

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OUTREACH

AWARENESS - SERVICES - PREVENTION



Good News About the Fight to End Domestic Violence

Fall 2025

10th Annual DV Mass for Survivors

On Saturday, September 27, DVO again celebrated its annual Mass for victims of domestic violence and their children at Chicago's Holy Name Cathedral. About 500 people participated, many visitors to Chicago. They enthusiastically applauded the message of Fr. Charles Dahm, O.P., Director of DVO, and the testimony of survivor, Mary Pat. An excerpt of her powerful words follows:



"After two years of dating, my husband and I married at Queen of Angels' parish. Things were good for two years. When I became pregnant, he first hit me. I was in total shock. He showed no remorse and wouldn't talk about it, drank too much and started using vulgar language, calling me names, withholding information, belittling me in public, expressing excessive anger and throwing things. I later learned these were hallmarks of abuse. I kept hoping things would get better; we loved each other, right? I just kept hoping and praying.

I never knew when the abuse would rear its ugly head, like a snake hiding in the grass. We now had two beautiful boys. The abuse continued and got worse. I went to counseling, but he refused to go. The emotional abuse was almost worse than physical, robbing me of my soul, my self-esteem, my dreams. I felt lost and alone. I asked God for strength to stay or leave.

One day my husband was so mean to me, I snapped inside and said that's it. This is not love; this is abuse. He couldn't understand why I wanted a divorce. He begged me not to, and I begged him to stop the abuse and go to therapy, but he refused.

My children heard and saw things no child should ever endure. Children learn what they see growing up. The divorce was so hard on them, but it would have hurt them more to stay in such a violent home. I tell my story hoping others will learn from it. God has given me the strength to get to this point in my life, and I am now happy, joyous and free!"

DVO Recognized as 501(c)(3)

In August 2025 the IRS recognized DVO as tax exempt with a letter granting DVO 501(c)(3) status. Because it is retroactive to April 2024, all donations received since then are tax deductible. The search for DVO's Executive Director has produced some great candidates. DVO is close to hiring a new Director. Thank you all for your generous contributions. At the end of the year, many know their financial situation better and are able to make significant donations. Thank so much for supporting our work. We greatly appreciate it.





Parish Ministries Raise Awareness

October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and many parishes organized activities to raise awareness in their communities. These pages report on some activities. People have been very creative. At Our Lady of St. Germaine they placed a small pascal candle on a candelabra wrapped in purple ribbon alongside the altar, and before every Sunday Mass in October the priest began with a short prayer for victims. At Holy Cross in Deerfield, the Domestic Abuse Awareness Committee addressed teen relationship violence with speakers on cyber abuse, legislative action, and possible parent responses. Some parishes placed banners on their lawn or

parking lot fences (Ascension Parish, Oak Park, *Left*), or purple ribbons on trees or fences. Other parishes collected toiletry and feminine products to donate for victims at DV shelters. All these activities help raise awareness about DV and



communicate that our parishes are concerned and want to help victims free themselves from abuse.

Diane O'Brien worked with survivors to produce a beautiful quilt with squares depicting survivors' art. The quilt was exhibited by local DV committees on different Sundays in the lobbies of St. Alexander, Sacred Heart and St. Stephen Deacon and Martyr. (*Right*)



On Chicago's South Side, parishioners from St. John Fisher, Christ the King, and Our Lady of St. Germaine gathered for prayer and a walk at St. Gianna along with nursing students from St. Xavier University. (*Left*)



St. Elizabeth Seton DV committee, St. Monica, celebrated a special Mass for victims and their children. Sally Willis

and her parish DV team spoke at all Sunday Masses about domestic violence and presented DV materials in the church lobby after Masses. (*Right*)



Frank Cihak organized a film showing *Where I Learned Not To Sleep*, at St. Vincent DePaul parish. A panel involving Tom Dart, Cook County Sheriff, Commander Christopher Bielfeldt, Aileen Robinson,



Chicago Police Dept DV Advocate, Kristin Kelly, the film producer, and Mark Wynn, featured in the film. He grew up in a domestic violence home and later as a police officer dedicated his life to educating police on DV. Police cause harm to their intimate partners at twice the national rate. (*Above*)



October Activities Abound



DV advocates on Chicago's South Side, led by Bernita Johnson gathered to hear Sheriff Tom Dart (*center*) explain how Cook County's team of seven survivors and social workers respond to victims. Baptist Pastor Diane Smith gave a powerful testimony as a survivor about the need for us all to be compassionate and active in supporting victims. The group then walked 7 blocks in recognition that victims often leave their abusers seven times before finally freeing themselves. (*Left*)

Fr. Chuck Dahm represented DVO at the annual rally organized by The Network Advancing Against Domestic Violence at Daley Plaza in downtown Chicago. Staff of HOPE Family Services joined Mariyana Spyopoulos, Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court. (*Right*)



DV team from Queen of All Saints and St. Mary of the Woods after hosting a prayer service for victims and their children. (*Left*) Holy Cross in Deerfield had a display of materials in the church lobby every Sunday which included DVO's booklet for survivors, *You Are Not Alone*.

San Padre Pio Parish presented a lively panel with police officer, Jamie Mansel, States Attorney representative, Christine Washkevich, Between Friends Training Manager, Susan Peters, and DVO's Fr. Chuck Dahm. Priscilla Litorja and other DV members participated with attendees. (*Right*)



The DVO Fall Virtual Walkathon was held throughout DVAM to raise awareness for domestic violence. Participants were encouraged to walk on their own schedule and at their own pace throughout October. Thanks to all who fundraised especially Debra Nelson of Chicago. Debra devoted all the miles walked on her week-long family vacation at Disney World to the cause. At print, Debra had raised \$1100 for DVO. Thank you Debra and Team Nelson! (*Left*)

Dating Matters Is All HeaRT

Dating Matters (DM) curriculum, designed for 6th, 7th and 8th graders, is effective in developing students' understanding of healthy and unhealthy behaviors. It helps students discern their feelings and those of others, and it teaches about rights and responsibilities in relationships. Students enjoy and look forward to DM sessions and so do their teachers. Principals appreciate Dating Matters because they see the positive changes in their students' behavior. DVO is currently implementing DM in 14 Chicago public schools. DM has been updated and renamed as Healthy Relationships Tool Kit or HeaRT for short. HeaRT will be released soon.





Demand Is Up; Funding Is Down

Although crime, particularly homicide, has declined in Chicago in recent years, domestic violence has risen sharply. The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence, reports calls, texts and messages to the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline have increased dramatically, with the volume now more than double pre-pandemic levels. In 2024, the Hotline received 59,704 calls for help or six per hour – a 26% increase from 2023 and a 140% increase from 2019. By October 1, 2025, the Hotline had received 65,000 calls. Increased awareness of programs and media coverage of high-profile DV cases contributed to the spike in calls. Domestic violence constitutes 26% of all Chicago violent crime. Homicides of DV victims increased by 18% since 2024.

A principal need of callers is safe housing. Unfortunately, the total 150 beds in Chicago's DV shelters are almost always filled. The Network supplements beds by providing temporary hotel stays. It provided 670 survivors with hotel rooms and covered almost \$800,000 in costs last year. After six months on the job, Cook County State's Attorney Eileen O'Neill Burke commented, "As I was running for office last year (2024), I thought gun violence was Chicago's biggest problem. But it turns out, domestic violence is."



Under O'Neill Burke, prosecutors are making progress. The rate at which judges detain those accused of DV while awaiting trial has increased from 50% to 81%. The difference is prosecutors now can examine more deeply defendants' history of abuse. Unfortunately, Cook County is the only major urban prosecution office in the nation without a forensics unit. DNA analysis, drug content and fingerprint analysis are integral parts of most felony cases. The office currently has only one scientist handling its forensics needs. That's a crime.

DVO condemns the recent defunding of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Division of Violence Prevention (DVP). Funding for VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) was reduced by 40%. In 2024 in the city of Chicago, DV funding was cut by 43% and Cook County eliminated all DV funding. We need to raise our voice and defend victims. Furthermore, the current federal government has cut funding for direct service to victims, dramatically cutting services at almost all direct DV service agencies in the Chicago area. We all need to urge our government, not to cut but increase funding for DV services. We are in a crisis.

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We thank you for your donations and urge you to consider enhancing your support. There are many ways to donate: mailing checks, donating on our website, transferring stock, including DVO in wills and living trust, donating from a rollover IRA. Securing DVO's future is critical for upcoming generations. Visit DVO's website or contact Naomi Gutierrez at 773.895.6674 or ngutierrez.dvo@gmail.com for additional information or forms. Send a check or credit card donation for DVO to Fr. Charles W. Dahm, O.P., 1914 S. Ashland Avenue, Chicago, IL 60608 or call 312-371-7752. May God continue to bless you.