

**16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.**

This is an international campaign that takes place each year from 25<sup>th</sup> November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) until 10<sup>th</sup> of December (International Human Rights Day)

***Loving Lord, in this time together we draw near in faith. Make us people of stillness and give us confidence to expose our whole being to you and meet you in prayer and silence. Amen.***

What is Gender Based Violence?

It is described as any act of violence or abuse which is directed at an individual or group on the basis of their gender, therefore, both women and men can be made targets of gender-based violence. However, it has been widely acknowledged that the majority of persons affected by gender-based violence are women and girls, as a result of unequal distribution of power in society between women and men. Further, female victims of violence suffer specific consequences as a result of gender discrimination. Gender-based violence occurs in every culture and context around the world. It can be carried out by a wide range of people, including: partners; family members; those in the community; strangers; friends; those in positions of authority; armed groups; and the state.

This year, 2020, will be remembered for the Covid Pandemic and the months of 'Lockdown' that have challenged us all in one way or another. Unfortunately, during this time the incidences of gender-based violence, specifically domestic violence, has increased significantly. So today we pray particularly for those who campaign against and raise awareness of abuse; and for those who support the most affected by abuse – both victims and survivors.

Domestic abuse can be defined as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence. In the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. It is unfortunately more common than you may realise and in the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men. Statistically 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced domestic or sexual abuse.

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse
- Gender and domestic abuse

***Lord of all, help us to be silent for a moment so we can hear the cries of girls and women, some loud, many muffled, enduring violence in every area of our global community. Help us to take the time to reflect on the fact that the majority of human rights violations across your world are acts of violence toward women. The roots of such hatred are deep and tangled, and justice is long overdue. We ask Your help to act so we may become agents of transformation, willing to work to change systems and structures that have fostered and allowed such violence to continue, to this day, in the human community. All humans, women and men, are made in your image and likeness, and have immeasurable dignity. Help us, for a moment, be silent and still so we can recognize You in the faces of every girl and every woman. Amen***

During 16 days of Activism it can be helpful to spend time thinking about and reflecting on the taboos felt by many victims and survivors of violence against women and girls. These include the stigma and unwarranted shame often put upon them by both the perpetrators and others.

Consider in what ways does our society make it hard for those who have experienced gender-based violence to speak out about their experiences? Consider the impact of stigma and silence on victims of gender-based violence today.

How can we raise awareness of these issues?

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed.*

*Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.  
(Proverbs 31:8-9 (NLT))*

***Merciful and loving God, forgive us when we have closed our eyes to the sufferings of others; when we have stayed silent in the face of abuse and oppression; when we have declined to challenge unacceptable actions and attitudes. Take away our selfishness and fill us with new resolve to proclaim the cause of righteousness in the name of Christ. Amen***

*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.  
(1Corinthians 12:12, 24-27)*

**Great God we give you thanks that you call us out of silence to name hidden and domestic violence.**

**We pray for all those women who despite suffering from violence continue to care for family and children, to grow and prepare food, carry water, earn a living and offer support to others.**

**We pray for women who are trafficked as domestic or sex workers; for women who are raped and do not know how to find words to name their pain or a way into the future.**

**We pray for transformation of our societies which often find it easier to judge the victims of violence than to solve the problems of injustice.**

**We pray that women's voices may be heard and taken into account in all peace and reconciliation work.**

**We pray for a transformation in the violent way many men act towards and think about women.**

**We pray for right and just relations between women and men that together we may transform and overcome violence in all its forms and learn to celebrate our diversity and interdependence.**

**We look forward to the age of peace, when violence is banished, both women and men are able to love and to be loved, and the work and wealth of our world is justly shared.** (World Council of Churches)

**The Grace**