

GATVOL YET HOPEFUL! WOMEN CALL THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA TO ACTION

Preamble

Women are *gatvol* yet hopeful! Southern African, ordained and lay Anglican women and scholars of religion met to summon the church to action. The descriptive Afrikaans word 'Gatvol' means 'completely fed up and upset.' 'Gatvol' sums up the fatigue, despair, anger, anguish and pain we continue to experience physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually as women. But we are here - again - because the unstoppable love of God, the witness of Jesus the Christ who treated women as equals, the empowering force of the Holy Spirit, give us courage and compel us onward. Because of this we have hope, we have agency we have resilience.

We gathered to "consider, take counsel and speak out" (the closing words of the gruesome biblical narrative of Judges 19, the story of a woman who was gang raped) against gender based violence, *yet again*. We lament that we have to do so, *yet again*.

We acknowledge that there has been "speaking out" in the past, but we wish to interrogate why this "speaking out" has not been enough to curb the pandemic of violence against those gendered as women, by those gendered as men. The 2017 Mothers Union Diocese of Cape Town protest march, included a request for action, "We have marched and prayed but we need something more tangible than symbolic marches" the women said. On 3 June 2017 twelve representatives of different women's groups met with the Archbishop of Cape Town and appealed to him, "You declared apartheid evil and a sin, please declare gender-based violence to be evil and a sin as well." Today we declare that patriarchy is not just a sin, but a heresy.

The purpose of this statement is to call for a deeper consideration by the Church of the insidious links between gendered belief systems and violence; of the violence of patriarchy reflected in the absence, ignoring or minimising of women's voices in leadership, in promises made in synodical or other resolutions not followed up or not resulting in action, or broken promises.

The source of all gender based violence is patriarchy. Patriarchy prevents us from seeing a faithful picture of who God is, in God's identity and in God's compassion. In the gender binaries the dominance of masculine language and masculine images of God, priest and church, renders theology and society poverty stricken. We yearn and strive for the kin-dom of God, where justice for women is restored! A new, beloved community where all humans are affirmed as image bearers of the living God.

We call the Church to condemn its death-dealing beliefs, doctrines, and practices

While there have been prior resolutions and strong statements issued by the Church in the past against GBV and the violence of patriarchy, these strong statements have sought to locate the problem outside of the church's doctrines, teachings, beliefs and most importantly, practices.

There is substantial research and evidence to suggest that religious belief systems play a leading role in perpetuating dangerous conditions for women. We therefore call on the Church to speak out against these death-dealing beliefs and doctrines. We ask the Church to condemn all of its *own* teachings and practices that are less than life-giving for women. The following is not an exhaustive list, but some of the major areas which need challenge and redress:

1. **Male Headship** – We call on the church to denounce theologies of headship and "natural order" which suggest that men are by nature to have dominion and power over women. Male authority must

be dismantled in all spheres – from the family to the pulpit. Therefore the church must avoid language like calling male priests ‘Father’ as it reflects a male clericalism which renders women priests ‘invisible’ in the presence of male colleagues who close ranks and insist on addressing one another as ‘father’. Liturgical language that reflects the images of God as gender-neutral should be encouraged and practiced.

2. **Female submission** – We call on the church to denounce theologies of submission, which require women to be submissive to men, to their husbands, and by extension other forms of male authority. The Church must intentionally address the transformation of previously male dominated ecclesial spaces by authorising and using teachings, liturgies and practices that are life-giving for women. The Church cannot continue to ordain women and expect them to practice ‘business as usual’ as if they were men. Women are tired – no *gatvol* – of conforming to patriarchal theologies and ecclesiastical practices and liturgies. Those who do confront these, often exit to follow their calling elsewhere, outside the ‘institutional’ church. Those who remain struggle to find ways to navigate their ministry within patriarchal norms and practices. Women need to be represented in all levels of church leadership, for effective action and transformation to curb the pandemic of GBV and the violence of patriarchy.
3. **Family Values** – We call on the church to denounce the recent call to return to “traditional family values” where power differentials are not acknowledged, and where the sanctity of family takes precedence over the sanctity of the lives of women and those who identify as LGBTQI+.
4. **Codes of Purity** – We call on the church to dismantle codes of purity. Teachings about modesty and purity which young women are expected to adhere to, promote rape culture and apportion blame to women for violence against their bodies. We condemn the ongoing practice of sanctions against women for “sexual impurity” while the men who are directly involved continue to enjoy pastoral care and impunity.
5. **Discourses of Powerlessness** – We call on the church to stop peddling discourses of powerlessness and vulnerability about women. Women are not *naturally* powerless and vulnerable – they are rendered powerless and vulnerable through the harmful and toxic theologies of the church. We call on the church to refrain from grouping women with children as a category. We recognise that the abuse of children is an important matter to address, but the continuous grouping of women with children reinforces the idea that women are minors.
6. **Discourses of Protection** – Women do not need to be protected. They need equal access to power; then they would not need protection from those who are given more power than them. The church needs to model equal access to power, material resources (including theological education and formation) and structural representation for women through the way in which it engages with women clergy and leaders. Since 1992 only two women have been consecrated to the Episcopate and that took twenty years after women’s ordination; only four as Dean, Provost or Senior Priest. The number of women delegates at Provincial Synod has decreased since the Synods of 1992, 1996, 2002 and 2005. There were more women participating and leading in those synods because intentional steps were taken by the church leadership. While representation does not necessarily result in transformation, representation must remain a key commitment of the church. Without women in leadership in the church, without the perspective of women in decision making about the church, theology is insipid and fails to speak life and truth and value to women who are victims of toxic violent patriarchy in every form.
7. **Discourses of Pity** – We call on the church to stop perpetuating a discourse of pity and charity surrounding *our* women. When men speak of *our* women they perpetuate the idea of ownership of

women and their bodies – this is at the heart of the problem of gender-based violence. Responding to gender based violence is an issue of justice, not of charity.

Conclusion

In summary, beyond issuing statements of condemnation against GBV, or lack of women's leadership, the church needs to acknowledge its complicity in, and repent of, its own role in perpetuating gender-based violence. Our hope is in the Church of God that fully reflects the wondrous beauty and diversity of God who is beyond all genders and loves all creation fiercely.

Consider this, take counsel, speak out and act!

SINETHEMBA!

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