



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

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 25th November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) and runs until 10th 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 1st 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.