

THE UNITING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Church in Society Committee of the General Assembly

Reflections on 16 days of Gender Activism on NO violence against women and children (girls) from 25 November to 10 December 2018

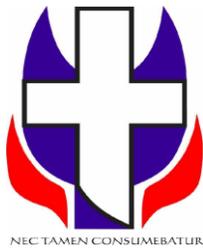
The mission of the UPCSA reads as follows:

We will proclaim our Triune God in Southern Africa through

- *Bearing witness to the saving love of Jesus Christ;*
- *Building vital, reforming congregations for worship, ministry and discipleship; and*
- *Visibly proclaiming the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love.*

The women and children deserve to experience the “*saving love of Jesus Christ*”, to be an integral part of the “*vital, reforming congregations*”, and to exist as citizens of the reign of God and feel, smell, touch and hear “*unity, justice, peace and love*”. They did not chose to be girls and women. They should therefore not be made to regret why God created them girls and women.

The Church in Society Committee invites all the Presbyterians and all the Christians to observe the 16 days and strive for the fullness of life. The Committee presents some reflections for the period. This is work in progress. The contributions here have been made by the Convener of the Church in Society Committee, the Rev Reuben Daka. More reflections will be shared by the members of the Committee who are responsible for the specific tasks. Hence, there are a few blanks.



Genesis 1: 26-27; 5:1-2,

Eph. 4:24; Col.3:10-11

Day 1: 25 November 2018/1

Listening: to the image of God

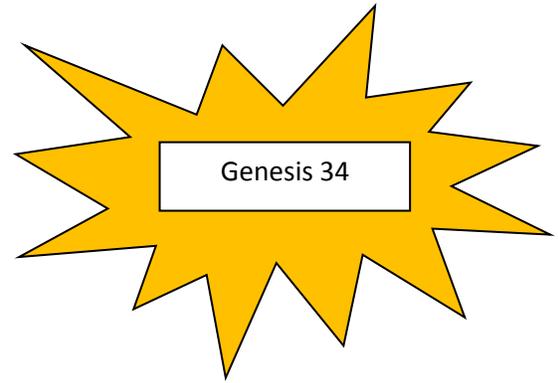
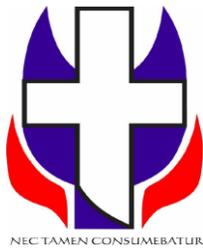
2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

Women and girls are created in the image of God. Gender based Violence rejects the image of God in women and girls. The history of violations against women and children may be as old as humanity itself. The scriptures make it clear that women are made in the likeness of God from all races of the world. This means women have the spirit, mind and body, on equal basis as men. By this understanding it implies that the image of God is inherent in women and girls.

Listening to the Creator, the source of humanity shows that any dichotomy between men and women is a distortion of biblical facts. The contamination of humanity is mainly the product of this violence we see in society against women and girls. Violence against women and girls makes God very sad and it grieves the Holy Spirit. To violate women and girls is self-injury on the sanctity of life.

Men and women, boys and girls are all part of one body of humankind. For those who are Christians we all belong to one God, one faith, one body, one Church, and one salvation. I think one reason; we do not listen to God and each other is because we have wrong information. Religion by far has contributed to the oppression of women and girls. For example, the Bible has been used to exclude women from ministry at the expense of our faith in the priesthood of all believes. It is sad that many times our language is oppressive, without any gender sensitivity.

In conclusion, GBV includes: a) **physical violence**: such as spouse battering, female genital mutilation, torture; b) **sexual violence**: rape, defilement, indecent assault, sexual harassment, incest, forced prostitution/sexual slavery, refusal to practice safe sex, forced impregnation; c) **emotional abuse**: using harsh or degrading words towards someone, name calling, isolation, silent treatment, stalking, blaming; and d) **economic abuse**: depriving of money, food, transport and other basic necessities and property grabbing. These vices marred the image of God. Women and girls are permanently in the image of God, hence to mistreat them is to mistreat their Maker.



DAY 2: 26 November 2018/2

Listening: to the traumatized

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

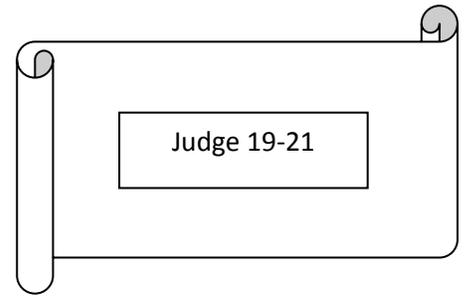
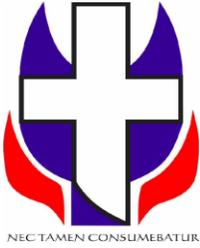
The story of Dinah is a very sad one by any standards and has a lot of value for women and girls who are abused sexually even today. The interesting thing is that the brothers listened to the sister and took very radical decision by killing all the women and girls of the Shechemites, including all the men. The decision was informed by many factors.

The causes of sexual abuse among women and girls even today are influenced by many forces like: The Power of the Patriarchal system, since time in memorial, has exerted control over women's lives; the social and economic factors of low social status and financial insecurity; the Cultural dynamics of stereotypical roles in which women are seen as subordinate to men that constrain a woman's ability to exercise choices that would enable her to end the abuse. For example, beliefs such as beating a wife as a sign of love, husband is entitled to sex even when the wife does not want, and also alcohol and drug abuse that causes violent behaviour towards family members and others.

Some of the children who grow up in violent homes and societies tend to perpetrate violence themselves when they grow up. The drastic decision of Levi and Simeon may sound very cruel for us today because we have very developed legal systems. However, we can learn that sexual abuse for women and girls must be taken seriously, if any fundamental change should take place in our communities. We have a lot of cover ups of these atrocities to a point where our women and girls have no free space to speak out and, in some cases, have even been killed.

The church cannot exercise its prophetic role when our house is not in order. We should have an intentional policy to create a safe place where our women and girls can be given a chance to speak out with assurance that they shall be listened to. The sexual abuses experienced by our women and girls are happening everywhere in the home, church, work place and many other places beyond any human imagination.

We should put in place systems that can help to rebuild our women and girls spiritually, mentally, physically, economically, educationally, and many other areas, in order to restore the brokenness that these abuses infect on our women. The legal frame should be solid to avoid perpetrators to get away without proper justice.



DAY 3: 27 November 2018/3

Listening: to the human dignity

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

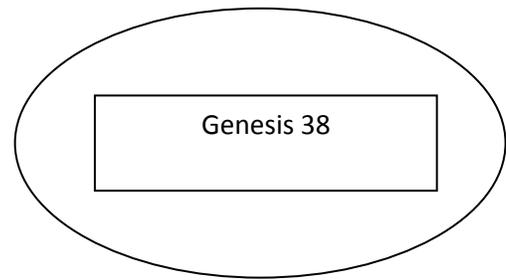
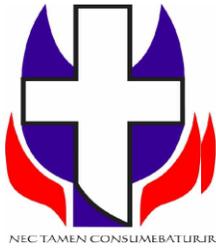
The record of the Bible shows the story of the Levite and his concubine how they were mishandled by the Benjamites. Reading the three chapters in our reference to a 21st century perspective, it still annoys even the modern reader at how dehumanizing the act was to the poor woman. She was gang raped without any protection or protest from the Levite. What is even more frustrating is that more lives were lost in trying to handle this matter and those innocent girls were sacrificed to provide wives for these crimes. Surely, in the modern world, this does not make sense. However, we can see that the human dignity was damaged by all means and the tribes of Israel stood in solidarity to punish the Benjamites and to send a strong message to the would-be offenders.

The consequences of sexual abuses to our women and girls are beyond description. Some of them are: a) Physical injuries: ranges from minor cuts to severe life-threatening; b) Emotional trauma: such as loss of self esteem; c) Psychological trauma such as anxiety, depression, suicide or attempted suicide and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); d) Contraction of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV, HBV & HCV; e) Unwanted pregnancies, forced abortion; f) Disability; Economic impact; and g) Death as indicated in our biblical text.

The Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can be alleviated by Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Treatment. The responses to a traumatic event like rape, sexual assault are common among women and girls. The symptoms of PTSD include repeated thoughts of the assault; memories and nightmares; avoidance of thoughts, feelings, and situations related to the assault; (e.g., difficulty sleeping and concentrating, jumpiness, irritability). If the presenting symptoms are related to re-experiencing, a traumatic event persistent for at least four weeks, then PTSD is confirmed. The women and girls survivors experiences flashbacks and re-experience the emotion of the trauma as if it is actually happening.

The Church should be a place of giving life and hope to those brutalized by these sexual assaults. The healing of the spirit, mind and body should be given the attention it deserves. The church should know that spiritualizing such matters just makes things worse. The human dignity affirmation needs multi-disciplinary team (MDT), with professionals functioning as a team. Survivors of GBV benefit when professionals coordinate their efforts. It requires that the professionals make efforts to communicate from the earliest opportunity, coordinate investigations, limit repeat interviews by different agencies and by multiple interviewers, and continue to share information throughout the duration of the case.

All agencies involved in the investigation of GBV cases are encouraged to use a multi-disciplinary case management approach whenever possible. The goal of this approach is to reduce trauma to the survivor, improve coordination of service delivery, and enhance the courts' ability to protect communities. The team must consist of the following people: *Police officers, Social Workers* and medical *professionals*. Other institutions and advocacy groups that respond to the needs of survivors include: the *community, courts of law* and the *media*.



DAY 4: 28 November 2018/4

Listening: to human rights

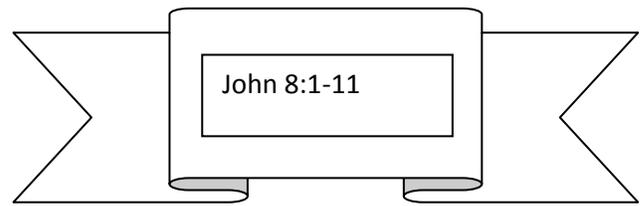
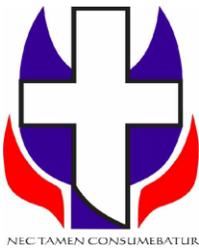
2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

The story of Judah and Tamar has many perspectives. In this work, I suggest that it is a matter of human rights. The customs that governed the care for the widows were not followed and Tamar took the situation into her hands that could have been an expensive decision for her, had she not been given a chance to defend herself. The important thing was that she was given space to be heard. Sometimes we condemn people before we hear the full story. In this time the human rights were not developed as we know them today.

In our time, the church should know that we have International Laws and Instruments addressing GBV. The Multi-disciplinary team (MDT) professionals should view their function as part of a team. The team must consist of the following people: *Police officers, Social Workers* and medical *professionals*. To respond to the needs of survivors, other institutions and advocacy groups include: the *community, the Church, the Courts of law & the media*.

For example, Zambia has the domestic Laws and Legislature addressing GBV; **The penal Code**: Main law dealing with criminal matters in Zambia. Most provisions dealing with GBV are found in *Chapter XV CAP 87 of the Penal Code (Offences against Morality), Amendment Act No.15 of 2005 and No. 2 of 2011*. Other provisions are found under offences relating to marriage and domestic obligations, murders and assaults. The **Anti-Gender Based Violence Act**: The mandate of this act is protection, rehabilitation & empowerment of survivors of GBV. It is not a criminal piece of legislation that only provides for the granting of protection orders to prohibit perpetrators from carrying acts of GBV. It also provides for safe houses to keep survivors away from perpetrators. The **Anti-Human Trafficking Act** provides for many offences against slavery, forced servitude, human trafficking, and forced labour and sexual exploitation. The **Education Act** criminalises the forcible removal of learners who are children from school for purposes of marrying them off. It also criminalises the refusal by parents to enrol children in school.

The transnational nature of our denomination means that the church should learn the provisions in our respective countries so that we can provide effective leadership to our members on human rights. Our church has been fortunate that, until now, we have not been taken to court for cases of Gender Based Violence. It is not that we are not abusing our women and girls but that our members just try to handle these matters quietly. In the background, sad stories are just covered up to avoid any confrontations.



DAY 5: 29 November 2018/5

Listening: to justice

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

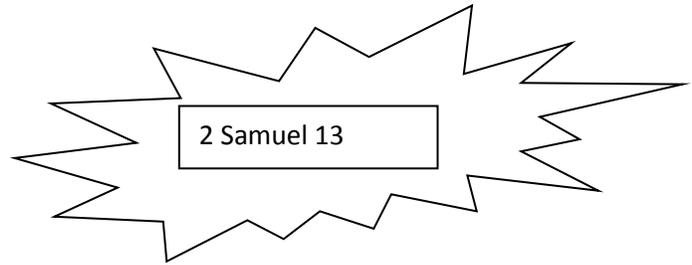
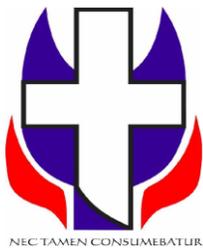
The story of the woman caught in adultery is also a matter of justice. If you can only imagine, had Christ not used wisdom, the woman could have been killed under the law. Jesus Christ asked a question of conscience which rendered the stoning as a form of Gender Based Violence, since according to the law the man should have been there for equal punishment. Friends, it is often the women and girls who are blamed for enticing perpetrators to assault them sexually. In some case these women and girls are even abused by the protectors in the name that it was they fault to have been abused sexually. This injustice of blame is found at all levels of our society. For example, female members are blamed for tempting pastors or daughters are condemned for seducing their fathers, the secretaries for wearing enticing dresses, and the list can go on, without any blame on the perpetrators.

A story is told of a young woman who was raped in her office at lunch hour by her boss and she never shared this story for years. It was only years later that she opened up because a young woman came to the women meeting with the same problem. The sad thing was that the perpetrators got away with it? It is this kind of injustice that our women and girls have to live with and suffer silently.

It was in this kind of context that Jesus Christ gave hope to this woman who was caught in adultery. Our women and girls live with the guilt and shame, and often times even blaming themselves without any words of hope and encouragement. This leaves our women and girls with deep hurts that manifest themselves in different ways that shock people. For example, in our country a lot of men have killed in very awkward ways, may be this could be an express of the hurt that has been carried for a long time.

The heart of Jesus Christ is to protect the vulnerable, the voiceless, and the condemned. I believe the nature of the gospel is to heal the broken hearted even among our women and girls. This can only be done when we provide a safe space to express these deep hurts, without passing judgment or thoughtless words.

The gospel should empower our women and girls to come out of this complex bondage by seeking justice and healing by way of facing the perpetrators or looking for help in order to deal with the realities of the situation with experts in order to have justice and peace.



DAY 6: 30 November 2018/6

Listening: to laws

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

The story of Tamar and Amnon was a premeditated, carefully planned rape that overlooked all the laws of human relationship. Tamar warned Amnon not to do what was not done in Israel, to a point of even offering herself to be given in marriage. However, the lust of Amnon blinded him not to see his death by his own brother Absalom. Amnon choose not to listen to the wisdom of Tamar, instead he disgraced and hated her.

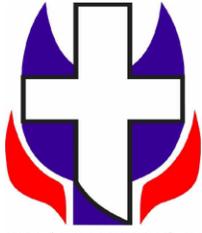
The Tamar campaign over the years has given us more insight in the world of our women and girls in relationship to sexual assault. Evil minds and evil heart plan most of these abuses that are reported in the media almost on a daily basis. We are in a generation that desires sex without responsibility and this was exactly what Amnon did. The violation of sex laws ended the life of Amnon and we do not hear much about Tamar, since in Israel only a virgin could get married. In other words the destiny of both Tamar and Amnon were destroyed in just a few minutes of selfishness by Amnon.

In our modern times, how many lives have been destroyed because of sexual abuse and assault? Sex outside rules of God and society has very severe consequences. I, once, worked with a Christian organisation on matters of sexual abuse for three year from 16 nations. I remember how I was traumatized by the stories I was editing from over 300 submissions.

Just pause for a moment! If Amnon had listened to Tamar, I am sure the story could have ended differently. Again just pause for a minute! If we could only listen to the victim of sexual assault carefully, may be our ways of doing would be different. We must learn to listen with the heart, if we are to make any difference? Remember, a victim cannot open up to us, if we do not show any signs of trust. We talk too much sometimes at the expense of being agents of giving hope.

The sex revolution has now moved to modern technology and this must make us aware of the advantages and disadvantages. The sexual information in this generation is found all over the media and sometimes the over feeding of information on sex could be tempting other people to experiment especially our young people.

The Church should invest in excellent sex education that should be twofold namely preventive and managementive education. The family central place is well placed to focus on potential perpetrators of these vices against our women and girls.



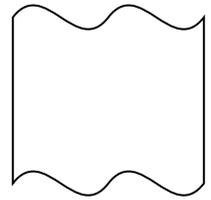
***DAY 7: 1 December 2018/7**

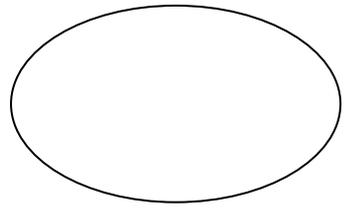
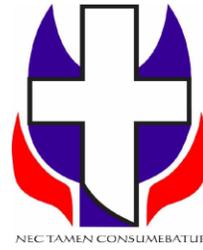
Listening: to development in the HIV/Aids world

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR

Dec: World AIDS Day



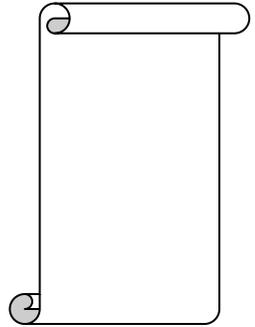
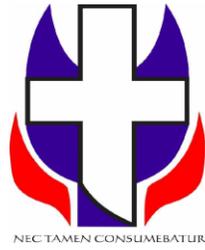


***DAY 8: 2 December 2018/8**

Listening: to Ubuntu (humanity)

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

2 Dec: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

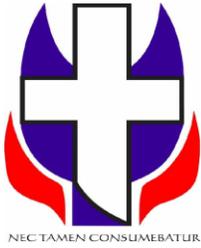


***DAY 9: 3 December 2018/9**

Listening: to Christian values

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

3 Dec: International Day of Persons with Disabilities



Genesis 16:1-16;
21:8-21

DAY 10: 4 December 2018/10

Listening: to Equality

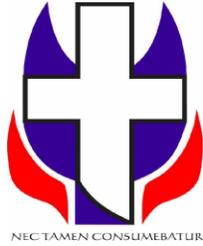
2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

The story of Hagar and Sarah shows the display of power balance between the strong and the weak. Hagar as a slave girl was given by Sarai to Abraham to have a child and Ishmael was born. Things went on well until Ishmael mocked Sarah for having Isaac as well Hagar was not respecting her mistress. The main event that unfolded was that Hagar and Ishmael were finally ejected from the Abraham's family into the wilderness. The questions of equality were not an issue at all and the rights of the child were not respected at all. It was divine intervention that saved Hagar and her son Ishmael. The God of the Bible has involvement in matters of injustice.

It is clear from the story that Hagar and her son Ishmael had a bad attitude towards Sarah, but it does not justify the mistreatment of these human beings by a fellow human being. It is no wonder God himself was haggard into this conflict. It is important to mention in a soft way that women can also be perpetrators of each other as this may be the case in this text. It was not long ago in our country a couple was sent to prison for sexual assault and the wife was charged for assisting her husband to rape an innocent young girl.

The voicelessness of Hagar and Ishmael speaks volumes of injustice in this story. Hagar was not given a chance to speak. It was only the angel of the Lord that changed the situation. Some of the atrocities that our women and girls go through are so private that we will never know or hear the true stories hidden in the shadows of silence. The mistreatment of women and girls is so latent that things are happening in our back yard without and notice. In fact our structures or orientation is so bad that sometimes we perpetrate these injustices of inequalities without realizing that we are participating in this diabolic system unconsciously. This was the case in the slave trade and the apartheid system. The church is history as been a culprit of these horrible injustices.

We can only hope that as a new humanity we should be intentional in dealing with these ugly spots in our communities. The women and girls should not feel aliens in our communities or live in fear because we have failed to address the root causes of this violence. Indeed it is the duty of all citizens of the world to create a safe environment for our women and girls. The picture of treating women and girls with equality should be painted so that we shall longer have a situation where every three minutes no female shall be sexual abused in any part of this planet.



Acts 16:16-40

DAY 11: 5 December 2018/11

Listening: to economics

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

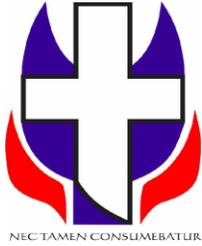
The story of the female slave who could predict the future gives an interesting reading in the context of our 16 days of gender activism. The slave girl was the money machine by fortune –telling. The name of the slave is not even mentioned not even the name of the owner of the slave. It is only the profit making function that is mention. The biggest mistake Paul and Silas made was to deliver this slave girl from demons and both Paul and Silas paid a heavy price.

Gender based violence is not just a sexual issue but it is also an economic issue. Therefore, economic abuse of our women and girls is a reality in our time and it appears in different forms like depriving them of money, food, transport and other basic necessities and property grabbing. The financial issues the women and girls are poverty, corruption and our women are used as fund-raising machines in various forms. Think of human trafficking linked to prostitution and sex trafficking.

The story from the Bible reminds us that abuse of women and girls takes many forms. The empowerment of women and girls should be a priority at all levels of human existence. For Paul and Silas the greatest gift they gave to the slave girl was deliverance from the Demons. Please we should not insult the intelligence of the women and girls, we should just create a level ground and we shall see the full potential in our homes, churches and other areas of influence. I have seen it in many women I have worked with, both in the church and outside the church.

The change we are looking for shall come if we change hearts and realize that abuse of women calls for a transformation of our morality and spirituality as a solution to empowering the women and girls. Remember that women and girls all the potential to make if only we would create a suitable environment.

The diabolic systems must be cast out in all areas of operation. It is the duty of the missional church to present the holistic gospel of our communities starting with the home we stay in. We, as a new community, should be the light of the world and uphold human dignity in our words and deeds.



DAY 12:6 December 2018/12

Listening: to African Culture

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife took place in Africa. The method of providing evidence has not changed much in matters of sexual relationship. Potiphar's wife had the clothes to prove that Joseph attempted to rape or sexually assault her. It was her word against his word. Joseph was never given a chance to present his side of the story and he was sent to prison. The innocent souls are crying out day and night in our prisons calling for justice. The souls of our women and girls are calling out for justice on the perpetrators who are covered by the church and society.

The honour of the family is a very strong principle in the African context. It would be better to transfer the offer to another place than to report to face law. It is better to send the pregnant girl to the village or have an abortion than to report the father to the police. The matters of incest, rape, and other abuse are swept under the carpet to protect criminals. These criminals are in our homes, churches, communities, work places and so on. All these are protected by the abuse of our culture or in some cases for fear of witchcraft. I remember in the early days of my ministry when the chairperson of the Women Fellowship was bewitched to death because she refused to have a sexual relationship with that particular leader. I attended the funeral and that leader is still doing the same thing to other women leaders, may God help us.

Culture must never be used a scape goat to abuse our women and girls. Remember, culture is dynamic and we should allow the gospel to confront our cultures. Jesus Christ is above all cultures because he knows all the strengths and weaknesses of our culture, customs, norms and virtues. It was just last week, the Paramount Chief or the King of my tribe abolished all the sexual customs that are dehumanizing like wife exchange, virgin sexual testing, wife inheritance, sexual cleansing, ghost chasing, house breaking for sex, sexual dancing. The Church should be deliberate in pointing out the wrong in our cultures and offer alternative replacement that are well thought out by the communities concerned.



Exodus 20

Mark 12:

DAY 13:7 December 2018/13

Listening: to morality

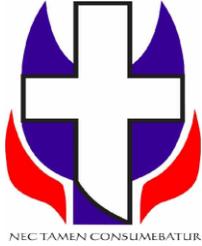
2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

The foundations of African ethos or morality are in divine revelation in the scriptures, our faith in the Triune God, faith that the human beings are created in the image of God and faith in the new humanity that is shaped with redemption and eternal values. The redeemed community is directed with divine morality. The texts above show that we serve God who has revealed his standard by loving Him and loving each other.

Friends we are in a strange world where some nations now accept that adultery is no longer a sin. Things that we knew as harmful practices are slowly being accepted as normal in our generation. It is in the context that we are called as believers to be the light and salt of the world. In my country, in the last months, witchcraft was almost introduced as a degree to study at our public university. We are living in a very permissive environment where the personal will is above all authorities, whether in the faith community or outside the faith community.

Sexual abuse or sexual assault is a clear violation of human dignity, which is called to love each other as loving God. The plain truth is that all humanity needs love; it does not whether one accepts the bible or not love in universal. For this reason our morality should be rooted in love. The abuse of women and girls is a constant reminder that we are becoming immoral in our handling of each other. It does not make sense to abuse women and girls. If anyone has uncontrolled lust they should seek help from experts quickly before causing scandals in private or in public.

Sexual abuse is also about the state of the mind. We need mental health to help us to have mental minds that are constantly being cleared from the contamination we experience in what we hear, see, touch, taste and smell. God in his wisdom has guided how to relate to him by giving four commandments and how to deal with each other by giving six commandments. In case we are confused we should just know that all the commandments are summaries in love in the new commandment. We all come from women and there is no reason why we should not love our women and girls unconditional. The church should lead in this path in this world missing true love.



DAY 14:8 December 2018/14

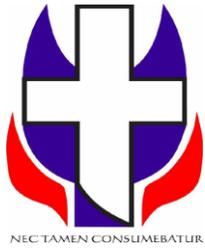
Listening: to Jesus Christ

The Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus Christ resonates very well with our theme- hear me too. The dialogue between Jesus Christ and the Samaritan woman was a heart to heart conversation. We should point our women and girls to Jesus Christ the perfect man. In Jesus Christ we do not find any dot of abuse. In fact Jesus Christ himself calls to all the troubled souls to find rest in him. I have worked with brutalized women and girls, and I have been shocked at how forgiving women are. I remember, long ago, I told my mother that had I been the wife to my father I would have divorced long time ago.

In my pastoral work over the years, I have been left with amazement at the power of the gospel to change people. I can see the same thing happened to the Samaritan woman she was changed and the transformation also touched the town of Sychar. My friends, the truth from the mouth of Jesus Christ was a game changer for this woman and her town. It is only in truth that we can find healing for those who have been victims of this dehumanization experience. It is not easy to deal with the inner pain, frustration, disappointment, and shame in such matters.

The period of activism is also a good time to repent - as a people - by asking God to forgive us for not giving the necessary support to the victims of gender based violence, even mainly our women and girls. One would only ask that God in his mercy may touch our hearts to transform our world. The Gender Based Violence is also a spiritual problem that needs a spiritual solution. Our governments have put in place very nice rules to deal with gender base violence; however, the situation on the ground shows that the situation is not getting any better. The behavioral change must be promoted by focusing on the men and boys as the potential perpetrators. For us, Christians, it is the power of the Holy Spirit that causes sanctification to root out the hidden lusts that manifest in these scandalous behaviour of abusing women and girls.

The pastoral care should be strategic with confidential levels. I have handled many such cases and only in sheer confidentiality have I spoken. It is important that people are given confidence so that they can build trust to open up. The Samaritan woman opened her heart to Jesus Christ and only then did she find the deliverance she was looking for. Remember Spiritual problems need spiritual solution, Psychological challenges need psychological answers and Physical difficulties need physical undertaking. May God bring healings and blessings to our women and girls in this special period of 16 days of gender activism.

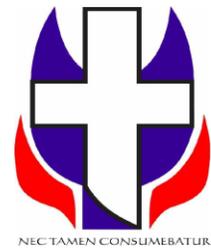


***DAY 15: 9 December 2018/15**

Listening: to reconciliation

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

16 Dec: [Day of Reconciliation](#) (South Africa)



***DAY 16: 10 December 2018/16**

Listening: to the gospel

2018 UN THEME: ORANGE THE WORLD: HEAR ME TOO

10 Dec: [International Human Rights Day](#)