

## **Bible Study on the South African context, regarding Violence Against Women and special focus on Children**

Theme: "How do we become Dream Builders?"

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Yesterday morning (01 November 2017), whilst waiting for my daughter at the Department of Home Affairs, a young girl sat next to me and started a conversation – which rudely awakened and left me with lots of questions, and great sadness.

After going through the platitudes, (how old are you – 12, what grade are you in – 7), etc., she started talking about what she would like to be when she's Big! "A Paramedic. Why? I asked. Oh aunty, cause I was beaten up by a man! A Man? Yes aunty, as we were walking from school he called us, and when we looked, he exposed himself! What? Yes aunty, and I told my friends they must not go as he wanted to do big people's things with them. Aunty he grabbed me, and kicked me, he beat me so badly that my arm was broken and my rib went through my one lung. Aunty, he was going to kill me!!!

At this stage, I could not ask any more questions and she just rambled on . . .

"Aunty, that's when the one girl ran to get my mother and she stopped him and they called the ambulance, and the last thing I remember in the ambulance was the aunty Paramedic telling my mother to stop shouting as they were trying to save my life!!!

We continued our chat, and I tried in a minute way to re-enforce to her the value of what she did. Do you know that you saved the lives of your friends? Do not ever stop fighting abuse! You are such a brave girl to break the cycle of violence against girls! You must promise me today, that every year, when you get to a new teachers class, you must tell them, that you need their help, as you want to be a Paramedic! Never stop learning my child!"

Yesterday, my little glass cage was shattered, yet again . . . .

I'm praying for all the little girls in the Western Cape and the rest of South Africa, who has to fight off paedophiles, uncles, brothers, and all people of trust! Girls, who have a vision for their future and does not yet know the effects and viciousness of life called Poverty . . . I Pray that we all be aunties and uncles who build trust, provides hope, gives love, nurtures, catches and builds dreams . . . my heart bleeds . . . this is the reality of life . . . . for young girls . . . . in the Western Cape . .

According to a report by one of the NGO's serving in the Western Cape, we have lost 66 children, who have been brutally murdered, raped/gang raped, sodomised, etc., during the period, January to September 2017. This number has now increased by 1 more after the murder of another 10 year old last week. South Africa, could by the end of 2017, be recording its highest cases of murder rates since the end of the apartheid era, against women and girl children. NGO's in the Western Cape, have placed the number of child murders in the province, revealing a horrific trend of how communities and families are torn apart by violence in South Africa. Joanie Fredericks of Mitchells Plain Crisis Forum, raised concern at the growing rate of child murder in the area and how little or no effort has been made by various security

agencies in the country to curb the mayhem. “We all know about gangsterism, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and poverty. But this new phenomenon of raping and killing women and children is unheard of, even in Mitchells Plain.” This report comes amid mounting pressure on the South African government and the state security to protect the lives of women and our young ones.

All the children have heart wrenching stories of how their innocent lives ended abruptly. It is the intense cruelty of their murders and the broken lives of child survivors that drives us to genuinely seek ways to end the scourge, we need to question whether such interventions are sufficient in preventing continued violations of children’s rights. How can these necessary early interventions be supported and coupled to violence prevention mechanisms?

Our call to the Premier of our Province to establish a commission of inquiry into the safety of our children in the Western Cape is linked to the need for sustainable preventative mechanisms. Her rejection of the commission as an “expensive” exercise that can be alternatively addressed through research project suggests that children’s safety is not a priority. We fail to see how the analysis of six case studies would be more viable than hearing multi-stakeholders testify on the challenges of children in their communities. This whilst our government is legally responsible for the well-being and safety of children in South Africa. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the government is expected to ensure child rights implementation, co-ordination, monitoring and accountability. National, Provincial and local governments were reminded that when the state fails to protect its citizens, it is tantamount to torture and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, according to the UN Convention Against Torture and is an international Human Rights crime.

How do we move forward in strengthening child protection implementation without assessing the status quo? Case studies highlight the tragedy in personal terms rather than guide intersectoral, violence prevention interventions. It will not highlight the impact of invisible violence on visible violence, nor will it focus on how exposure to colonialism and apartheid has created transgenerational and intergenerational trauma in predominantly black communities.

Based on Dr Sarah Malotane Henkeman’s Invisible/Visible Violence framework which considers cultural, structural and psychological violence as invisible forms of violence that influences how visible violence (self-directed, interpersonal and collective) is experienced in communities, it outlines how victim/perpetrator cannot be seen as purely interpersonal. People, communities and society deny or collude with visible and invisible forms of violence.

### **Reflecting on Matthew 19 v 13 -15,**

“Then the little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hand on them and pray for them; and the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them! For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. And after He placed his hands on them, He went on from there . . .”

Dear Bible Study participants, in our tradition within the Moravian Church in South Africa, we use the above mentioned text not only for the sacrament of the Baptism, but also as a call or invitation to our “Kinderfees/Kinderfest” or Children’s Festival, commemorating and celebrating the life story and legacy of the “founder” of our children ministry, Susanna Kuhnel on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1727, where she committed her life unto the Lord. This brought about a revival of the children’s ministry in Hernnhut, Germany and is commemorated with a special service for children, with the decorating of churches, special children and youth choirs, plays/drams/skits, talks and the serving of the traditional “mos bolletjie/bun with aniseed” and refreshments served by the Church Councillors to the children. Parents on the other hand dress and dolly up their children with new outfits, which in many instances are then kept for Christmas.

Reflecting upon the passage, teaches us about our children and about the Saviour’s invitation for them to come to Him, however it further continues with a serious message to both Parents and the Church.

1. We are both co-responsible for the evangelizing of our children (Deut. 6:1-8 and Eph. 6:4)
2. We are both co-responsible for educating our children (Eph. 6:4)
3. We are co-responsible to encourage our children to come to church on a regular basis
4. Both the parents and their children need Redemption – we all need our Saviour

Within our context, we observe the interconnectedness regarding, Responsibility with Accountability and Answerability. As the nurturers, educators, dream catchers and builders, we are now faced with fresh challenges, with many unanswered questions:

1. Due to the inept manner of dealing with Child Abuse in South Africa, is there a new role for both church and parents which needs to be explored?
2. Called to be accountable to the lives of our children, How are we using our Prophetic Voice, when our innocent are dying horrific deaths?
3. When we are combatting the scourge of Violence Against Women, do we need to re-focus and include Violence Against especially our Girl Children?
4. Where do we fit into the multi-sectoral/stakeholder intervention strategies in our communities?
5. Finally and probably the most important question: “How do we Catch and Build the dreams of our young?”

“And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” 2 Timothy 3:15

Colleen Cunningham

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References:

SA 2017 Murder Report by Chika Udeh

66 Child Murders and counting by Farren Collins