

**16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**  
**Worship – Ecumenical Centre - 2017**  
**“PRECIOUS IN GOD’S EYES”**

We know enough of statistics. We have enough numbers; we are aware of the reality. We have enough. Basta! We don’t need more knowledge about the context. It is not more information about domestic and GBV that we need.

Why then do we need at all a 16 days campaign? Because these numbers are not just numbers; statistics and numbers aren’t powerful enough to provoke engagement. These numbers need to have a name, a face, a story. It is not about knowing the reality – it is about changing it. It is when our bodies are in solidarity with the suffering bodies – this kind of knowledge may have the power to move to actions.

In my working journey with gender justice, feminist theology and women’s rights I have learned that going through experience can establish another kind of relation with reality; it is the embodiment process that will bring another relationship with a specific issue.

I would like to propose now an experience. I want to propose you a short exercise; I kindly invite you to try and to allow yourself to engage and to take the risk to interact with the topic of domestic and GBV from a different perspective.

I would like you to think in a concrete story you have heard, you experienced as man, as a woman. Think about a concrete woman, her name, her face, her eyes, it could be your neighbor, your parish member, your relative, your friend, your sister, your mother. Don’t think about a general statistic, but remember – a memory close to your heart - a concrete woman.

With this embodied memory listen some verses of **Psalm 55** – listen to the words of this Psalm as a lament of that woman, as her cry to God.

**1** Give ear to my prayer, O God; do not hide yourself from my supplication.

**2** Attend to me, and answer me; I am troubled in my complaint.

I am distressed by the noise of the enemy, because of the clamor of the wicked. For they bring trouble upon me and in anger they cherish enmity against me.

**4** My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

**5** Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.

**6** And I say, “**O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest;**

**7** truly, I would flee far away; I would lodge in the wilderness;

**8** I would hurry to find a shelter for myself from the raging wind and tempest.”

**12** It is not enemies who taunt me— I could bear that; it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me— I could hide from them.

**13** But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend,

**14** with whom I kept pleasant company; we walked in the house of God with the worshipers.

**15** I call to God, and he saves me.

**16** Evening, Morning and noon I cry out in distress and he fears my voice

Listening her voice, feeling her words provoke in me some thoughts:

- There is fear – fear and terror. To whom cry? Who will listen? Who will believe a woman when she says she is suffering violence? Who will believe when she says that she was raped, if the first question normally is:
  - o what have you been doing at this place,
  - o followed by: at this time,
  - o to finish with the so distressing: in with clothes?

Women are feeling so much fear: fear of being alone among men; anxiety of being the only woman, alone, in the street at night, being the only one in that car, in the bus, or the only one in that meeting. Fear of violence, of being harassed, of not being taken seriously, of her voice and ideas being minimized.

And it is not mostly the loneliness of the dark street that is a place to fear. It is the most well-known place, our home, our work places, our familiar environment that represents danger.

*It is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, as verse 13 is saying.* I want to invite us to think in our own places, and listen to voices and experiences of women who feel diminished when they say something in meetings, when their ideas are taken in mockeries, where women are labeled as too naïve, as just token or, if they chose to be affirmative, then they are too bossy, aggressive.

- **The wish for wings** – normally wings are associated with freedom. Wings bring to memory the capacity of self-determination to fly in liberty. But, the words of a woman who is suffering violence, physical or psychological violence – that constant feeling of being diminished, feeling insecure, wings are an image to fly away; to seek safety. Even the wilderness seems to be a better place;

But wings are also helping to move towards a safe space; to find protection, to be in the loving arms of God, who offers refreshing shadow or warm calm. Because human beings are dignified in God's love and mercy, woman, girls, men and boys are precious in God's eyes, and arms. Being precious is not assigned by compassion or consideration of other human being. Being precious is in God's love and welcoming arms.

Let us use these 16 days to boldly affirm and take actions where we can feel these warm and loving wings of God among us, in the arms of our colleagues, friends, and partners. May God wings embrace us and protect us

Amen

Elaine Neuenfeldt  
LWF Women in Church and Society  
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