



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

PASTORAL LETTER ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, GIRLS AND CHILDREN

"A bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:18, 23)

Brothers and sisters,

This is a very sad and tragic moment in our land when women and young girls are murdered and subjected to all forms of violence, physical and emotional.

"Violence against women cannot be treated as 'normal' maintaining a culture of machismo blind to the leading role that women play in our communities. It is not right for us to look the other way and let the dignity of so many women, especially young women, be trampled upon." (Pope Francis in Peru, 19 June 2018)

We issue this pastoral letter on the eve of the Advent Season, a period of renewal which calls us to conversion of heart as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this context of fear and trauma for women, Advent offers all of us an opportunity to aspire anew to imitate Jesus Christ who in his incarnation made himself vulnerable and indeed suffered violence at the hands of those who refused to follow him.

"I have come that you may have life and life in abundance." (John 10:10)

Through the birth of Christ, God has pitched a tent among us to bring the gift of life to humanity so that all may have life, life in abundance.

In this time of Advent let us heed the call addressed to all of us to bring the gift of God's life to the women of Southern Africa, especially those who are living in abusive relationships and those who are victims of violence and rape.

"See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands." (Is. 49:16)

During the four weeks leading up to Christmas we recommend the following actions which affirm and promote the unique dignity of every woman and girl; in fact, each person created by God.

- Make positive efforts to renew and strengthen our own families through prayer and the reading of the Scriptures in which we celebrate the birth of God's Son as a human being.
- Support others who are looking for help with overcoming particular problems in their families like divisions and the need for reconciliation.

- Work together to eradicate any mentality, norms or language that portray women and girls in negative stereotypes and does not accord them dignity as persons, life-bearers and children of God.
- A particular call to all men to actively promote attitudes of respect for women and stand up for their dignity.
- The promotion of community police forums and other structures which guarantee women and girls justice when they are abused, violated, raped and murdered.

We encourage men to speak out and condemn the violence that is happening in families and communities. We call on men to strive to be positive role models for our boys.

We invite everybody, men, women and young people to portray the face of God's love.

It is our fervent prayer that this Advent will help us to prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, "**born of a woman**" (Gal. 4:4) by committing ourselves to homes and families and a society where we live the love, joy, peace, faith and hope that the angels proclaimed in the birth of the Saviour, "Peace on earth" fulfilling the discovery of the first man when he recognised and acclaimed: "**bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh**" (Gen. 2:18, 23)

Bishop Sithembele Sipuka
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