

# FAITH RESOURCE SHEET FOR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PROVIDERS

## CATHOLICISM

### Cultural Distinctions and Practices in Catholicism

Here are some key points to keep in mind as you engage the Catholic community and men and boys of faith in your violence prevention work:

**Places of Worship:** Catholics worship in churches. Their central worship service is called the Mass, which Catholics are obliged to attend weekly on Saturday evening or Sundays. Some Catholics attend Mass more frequently. Not all Catholics attend Mass regularly, but they may still observe some Catholic customs. Non-Catholics are always welcome to visit any Church and attend any service. Most churches have meeting rooms that might be appropriate for programs.

**Spiritual Leaders:** In the Catholic faith, ordained leaders are men known as bishops, priests and deacons. Bishops oversee priests and deacons. The Pope holds the highest position as the chief bishop. Bishops and most priests take vows of celibacy, although there are some married priests. Deacons, on the other hand, may be married men. Lay faith leaders, known as pastoral associates, can be men or women, married or single, and may serve in paid or unpaid roles. Priests are responsible for all the souls in their assigned geographic area. They do many things to promote justice and peace. They especially provide pastoral care and administer the sacraments: Mass, weddings, baptisms, anointing of the sick and dying, and funerals. Catholics are called to make a private confession of their sins to a priest at least once a year. Advocates should contact their local parish priest to initiate a discussion on gender-based violence prevention. He may refer them to the diocesan office if there is an overall program for the larger geographic area called a diocese.

**Major Religious Holidays:** The Catholic calendar begins on Advent, four Sundays before Christmas, with the lighting of an Advent Candle composed of four candles. The purpose of this prayerful time is to prepare for Christmas, the Birth of Jesus. Each Sunday, another candle is lit. The candles respectively symbolize hope, peace, joy and love. Christmas Day (Birth of Jesus) is always on December 25<sup>th</sup> and continues through Epiphany (January 6) to note when the Wise Men reached Bethlehem and adored Jesus and then ends on the Sunday celebrating the Baptism of the Lord, a total of about 20 days. Some Catholics leave their Christmas tree and decorations up until at least Epiphany.

The next major holy day is Easter, with the specific date in the spring varying according to the lunar calendar. It commemorates the resurrection of Jesus and is preceded by a six-week period

of intense prayer, fasting and abstinence called Lent. Catholics fast and abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent, as well as on Good Friday, three days before Easter, representing the death of Jesus. Additionally, they abstain from consuming meat on Fridays during Lent. Those who regularly do not eat meat are invited to abstain from another favorite food. Fasting means reducing one's food intake during the day to not equal one full meal. It is a way of acknowledging God as our Creator. The purpose of abstinence is to express sorrow for wrongdoing and to practice self-denial to grow in holiness.

Anyone, especially advocates are always welcome to contact a priest at the local Catholic parish to schedule a meeting. The major religious holydays are busy times, but the priest will be glad to schedule a mutually convenient time.

## Catholic Demographics in the United States

According to the 2021 census by the Public Religious Research Institute, 22% of the population in the U.S. and U.S. Territories identified as Catholic. This percentage is further broken down as follows:

- 59% of U.S. Catholics are white
- 3% are Black
- 3% are Asian
- 34% are Latino
- 2% other/multicultural

According to Pew Research Center, Catholics are fairly evenly dispersed throughout the country.

In 2018, statistics indicated that 39% of American Catholics attended church on a weekly basis, whereas 45% of individuals belonging to other Christian denominations reported attending weekly services.

Age Distribution Among Catholics:

- 17% age 18-29
- 33% age 30-49
- 29% age 50-64
- 20% age 65+

Sources: <https://www.ppri.org/> 2021; [Pew Research Center 2018](#)

## Catholicism and Interpersonal Violence

The Catholic belief in the inherent dignity and equality of the person opposes patriarchal beliefs that contribute to dating, sexual, and domestic violence. Proper interpretation of Scripture leads to embracing equal dignity regardless of gender. Advocates should note that Catholic marriage law affirms this by allowing separation in cases of grave danger. (c. [1153.1](#)), which also applies to all relationships. In 1992, U.S. Bishops published "[When I Call for Help: A Pastoral response to Domestic Violence Against Women](#)," which emphasizes that seeking help doesn't break marriage vows. The document guides helpers to listen, believe, assess danger, and refer to specialized services.

Some parishes have gender-based violence outreach committees, and some bishops, priests, and deacons preach about this issue, especially during Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October. [Catholics for Family Peace](#) can provide resources to advocates looking to engage Catholic communities in their work.

### **Common misconceptions or stereotypes about domestic violence in Catholicism:**

While some Catholics may hold the misconception that the husband's role is head of the family, in truth, Catholic doctrine promotes the principle of mutual partnership within marriage and encourages equal participation in parenting. Additionally, some Catholics mistakenly believe that it is not permissible to leave an abusive marriage. In fact, Catholic teaching emphasizes that seeking safety by leaving an abusive situation is the right course of action.

### **Cultural and Societal Expectations of Men and Boys and Gender Norms in Catholicism:**

Catholic men may have grown up with the message that they should dominate their households and that strict discipline, including corporal punishment, was an acceptable form of parenting. Consequently, some men may hold the belief that women are not truly equal to them. It is crucial to ensure that people understand the Catholic teachings regarding Scripture and Catholic tradition, which uphold and value the mutual dignity of all people.

### **Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention:**

Fostering relationships with national groups can play a pivotal role in initiating introductions and facilitating collaboration. Advocates can engage with national and local men's and boys' organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus, Holy Name Society, That Man is You, Catholic Scout troops, and Catholic Youth Organizations (CYO). In addition, local parishes also have men's fellowships and youth ministries. All of these groups could be offered technical assistance (TTA) on engaging Catholic men and boys in gender-based violence prevention work. It is also recommended to use confirmation classes to incorporate instruction on healthy relationships and gender-based violence prevention. Additionally, advocates can connect with willing Catholic parishes lacking the necessary funds to directly engage in this your services.

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