' response and the systemic role of the Church and how a particular victim perceives her priest.

2). A second area that would merit further research is the band-aid solution based approach of priests to the spouse abuse victims. Despite the diversity of the participants' age, years of ordination, seminary of formation, ethnicity, racial, and professional background there was unanimity in priests' response to spousal abuse. The study found that a uniformity in their mindset. The researcher was well into the data analysis when the evidence became compelling that all the priests are focusing on temporary solutions not the problem. The fact that previous studies (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1988; Bowker, 1982; Lake, 1982; Langley & Levy, 1977) report that clergy interventions were not as effective as other helping professions, parallels the difficulty of one-session problem solving. Spousal abuse needs systemic intervention. Hence, the suggestion is to have a study that further explores the band-aid solution based problem-solving skills Catholic priests employ in their interventions with victims of abuse. What additional preparation or continuing education would the priests' need to move beyond the band-aid approach?

3). The parishioners have to request and demand the programs that are important for them. For example, women's groups would be able to make changes in the community's perceptions on spousal abuse. They can be partners in change. Thaddeus, recollecting the influential people who shaped his view on spousal abuse

says: “My friends influence me most, especially women, who share their life stories and who are the most compelling.” The laity can make a difference if they develop a network of expertise on abuse in the parish. Systemic change happens when there is a need from the bottom of the hierarchy and that can happen only when the parishioners ask for it.

4). The training of priests should include help the priests’ become more sensitive to concerns of their parish. Seminary faculty could more successfully address that they would know what the future priests may encounter in the actual parish ministry if they partnered with priest’s who are currently in the field. Seminaries have to use the available resources and documents on spousal abuse and use these to help the priests to be connected to the community they would serve. The participants of this study have been priests for a range of 3 months to 46 years. All the participants agree that they never had any training on spousal abuse issues. This result raises the question of curriculum revision in the seminary. Bishop Dolan (2000), who was a seminary rector himself, writes about the roles of priests, which is cited on page 3, but he avoids addressing how the seminary prepares the priests to the service of the multifaceted roles.

Priests are called to be a part of the families whom they serve in the thickest emotional zones of life like birth, wedding and death. Bartholomew, a 76 year old priest observing his and other priests lives, made this remark: “Apart from the paper work, 99.9% of our time is spent on relationship issues of people not on theological issues…. So we need more training on this.” All the participants share his opinion. Matthew, who works with Hispanic, Indian and Anglo populations, observed that

referring people always might not always work, especially if they do not have the resources to afford a therapist. Therefore the suggestion is that seminary training also should include better counseling skills to help the priests more effectively deal with the relationship issues of the people whom they serve.

Since, 1981 the Catholic Church has established 9 (Rome, Spain, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, Ireland, India, Benin, and U.S.A.) institutes throughout the world for study and research on marriage and family life. They are called John Paul II Family Institutes. Even those institutes' syllabi have no programs on spousal abuse or domestic violence.

All the participants want training on spousal abuse; they acknowledged their lack of expertise and their need to learn more. Thus the seminary should provide information on spousal abuse, the dynamics of family abuse, and how to respond as a priest to spousal abuse. Available documents fail to get priests attention because of their lack in seminary preparation. By providing a protocol to priests on spousal abuse, the Church can reduce the patriarchal oppression of women. This protocol can draw from models like *Caminar Latino* (Perilla, 1999), which is a systems approach to family problems, making every family member accountable for abuse. Additional knowledge can be gleaned from information such as the book, *Breaking the silence: A pastoral response to domestic violence.*

5). The priests are the bridge between the people and the community. The need for systemic support has to emerge from the priests. Priests cannot say that spousal abuse issues are private and personal while the society treats them not only as a crime of civil justice but also as a crime where the victim need not even press the

charges against the perpetrator. In order to be an effective in the community, priests have to establish a network with legal, medical, other denomination clergy, and civic leaders so that they can be of better assistance to the people whom they serve. Bishop Ramirez (2001) urged priests to address the tragic manifestation of violence in their lives, and he says: "including our own complicity as individuals, as a community, and as a religious organization" (p.8). Another suggestion to priests is to ask for continuing education on spousal abuse and violence. The participants who are more involved in the lives of the people reported higher number of cases of spousal abuse.

6). In the diocesan level, changes could be initiated for better efficiency. Every diocese has an Office of Family Concerns, this study recommends two suggestions to them: First, to institute a parish level office of family concerns in every parish with volunteers. This office will help the central diocesan office have a link to the families and their concerns and parishioners will have a link to the central office. Second, to have a contact person for the abused and violated in every parish. Having a voluntary coordinator in every parish would give the abused person better access to resources and also that the victim need not compete with all others to get the attention of the priests who are already overwhelmed.

7). Finally, this study has suggestions for both National Committees and National Secretariats of the Catholic Church. To the Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family Life, Bishops' Committee on Women in Society and in the Church, Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth, the study makes three recommendations: First, together these organizations can be a catalyst in providing specific grass-root programs for nonviolence. The spirituality of nonviolence could be

the tapestry of programs, which could address the issue of abuse in relationship. Such programs should also address the theological issue of a lack of respect for the suffering in the society. The Church as an organization has great respect for the sufferings of martyrs and saints, but fails to acknowledge the sufferings of living victims of abuse. Second, develop culturally- sensitive conscientization (Freire, 1972) programs based on critical thinking (Freire, 1973) for the clergy and for the parish community. And finally, consider rejuvenation of the ministry of the nuns in the parish community as a link between people and priests. This rejuvenation might help the counseling of the victims as well as overall issues of women in the parish community. All the participants agree their parish communities' ethnic and racial configurations are changing rapidly and they do not have resources to address the needs of all people.

Conclusions

This study found priests help individual victims with a pastoral compassion and band-aid solutions. It also found that in spite of their lack of training, priests' have a general understanding of spousal abuse, ironically, not with ecclesiastical literature. Catholic priests are in a unique and strategic position in the community. They are privileged to be witnesses to the families and their personal lives in all seasons of life. They appear to fail to use their privileged position to be a catalyst when it comes to the parish community at large. The lack of a protocol leaves the priests all by themselves to depend on their personal problem solving skills. Priests are called upon in their numerous roles (Dolan, 2000) to go way beyond their training. Participants shared feelings of helplessness and incompetence. Priests look

like carpenters with tool belts but without any tools to put in them. They draw on a common-sense problem solving approach to search for the quick fix that they perceive people are seeking.

There is an old Latin saying that states: "As is the priest, so is the Church." When the priesthood fails to be what it is called to be, the mission and purpose of the Church fails. This study explored Catholic priests' perceptions, personal understanding and responses to spousal abuse. At the conclusion of this research journey another old saying that "it is treason to do the wrong thing for the right reason" resonates in my mind. All the participants have elementary knowledge of spouse abuse issues and their prevalence but are hesitant to address it for the wrong reasons. Silence is a form of collusion. Physicians frequently treat the injuries only symptomatically or fail to recognize the injuries as abuse (JAMA Council Report, 1992). The whole medical system from the 911 dispatchers, paramedical team, emergency care team to the doctors by their silence colludes with the abuser. This study reveals another group who colludes with the abuser by their silence and evasiveness – clergy.

Having talked to abused women who are in shelters and to perpetrators who are participating in the court-mandated programs, I believe, the Catholic priests' attitude of silence and response of nonviolence to spousal abuse issues, is violence to the abused. The Church has to be proactive against spousal abuse if it is to be truly pro-life, and if it wants the family to be the center of life and Church. In 1981, Pope John Paul II, concluded his writing entitled *Christian Family in the Modern World*: "The future of humanity passes by way of the family" (p. 891). Much has been said

and done, but nothing has changed -- for the Church and for the victims of spouse abuse who are in a sacramental relationship forever. In spite of the current media focus on them, the participants were willing to discuss their perceptions, understanding and responses in a candid manner, revealing that they can be witnesses to hope.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX: A

Interview Guide

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to investigate how Catholic priests perceive and respond to spousal abuse.

Thank you so much for giving me your valuable time. I appreciate it. My intention in this study is not in any way a judgment of you or the priesthood. My purpose is to figuratively crawl behind your eyes and see the way you see spouses who are abused. I want to understand the issue of spousal abuse from your point of view. Try to think of our time together not as a period of questions and answers but more of a conversation between two friends. To begin our interview, it would be helpful to me to know a few things about you:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your ethnicity/race?
3. Where were you were born and raised?
4. What seminary did you attend and where is it located?
5. How long have you been a priest?
6. What are your academic qualifications?

Now that I have a better understanding of your background, please share with me your thoughts about domestic abuse and violence:

1. What do you consider spousal abuse to be? (i.e., How do <u>you</u> define it? What forms does it take?)

2. Our perceptions are often influenced by things we have experienced in life, for example, our upbringing, educational experiences, culture, and so forth. What has shaped your views in regard to spousal abuse?
3. Thinking back over the past two years, can you give me a "ball park" percentage as to the number of individuals who came and talked to you about spousal abuse?
4. How would you describe your responses to these revelations about spousal abuse?
5. Are there two or three things, in particular, that you typically do when someone comes to talk to you about spousal abuse?
6. I'd like for you to take a minute and think back to an incident when you felt you were helpful to someone who came and talked to you about spousal abuse. Why do you think you were helpful to that individual? Is there anything that you would do differently if you could "do it again"?
7. Now, I'd like for you to do just the opposite: Think about an incident when someone came to talk to about spousal abuse and you <u>didn't</u> think you were helpful. Can you describe the situation for me? (In other words, If I had been a "fly on the wall," what would I have seen?) How did this situation (in which you did not feel helpful) differ from the one in which you felt you were helpful?
8. According to Alsdurf & Alsdurf (in A. L. Horton & J. A. Williamson (Eds.) 1988, <u>Abuse and religion</u>, Lexington Books) some people say that in order to

play it safe clergy minimize and ignore information on domestic abuse rather than be proactive. How would you respond to this statement?

9. In his book on Domestic violence Reverend Al Miles (2000, p. 40. Fortress Press) reports that since divorce is not an option in the Catholic Church, priests may be encouraging individuals to stay in abusive relationships, whether they realize they are doing so or not. What are your thoughts about this assertion?

10. "Male privilege" is the belief that men are to be served and that they are superior to women. This belief can lead to a man treating his wife as a servant, minimizing the abuse, and even denying that abuse is taking place. In your opinion, what role, if any, does "male privilege" play in your parish community (of parishioners)?

11. What sorts of things, if any, do you do to let your parishioners know that they can come and talk to you about spousal abuse?

12. Earlier, you shared with me your responses to revelations of spousal abuse. How comfortable would you describe yourself being today when someone talks to you about spousal abuse?

We have been primarily talking about your perceptions and responses to spousal abuse among parishioners. Now, I would like to shift our focus to the Parish as a community.

13. What Church traditions, customs, or norms, if any, do you think support the Church taking a proactive stand to help eradicate spousal abuse among parishioners?

14. What, in your opinion, are some of the barriers that prevent the Church from taking a more proactive position in regard to the eradication of spousal abuse?

15. What would a Church that is taking a proactive position in regard to spousal abuse "look like"? That is, describe to me the sorts of things it would be doing, the kind of atmosphere it would be striving to create, etc.

16. Have you ever preached against domestic abuse and violence? (If yes, what led you to do so? What types of issues did you raise in these homilies? Do you have any of these in written or audiotape form that you would be willing to share with me? If no, why have you not spoken out against spousal abuse?)

17. In what contexts, if any, have you observed or been a part of priests' open discussion of spousal abuse?

18. If priests do not speak about spousal abuse from the pulpit, how do you think it affects their counseling skills in regard to this issue?

19. Are you aware of Church documents on spousal abuse? (If yes, what influence, if any, have they had on how you think about spousal abuse and respond to it?)

20. Has your parish sponsored any courses, workshops, or special event about domestic abuse (e.g., support groups, parish missions, celebration of October as anti-domestic violence month, etc.)?

21. How prepared do you consider yourself to be to deal with couples who experience spousal abuse?

22. What additional supports would be helpful to you in working with couples who experience spousal abuse?

My purpose in this study is to understand your perceptions of and responses to spousal abuse. Is there anything that I've not asked you that you think it would be important for me to know?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

I, Fr. ---------- ---------- agree to take part in a research study titled, THE CATHOLIC PRIEST: A WITNESS TO THE SEASONS OF LIFE - AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF PERCEPTIONS AND RESPONSES TO SPOUSAL ABUSE. This study is conducted by Fr. Joy Thomas Nellissery from the School of Social Work at the University of Georgia, (770.482.6339) under the direction of Dr. Margaret Robinson, School of Social Work, 706.542.5464.

I understand that I do not have to take part in this study if I do not want to. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records or destroyed. The purpose of this study is to understand how Catholic priests perceive and respond to spousal abuse and violence and what they do?

I may not benefit directly form this research. However my participation in this research may lead into information that could help other priests to be sensitive to spousal abuse and be enabled to help the victims of spousal abuse and violence better way. I will receive a reward of my choice, either a lunch or a $ 10 gift certificate for my participation.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be interviewed regarding my experience with abusive family relationships for 60–90 minutes and the interview will be audiotaped. The place and time of interview will be at my convenience. No discomfort or stresses are expected by participating this interview.

Interview tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study. Any information collected about me will be kept confidential "unless otherwise required by law". If the study is published I understand any identifiers will be removed and pseudonyms will be used. The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 770. 482. 6339 or jtnelli@msn.com

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

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Signature of the researcher, Date Signature of the Participant, Date

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For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone 706. 542. 6514; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu