

16 days of activism to end gender-based violence

Churches say ‘No’ to violence against women

Introduction

As a faith community, the church begins this task with affirmation of the image of God in women and men and their co- responsibility and co-privilege as stewards of all creation. It looks at Jesus and his solidarity with women as a model for all to emulate. It sees the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on women, men and children as a sign and gift from God for mutuality and equality. This is received with faith in and through baptism. Our justification by grace through faith proclaims that no one is to be excluded or downgraded because of patriarchy and hierarchy. Therefore, the church looks at violence against women as a sin against life, which should be named and condemned, as it disregards the image of God in the person affected, be it woman, man, girl or boy.” (Churches say ‘No’ to violence against women. Lutheran World Federation, 2002, p. 9)

As we gather during the “16 Days of Activism to End Gender Based Violence” we reaffirm the commitment to name violence as a sin and to work together to end violence and build gender just relationships, churches and societies, as stated in the LWF document, “Churches say ‘No’ to violence against women”, published 20 years ago.

The “16 Days of Activism to End Gender Based Violence” is an annual, international campaign that begins on November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and runs through December 10, International Human Rights Day.

Therefore, as we unite in worship, in prayer, in reflection, in advocacy, may the Holy Spirit keep alive in us the flame of hope and renew in us the spirit of justice.

Welcome:

Welcome everyone! United with sisters and brothers from all over the world, from South and North, from East to West, we gather today to pray and commit to end violence against women and girls and to build just relationships.

Song:

Litany

In the name of God in whose image men and women are created.

Amen.

We confess that by our thought, word and deed we have not honored your image in each other, we have limited you as we have demeaned each other, we have turned away from the source of wisdom and trusted our own foolishness.

Set us free today.

From the need to conceal at all cost, from the need to hide behind the safety of the Church.

Set us free.

From the temptation to compromise convictions for the sake of diplomacy and to trade lies for our self-gain.

Set us free.

We trust that beyond our pain

There can be healing.

Beyond the brokenness

There may be wholeness

Beyond the hurting

There may be forgiveness

That beyond the silence, there may be understanding. And that through understanding, there is love.

(Ecumenical Center Chapel service, 3 November 1994, Geneva, Switzerland, In: Churches say 'No' to violence against women, p. 57)

Prayer:

Merciful God, hear our cry for gender justice and the end of violence against women and girls. You identify with the oppressed and marginalized. Inspire us to see You in all human beings created in Your own image. Breath your spirit throughout the earth and strengthen your children to be agents of transformation. May violence against women and girls end, and may women and girls enjoy freedom and safety. May your Kingdom of love and justice reign over the earth now and forevermore. We ask this through Christ our Savior, Amen.

Song:

Scripture readings

Isaiah 42.14-16

For a long time I have held my peace;
I have kept still and restrained myself;
now I will cry out like a woman in labor;
I will gasp and pant.
I will lay waste mountains and hills
and dry up all their herbage;
I will turn the rivers into islands
and dry up the pools.
I will lead the blind
by a road they do not know;
by paths they have not known
I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I will do,
and I will not forsake them.

Gospel John 8.1-11

While Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word,

Thanks be to God.

Sermon inputs

- Around the world, women and girls face daily difficult situations they are put into by unjust social and economic systems, by patriarchal norms and rituals.
- Women and girls of all ages are forced into unwanted sexual acts, and not only in war and conflicts, but in their own homes and communities.
- Why do we today, deny women and girls the right to live and serve with the gifts received from God?
- Why, as Christians, do we point fingers and call our moralities just to women?
- Why are churches so eager to forgive perpetrators without proper repentance, change of behavior and acts of reparation?
- Jesus did not condemn the woman brought to him and facing death. He open to her the opportunity of a new life.
- Violence against women and girls is a sin

Sin is a state of bondage that rules over and distorts human life. It is a turning away from God, which leads to sinful acts of control over, abuse of and violence against other people. Such acts are often justified by the assumption that some are intended to dominate over others. For example, Genesis 3:16b, "...your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you," is often used to justify the control of men over women. But this passage describes the result of sin entering the world, and is a description of a fallen humanity, rather than a prescription of what God had intended. It is a fallen state from which Jesus Christ has already redeemed us. The persistence of the fallen state is because we are unwilling to accept the justification by God's grace through faith received through Christ. God's act of reconciliation not only frees us as persons from the bondage of sin but also helps us to be one in Christ. (Gal 3:28)" (...) "The church, therefore, must start with the confession that violence against women is not only a sin 'out there' in the world but that some church members themselves have at times committed such sinful acts, and that we have sinned both in our actions and our failure to act. (Churches say 'No" to violence against women, p.12)

Jesus' solidarity with women from all walks of life, especially his concern for those marginalized, his deliberate affirmation of women, transcending traditions and norms, is a mandate for us. The fact that women were in solidarity with Jesus not only during his life and ministry, but also in his suffering and death and beyond that, resurrection, emphasizes the need to affirm and commend women's faithfulness. (Churches say 'No" to violence against women, p.44)

- Proclaim hope, be open to listen and welcome all who suffer

Song: Jesu, Jesu fill us with your love, song by Tom Calvin

We join in prayers:

Merciful God, you created human beings in your own image, you gift them with knowledge, wisdom and talents, to love and live in peace and justice. God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer

We witness injustice, disparities and inequalities in social, economic, political and religious circles. Your own church is not spared, oh God, as Christians themselves inflict gender injustices upon each other, as women are segregated from leadership positions, silenced and harassed. God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer

We pray with women and children in our countries and communities who live in fear, with those who became as foreigners in their own communities. God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer

We pray with the victims and survivors of harassment, all sorts of abuse, sexual violence and rape. We pray for all those victimized by femicide. God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer

We pray with the girl child, deprived of her own rights and forced into marriage; we pray with adolescents facing pregnancy and child birth, unable to continue education. God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer

We pray with those who fear and feel threatened in their own homes, churches or communities. Give us the strength to see, to listen, to believe and welcome. May those that are affected receive the proper care and the comfort of your healing presence. God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer

We pray with those who perpetrate violence, for those who do not know how to care, love and respect women and girls. May they recognize their sin, and let themselves be transformed by love and by taking responsibility of their actions. God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer

We pray for ourselves, for wisdom to recognize acts of discrimination and harassment in our own lives, for courage to speak out and witness Your love in the world.

Hear our prayer

We pray for our churches. May they become a safe place for women and girls, and may they call to accountability those who perpetrate violence. May churches welcome the gifts of all, in joy and gratitude.

Hear our prayer

Loving God, guide us through this day, shield us from all evil, and strengthen us to do justice and kindness. By your grace, restore our world, churches, communities and families to wholeness and just relationships. Together we pray:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven ...

Blessing:

May God bless and keep you

May God open your arms to welcome those who suffer

May God open your mouth to speak words of peace and justice

May God give you boldness to proclaim love and mercy

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Liturgy prepared by participants of the Hélène Ralivao Fund training on Theology, Gender Justice and Leadership Education in Africa, at Tumaini University Makumira in partnership with ELCT and LWF.

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