

TEASA draft statement on GBV

Our South African context

In spite of numerous attempts by government to address the challenge faced by women in South Africa, we remain a particularly rogue country in term of the high occurrence of gender based violence. The statistics are numbing.

- Whilst people of all genders perpetrate and experience intimate partner and or sexual violence, men are most often the perpetrators and women and children the victims
- More than half of all the women murdered were killed by an intimate male partner.
- Between 25% and 40% of South African women have experienced sexual and/or physical IPV in their lifetime

This is a marker of both the cultural and spiritual character of the nation. It is for this reason that the witness of the Church as Salt and light is most needed.

Christian teaching enjoins us to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”^[4] This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ It is evident that this does not reflect the lived experiences of women in South Africa. They daily bear the brunt of violent rape, beatings, economic exploitation and murder, as regular news reports attest.

A Lament.

TEASA laments that while the plight of women is a scandal for the whole nation, it is most tragic that even in the church, such violence against women exists. Our Christian testimony and proclamation of the gospel is severely compromised as a result. The weak and vulnerable among us have often enough not felt safe in our midst. The power given by our Lord for Christian ministry has been abused to violate, instead of protect and nurture, the flock of Christ. The servants of Christ who preach His Word and administer His sacraments, have been found to be captive to, and blinded by that power, leaving many violated victims with deep and long lasting physical, emotional and spiritual wounds.

TEASA further laments that Churches often do not have a coherent theology and plan of action to address the crisis, which has persisted somewhat underground for years, and sometimes erupts into the open. What has instead often been offered is a band aid approach to an endemic, even systemic problem. TEASA believes it is past time that the Church be made a safe place for women, and further for it to play a redemptive role as salt and light in a society that does not have the benefit of the light of the gospel.

A Prayer

There is no better place to begin our prayer, than for the Church to confess our individual and corporate sin against women. We can no longer afford the denialism that has characterised evangelical Christianity for generations. To deny our sin is to continue in our blindness to the detriment of the vulnerable members of the Lord’s Church.

Further, John's gospel reminds us of the words of our Lord that "Without Me you can do nothing" John 15:5. For this reason TEASA believes that any meaningful campaign to rid our society in general and the Church in particular, of the shame of GBV and all other associated violations of the rights of women and children, must begin in a concerted and deliberate reliance on God's enabling power.

Not only will this enable a bold and vigorous engagement with this challenge, but it will also assure a sustainability that is a sure promise to "those who wait upon the Lord" Isaiah 40:31.

A Commitment

Faith without action is hypocritical, so it is necessary to make commitments that befit our prayers.

- We commit to change our behaviours and beliefs about the value of women and men in a sexualised world.
- We commit to teach and preach messages that affirm that **women's lives matter**
- We commit to effect such transformation in our churches as would ensure the safety and equality of value of women
- We commit to deal with occurrences of violations in a transparent and responsible manner.
- We commit to reach out to the broader communities which we serve to promote the need by both men and women to vigorously work for the end GBV.