

## **Domestic Violence: The Challenge**

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*A Japanese Problem, A Worldwide Problem*

*Family Peace and Love – Seeking a way of preventing Domestic Violence and Child Abuse in the Words of God and the words of Mother Teresa. “The family – a school of love. The family is humanity’s first school of love.”*

Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning everybody. I am Reiko Joh, National President of the Japan Catholic Nurses Association. May I offer my congratulations and best wishes for this the 19<sup>th</sup> CICIAMS Congress, being held here in Dublin, Ireland, a country with a history of Catholicism going back to the earliest centuries of Christian history. A special word of thanks to Sister Anne John, International President, Teresa, President for Asia, the Catholic Nurses Guild of Ireland, and especially Geraldine McSweeney Secretary General pro tem CICIAMS GENERAL SECRETARIAT, for the support you have given me, in inviting me to talk today on the topic of “Domestic Violence – The Challenge”.

A word of welcome also to all the Bishops, priests and sisters present, both from Ireland and from across the world. And special respectable thanks to MSGR. Jean-MARIE MUPENDAWATU SECRETARY OF PONTIFICAL FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS.

Not forgetting all the members of CICIAMS, doctors from the International Catholic Doctors Association, WHO, UNESCO, the ILO and numerous other organizations also present.

I’d like to address this topic from the perspective of Japan. In Japan we are committed to responding to the problem posed by an annual suicide rate of some 30,000. So why look to domestic violence, because many women are victims of the violent behavior of their partners, turn too frequently to abortion when they find themselves pregnant, and some go so far as to take their own lives. Busy both with work and receiving inadequate support as they bring up children, they become emotionally stressed and turn violently on their own children. The annual divorce rate is rising rapidly. Divorce as a response to domestic violence is becoming more frequent. As also is a pattern of marriage – divorce

being repeated, not just twice but three or more times. A situation unimaginable in Japan in times gone by is becoming commonplace. Similarly with increasing frequency the daily newspapers are carrying stories of fathers who abuse and kill their own children. It is against this background that I'd like to seek a way to a resolution of the situation in the words of scripture, of the Church's tradition, and the ideas and thoughts of Mother Teresa. I speak as a nurse who cares, as a mother. What can we do to guard and protect "a peace filled family life?"

DV – Domestic violence is being recognized across the world as a critical problem.

Just looking at the most recent research done by the WHO. In the USA there are over 200,000 cases of women who victims of DV reported every year. Every day, on average 11 (eleven) women victims of DV die. A similar situation is reported in Japan. According to a report issued by the Prime Minister's Office, it has been revealed that one in twenty women have felt their "life was at risk" because of Domestic Violence. DV is a daily problem, occurring in our own neighborhoods. Similar reports of an increase are coming out of Korea, China, India and across Europe. In each country there are specific contributory cultural factors, but these do not diminish the significance of the problem.

Domestic violence does not, of course, just affect adults, young children, teenagers in such families are also affected. Children, young people who witness DV as they grow up are traumatized. They also carry psychological wounds and so are in need of care and protection.

Why is it that the majority of the perpetrators of DV are male? What, and where are the roots?

Most perpetrators of DV are men, leading one to ask why? what are the causes? At the present time in Japan then, looking at why male offenders engage in DV, rather than looking to it as an "illness" (a medical issue) for a cause, the consensus is towards seeing it as rooted in problems of "attitudes", "values", as the root cause. Pointing to mistaken/wrong attitudes as leading to DV, leads to a consideration of a Japanese expression (男尊女卑) – "Males are respected/Women are disrespected" ( disrespected = sometimes seeing women as base, despicable), so emphasizing male supremacy and female servility. "*I feed you, keep you, don't I?*" is a strong male belief, and so also leads to physical and psychological abuse (verbal, shunning), sexual abuse and economic neglect. Spousal trauma is then the obvious consequence. The perpetrator is, in turn, under stress at work and suffering possibly from lack of self-respect, even

self-hatred. So if there was someone they could open up to, someone who would listen to their story, the worst case scenario might be prevented. However male self-centeredness in most cases leads instead to a ‘shifting/transference of responsibility’ and/or losing control, going on attack against the spouse. All this begins, goes back to a failure in emotional nurture, learning how to live with ones emotions as a child. It is to such basics we must return.

Expressing anger without rhyme or reason is a way of fleeing from, denying reality, and has its roots in personal immaturity.

Maternal child abuse has similar origins. When a mother is under extreme stress, unable to cope with the demands of child care, one of the commonest consequences is child abuse. If there was a way they could relieve the pressure, lower the level of emotional stress. If there was somewhere that would look after their children for just a short time. Having such a break is so important for mothers these days.

Setting aside cases of indigent poverty, psychological/emotional handicaps, drug or alcohol dependence such as require specialist intervention, I’d like to think about those cases of DV and child abuse where, in general, the life-skills that are essential for building a peaceful family – peace in the home, can when present lead to the resolution of such problems. As I mentioned earlier attention to nurturing the heart – education for emotional development/maturity.

It is important, essential that at an early age, around the time of adolescence, or even before that, that proper values are learnt, that a genuine “couple” relationship is born from mutual love, a way of life where one loves both the other and God.

As the US Bishops Office for “Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth” one put it very bluntly, - Marriages are destroyed, not by the actual process of a divorce, but by violence.

So what can we do so that marriages aren’t destroyed? How should we live married life?

Last year, in his annual pastoral letter, Archbishop Takami Mitsuaki of Nagasaki, wrote of the importance of protecting life and the family. In the time available I can only touch on the main points, key themes of the pastoral letter. I would like to encourage you to read the pastoral, an English translation of which is available.

Some key points:

*The model of husband and wife – a couple is a model for all human behavior. That relationship is kept fresh and fruitful by daily prayer and sharing in the grace of the Eucharist, so sustaining and deepening our trust in God, always learning to see life from the viewpoint of “the other”, mutual respect and care for the other. Learning to communicate your feelings to the other clearly, while also listening to what they have to say.*

*If there is a strong bond between the partners in a married couple, and an equally strong bond with their children, those children will grow up as equally honest and caring individuals.*

*When harmony between parents is absent, the bonding will be fragile, broken. Children will be raised with divided hearts, hearts torn in two. And the bonds with their parents will be damaged. Above all it is necessary to respect the children as individuals.*

*The crisis of faith today and the crisis in marriage are two sides of the same coin. So during adolescence, for example as young people are being prepared for Confirmation, as they prepare to celebrate the sacrament of Marriage, it is essential that they learn and understand the true meaning of marriage, its purpose and the social responsibilities that come with it.*

*Also that they appreciate how important it is that they assume responsibility for life, and how a true bond between couples is built on mutual love and respect.*

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“The family is a school of love. The family is the first school of humanity”

Dr Yukio Moriguchi,

As the first ever representative from Japan, attended the 6<sup>th</sup> World Congress, Catholic Doctors Association, (Dublin, 1954), Address topic, “After-effects of Artificially Induced Miscarriages (abortion)”.

Medical consultant to late Pope Paul VI, currently professor in the graduate school, Research Center for Geriatrics of South Rio Grande Catholic Hospital,

Earlier this year, on June 19<sup>th</sup>, I met with Dr Moriguchi. He was back in Japan to attend an academic congress. We met in Asakusa, Tokyo, where he was born. Now the home of Tokyo’s newest landmark, Tokyo Sky Tree. It is one of Tokyo’s most popular tourist spots. I showed him the outline of the talk for today which I had begun to prepare, and asked him for any thoughts, any advice he could offer. Dr Moriguchi is still active as a

doctor in Brazil, and I'd like to share with you some of the thoughts he offered on reading an earlier draft of my address.

Domestic violence – it's the absence of love and humanity

“The family, the family more than anywhere else is the teacher in the school of love. The father, the mother are the model.”

So Dr Moriguchi's mother said to him when he was twelve, in his first year as a junior high school student.

“A boy who strikes, hits a weaker girl is marked out as one who has lost his humanity. In the future you will marry, may striking your wife be the last thing you ever do. To do so will show you have forgotten love and lost your humanity. The husband who hits his wife has absolutely no values. Yukio may you never behave in such a way that others may say that of you.

From that day on I never forgot my mother's words, kept her teaching in my heart and memory. Now, I am 88, It's 58 years since I wed my wife, and though we have had our arguments, I've never once raised my hand to her, never struck her. My mother's invaluable lesson has stayed with me, never forgotten.

Education in the family is formation in loving. But before that it must be holistic character formation.

The model of a father who would never even think of hitting the mother is essential. The child is formed by what it sees.

Peace and harmony are the mark of a family where DV, being it physical or verbal doesn't happen.

A spouse who sees his father behave violently towards the mother will believe that is how things are. He will not think it is wrong. He will in turn behave in the same way. Will not see it as wrong, will not feel guilty. Families where DV is a daily occurrence, when they marry will do the same.

Where violent behaviour towards one's wife isn't seen as wrong, where it becomes like having a morning cup of tea, so also the trauma suffered by the wife will go unnoticed, unrecognized.

Words, speech are just as violent as actions, “Get out!!”, “I wish you were dead” is also DV. Verbal abuse is as damaging as hurtful as hitting, punching the other.

The model the father offers is foundational, “I never saw my father hit my mother”. Such a model is essential.

In a family where there is absent an understanding of holistic character formation the

father will abuse the mother.

In a family environment where children are abused, where one of the partners abuses the other, where a child witnesses such behaviour, there you have the roots of DV in the next generation.

One who has never been loved cannot love.

One who has never seen, experienced the beauty of nature will never be able to imagine it.

One who has never seen the sea will never be able to imagine it, visualize or taste it.

A child who has never known the warmth of a mother's embrace will never know what a mother's love really means.

Dr Moriguchi continued,

My mother continued to love me even when life was hard and bitter. She loved me through the worst of times. One day she said to me, "Times were so hard I wished I was dead. Because of you, Yukio, I still kept, knew the will to live. If you hadn't been there I'd have chosen death."

A life given, sacrificed that I might live, that is what I experienced.

When in pain and distress a child calls out, "Mum, MUM". Then in the loving embrace of the mother, all bitterness, all pain goes away.

"It's alright, it's alright, are you hurt?", all is gathered and held in a mother's embrace.

To all women God gave all women the grace of motherhood, and at the same time hearts that grow wider in loving. A true work of God, a work of creation.

Japan may be an economic giant, but present day Japan's ethical standards are at the lowest ebb.

There is no true, proper understanding of sex. Women are walked upon, trampled into the ground like dust. There are countless dating sites easily accessible even to minors. Sex, sexual relations are goods exchanged in the market place with alarming frequency. There to be enjoyed.

As a young doctor Dr Moriguchi prayed, "God, keep me chaste", the temptations were too numerous to count. To young women who tried to lead him astray he had to say on more than one occasion, "Get out of here! Leave!"

Until one marries sex is out of the question. To engage in sex before marriage is to turn ones back on God. Sexual relations are a gift, a grace shared when one weds. So he decided in his heart, so he firmly committed himself.

Such were the thoughts Dr Moriguchi shared with me that day, and it is a joy and a privilege to share them with you all today.

Over the past few years, in the Japan Catholic Nurses Association, we have focused on suicide prevention, controlling the spread of HIV and as we look to creating a world without DV, all sorts of ideas emerged. Once more I have come to believe that in the hints offered by the words of Mother Teresa, we can uncover the basis for removing DV from our world.

To recall some of her thoughts from the many she left behind.

**From where does love begin? From the family, of course.**

**Let's strive so that children have hearts that love their family**

**If people really love their family, then many failures will be avoided.**

**What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.**

**When a mother can kill the child in her womb how can we presume to believe it is possible to build a world without war.**

As the Bishops of Japan have recalled on numerous statements over the years, Japan is today the only country where nuclear weapons have been used in conflict. Based on article 9 of the Japanese Constitution with its rejection of conflict, of war, Japan has seen the promotion of peace as its calling, its vocation as a nation. The first step in promoting and keeping peace is the protection of life from the womb. This I have become convinced is the starting point.

Before I close let us listen to a song from Nagasaki, "A Thousand Cranes."

Next year, 2015, Japan, the whole human family, marks 70 years since the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6<sup>th</sup>, and Nagasaki on August 9<sup>th</sup>.

Looking back over the years since World War II ended, there has been no end to wars and conflicts across the globe. Experimental explosions of nuclear devices continue, as do acts of violence and terrorism. The quake and tsunami that struck North East Japan is still fresh in the memory of many Japanese. Volunteer work and rebuilding the area are still ongoing – only just beginning with respect to the latter. Nature continues to remind us almost daily, and very painfully, of its destructive power. Ours is truly a turbulent era. And we may only be in the middle of that era.

Further we need to commit ourselves to protecting young people, the next generation from fraud and deception, from amphetamine – “Uppers and Downers” – from hard drugs, from that sense of loneliness that leads some to delinquency or even suicide, not to mention DV – Domestic Violence. The breakdown of the family, the loneliness it brings to birth has left too many young people open to losing their way. The truth contained in Mother Teresa’s words, “Love – loving begins in the family” have never been truer.

Building a family founded and rooted in love is we say essential – a sine qua non – but an uncommon, extraordinary level of commitment and co-operation is necessary to make that a living part of daily life. The knowledge that academic study can provide us with is vital, but even more essential is the wisdom life teaches us. Learning the “habits of the heart” we name as virtues is even more essential.

Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. The message she proclaimed then, the words she has left behind, are words that reach beyond the divisions and distinctions marked out by religions and human thought, by politics and nationality or ethnicity. Her focus on “Love and Peace in the Family” teaches us to move beyond such divisions. In Japan, co-operating with educators, we have created an eternal calendar on which for each day, along with photographs of her activities, are words from Mother Teresa. As part of a social awareness campaign we are distributing the calendar both to Christians and non-Christians, to educational institutions at all levels, from kindergartens all the way up to universities. It is but the first step in our mission to promote love as the true foundation of the family.

On this day, today, is the day, a chance, and opportunity given to us, through the words of Mother Teresa, to take action, become active in promoting truly life-giving habits of the heart

It is I believe the first step in helping families, not just one, but all, to live the truth of families founded on love and peace.

Exactly 60 years ago Dr Moriguchi stood where I now stand, (at a attended the 6<sup>th</sup> World Congress, Catholic Doctors Association, Dublin, 1954), CICIAMS 19<sup>th</sup> World CONGRESS held here in Dublin,2014. He spoke of his regret that he couldn’t be here this year. I stand in his place, I stand in his shadow.

Thank you for your kindness in listening to my presentation. Thank You.

(Translation: Brendan Kelleher, SVD, Nagoya, Japan.)