



Wednesday, 11 November 2020

Dear Friends

This month I want us to pay special attention to the dreadful scourge of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and our response to it as a church. On the website <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/aminext-south-african-women-share-gender-violence/> there are accounts, stories and details of the extent of this "second pandemic", as GBV has been labelled, especially in South Africa. The site references poet Koleka Putuma who writes in her anthology, "Collective Amnesia": "I don't want to die with my hands up or legs up." The site tells the stories of women who have responded to the #aminext movement with harrowing tales of violence and abuse. The site mentions a letter written to the South African Minister of Higher Education in 2019 where the authors say, "This environment compromises both the academic freedom and citizenship of female staff and students in our higher education and training institutions. We know that this is not unique to the academic setting but prevails in society as a whole. However, we hope that the Higher Education sector can start leading the way and show how to deal with sexual violence in other sectors as well." The concerns in that letter could easily be extended to cover the church as well, since it is often the space where women should feel appreciated, valued, and nurtured that they are often subjected to violence, abuse, and exploitation.

The UPCSA wants to add its voice to the many others calling for an end to GBV in whatever form in all three countries in which the UPCSA is active. We have, in the past, marked these significant days on the annual calendar, but this year we want to go much further. We want to draw attention to the plight of vulnerable communities, so that these persons will be able to move about in safety and be able to live their lives with dignity.

First, the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV that begins on 25<sup>th</sup> November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) and runs until 10<sup>th</sup> December (International Human Rights Day). We will have a (pre-recorded) service on that day that will be available on multiple platforms to mark the beginning of the 16 days. We will launch a theological statement against GBV on that day and follow up with a daily devotional for each of the 16 days.

Second, the Health and Wellness Committee will present a webinar to mark World Aids Day on the 1<sup>st</sup> December.

Third, to mark the International Day of People Living with Disabilities, the Church in Society Committee will host a webinar combining two events: 1) People with Disabilities and 2) the "Count Me In Campaign – Fight against GBV" on 3 December.

Fourth, the Gender Desk will host a follow up webinar on "Men Confronting Patriarchy" on 5 December.

Tiyo Soga House  
Plot 18 Dann Rd, Glen Marais, 1619  
PO Box 12355, Aston Manor, 1630  
Tel: +27 11 727 3500  
Email: [gensec@presbyterian.org.za](mailto:gensec@presbyterian.org.za)

**PBO 18/11/13/1612**  
Moderator: Rt Rev Dr P Langerman BCom LLB BTh MTh DMin  
General Secretary: The Rev Dr L Mpetsheni PGDSS, MTh, PhD  
Clerk of Assembly: The Rev WV Mkhungo DipTh  
General Treasurer: Mr R Johnson MCom (UP) MIRMSA

Fifth, the Youth Desk will also host a webinar to talk about 4IR (the Fourth Industrial Revolution).

While the campaign will end on 10<sup>th</sup> December, the UPCSA event to conclude the entire campaign will be on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> December at 15:00.

While we can pay lip service to the issues raised by these various events, we will only tell whether we are responsibly serving God's people - women and men, people living with disabilities, those infected and affected by HIV / AIDS and youth, once we have real change in the way these persons are treated in our congregations as well as broader society. Therefore, we do not want you just to sign in for these various events and think that is the end. If anything, these are just the beginning. As a leadership, we trust that these events will act as a catalyst for you to want to do better for the vulnerable in your community. So, we would love to hear what you have planned for the 16 days and how you plan to take the strategy into your community.

There are so many images that speak to GBV (including some amazing posters that the GS will send out), HIV/AIDS, and so on, but I came across the following picture online and it says so simply what I want to say in this period about all these issues.



Although this picture speaks mainly to those who live with a disability, it speaks to all of us too. We are so often overwhelmed by all the needs out there and all the issues that need addressing. However, if we focus on the one thing, we can do for just one other person, we will make a difference. Whether it is in the area of gender justice (put an end to GBV), or HIV/AIDS or disability awareness or youth development, if you can do just one thing well, you will have been of use to another person. That might be an abused woman, or child, or an abusive man, or a person living with a disability, or a young person who will have a significantly better life because of your action. As Gandalf says in The Hobbit, "I have found that it is the small everyday deed of ordinary folks that keep the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love."

Friends, in this time of activism, do not become overwhelmed by the size and scope of the challenge. Focus on the difference you can make where you are and just do that one thing well, focus on the small acts of kindness and love and we will change the world.

With all my love

Peter