

Weekend Window

Say No to Gender Based Violence!

By Canon Ethel Schultz Pittaway, Anglican Diocese of Port Elizabeth

Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned. – UNIFEM

We read about gender based violence in newspapers and view it on television. We hear about it from our colleagues, friends and family and we experience it in our workplace, church, society and homes. Have a good look around the next time you have the privilege of celebrating at a family event, relaxing at a coffee shop with a friend, shopping at your favorite mall or sitting in church. According to statistics one in every four women of all income groups, race and educational levels are in abusive relationships.

Angie(*) started working in my business while her husband was in jail. She dressed beautifully and had an air of confidence and elegance about her. After a few years, her husband, Tom(*), came out of jail and the beatings started. Each time he would promise that he would never do it again but soon he would be throwing the furniture at her and beating her until she could not walk. He threatened that he would kill her dog while she was at work, said she dressed too smartly and accused her of having a boyfriend. Each day her children silently witness the abuse, learning from their father that violence is the answer to conflict

Zuki(*) stays in an upmarket suburb in Port Elizabeth with her husband, Tambo(*), who has a mistress in Kingwilliamstown. Everything from the car to the house is in his name. Whenever she speaks to him about the way he publicly humiliates her, stops her friends from visiting and controls her activities, he threatens that he is going to throw her out of the house. He has raped her on many occasions but she never reports it to the police. It is known as the "silent crime".

The question often asked is why the abused stay in these abusive relationships? Why do they cope, work around, excuse, justify and even blame themselves? Why are they quick to forgive when they see the tears, accept the gifts and believe the promises that it will never happen again? Abuse contaminates and destroys hope, self-esteem and self-confidence and not only leaves the abused with feelings of anger, resentment, failure as well as physical effects but also with fear and lack of economic or social resources. Another reason may be that

society still does not want to discuss the topic of abuse and some faith-based organisations still deny, hide or even tolerate that it is happening in their communities.

What can be done?

Men and women will be marching against gender based violence on Saturday 29th November 2008 from Albany Road at 10h00 to the City Hall in Port Elizabeth led by Bishop Bethlehem Nopece. They will join hands to condemn all types of abuse and will be committing to safer and more secure families and communities in our city. Be challenged and join the march. Be the voices that say ENOUGH to gender based violence in our country. "Be the man who will say I will be that MAN who does not find his value in physical strength but in strength of character and I will no longer tolerate this abuse. Be that WOMAN who will say to the cloud of witnesses watching who have died as a result of abuse, I will no longer be silent. Be that YOUNG PERSON who says I cannot grow up in a world where men and women are not valued equally."

(*) not their real names

Contact Ethel Schultz Pittaway (083 398 6218) for more information.

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