

Official Launch

Thursday, 2 December 2010 • Library Auditorium,
University of the Western Cape, Bellville



Opening Proceedings



Archbishop Thabo Makgoba



Professor C. Lombard



Dr Rashied Omar

The proceedings were opened and facilitated by Imam Dr Rashied Omar who is one of SAFFI's patrons. Prof C Lombard, the Head of Department of Religion and Theology, UWC who reflected on the important work that SAFFI seek to implement amongst the faith communities and expressed words of welcome to participants and special guests.

Invocation of Blessing:

Imam Rashied Omar and Revd Desmond Lambrechts shared prayers of blessing on the proceedings. Revd Lambrechts also read Archbishop Thabo Makgoba's letter of blessing and best wishes on the launch of SAFFI.

Elizabeth Petersen, Founder of South African Faith & Family Institute, provided a brief overview on the vision and mission of SAFFI. She acknowledged the presence of Rev Dr Marie Fortune (Founder & Senior Analyst of the FaithTrust Institute) courtesy the Cape Town US Consulate. She informed participants about the format of the day i.e. roundtable discussions with key experts on five specific themes after which a panel discussion will follow in plenary. These proceedings would be informed by voices of women who survived intimate partner abuse.



Elizabeth Petersen

Official Media Launch
Thursday, 2 December 2010, Library Auditorium,
University of the Western Cape, Bellville

8:30am Registration and Tea

9:00am Welcome, Introduction and Context

Prof C Lombard – Head of Dept. Religion and Theology, UWC
Elizabeth Petersen – Founder of South African Faith & Family Institute

Voices of Women

Nobuntu Ngcoyi – Survivor

Yusrah Oliver - Survivor

Nicolene October – Singer (Courtesy New Birth Singing Ministry)

9:45am Roundtable Discussions:

1. Interventions with Women Surviving Domestic Violence.
Lungiswa Mamela and Loretta Burgers
2. Interventions with Men who Abuse their Intimate Partners.
Dr Marcel Londt and Sheikh Achmat Sedick
3. Intersection between HIV/AIDS, Domestic Violence and Faith.
Rev Desmond Lambrecht
4. Intimate Partner Abuse in LGBTI Relationships.
Rev Laurie Gaum and Rev Judith Kotze
5. Sacred Text and Religious Teaching.
Rev John Oliver and Dr Miranda Pillay

11:00am Tea Break and Networking

11:30am Media Launch – Panel Discussion

Panellists: Elizabeth Petersen (SAFFI)
Lungiswa Memela (WC Network on Violence Against Women)
Dr Marcel Londt (Expert: Interventions with Sexual Offenders & Perpetrators of Domestic Violence)
Rev Desmond Lambrecht (NASRD and SANAC)
Rev Judith Kotze (IAM)
Rev John Oliver – WC Religious Leaders Forum
Dr Miranda Pillay – Theologian and Gender Activist
Rev Dr Marie Fortune (FaithTrust Institute, Seattle, USA)

Question, Answer and Comment Session

Acknowledgements

Religious Leaders Sign Pledge of Commitment to Collaborate with Existing services to End Violence Against Women

1:00pm Lunch and Networking



Partners

The *Voices* of Women who *survived* Intimate Partner Abuse

Nobuntu Ngcoyi spoke of her journey through intimate partner abuse, including the rejection by her deceased abusive husband's family when they discovered that he died of AIDS. With a sparkle in her eye she said *"I grew up as a happy child in a missionary community and attended a Catholic school.*

I did not know that I would end up abused and rejected with no where to go except a shelter. My husband's family blamed me for his death and evicted me from our home".

After her husband's death she discovered that she and her baby were both HIV+. She ended up in a shelter for abused women and children and through the shelter she reclaimed her life.

She explained that as a child she had happily grown up in a Catholic missions setting, but as an adult she has not received much support from the church with regards to her personal crises.

With the support of the shelter and an AIDS non-profit organization, Nobuntu has re-established herself as a self-reliant human being - a woman of deep faith, a mother of



three an employee ready to share her experience and encourage other women to reclaim themselves.





Yusrah Oliver

Yusrah Oliver, a woman in her 60's, reported that she had been in an abusive marriage for over thirty years. *"Being a woman of faith I understood that God was my refuge and strength"*. She recalled how he throttled her, physically and emotionally, and violated her in other ways too shameful to explain.

After several escapes from her husband's brutal attacks, she fully relied on her strong faith in God to carry her through some of the most dangerous episodes.

She recounted saying to him that despite his threats and brutal attempts to kill her, she was convinced that her life was in God's hands. She would challenge him by saying that she has no fear of him and that she would not die at his hand, only at God's hand and in God's time. Mum Oliver, expressed her sincere gratitude at

SAFFI's launch, *"because..."* she said *"...in those days there was no one you could go to in the church. Now SAFFI will provide opportunity for women of faith to speak out and get help."*

Nicolene October shared some of her experiences of witnessing domestic violence in the home where she grew up and thanked SAFFI for the opportunity to participate in its launch.

She rendered an item in song entitled "Alabaster Box" – a spiritual song which relates the story of a woman's journey of struggle and encounter with her faith. The song spoke of the hope, personal strength and spiritual freedom drawn from her source of faith.



Nicolene October



Roundtable Discussions:

After listening to the women's experiences of intimate abuse and the inspirational song, participants were invited to join one of the five roundtable discussions which were convened by leading voices on the subject field. SAFFI understands that addressing faith issues of intimate partner abuse is multi-layered and complex arena. Through these discussions, participants would have the opportunity to reflect, share and dialogue the specific topic as a way of opening up an ongoing dialogue.

1. Interventions with Women SURVIVING Domestic Violence



Fatima Ismail, a social worker, was asked to facilitate this roundtable discussion to ensure that the professional support would be available in the event that victims and survivors would require it. She invited Lungiswa Memela and Loretta Burgers to make brief presentations on pertinent facts, figures and obstacles in their experience working in the field of Domestic Violence. The following are some of the points covered:

- Statistics about the scourge of violence against women were highlighted
- Survivors wanting their partners to change as opposed to going to jail
- Isolation vs love
- Cultural norms, traditions = contribute to silence, oppression, being submissive
- Women get higher sentences than men if they kill their partners as result of ongoing abuse
- Gruesome abuse unto Jesus as well, looking at the stigmata.
- Women's Courage to go into "the lion's den" to enable social change
- Women's sacrifice and suffering in general and acknowledging, despite platforms being in place, some women remain silent for various reasons.
- During the discussion, the following verses from the Bible were quoted:

1 "Love your wife as christ loved the church"

2 "Love your wife like your own body"

3 "Love your wife as you do yourself"

Ephesians

The participants were divided into 3 groups where the following questions were answered.

a) How are faith Communities dealing with women who Survive DV?

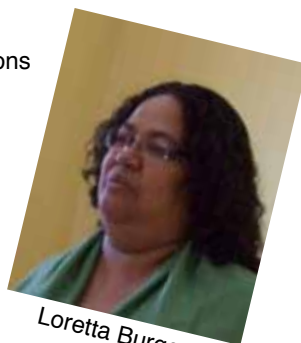
- Men in Church not often sensitive on issues of Gender Based Violence
- Religious Forums are made up of men who are the decision makers. Women are not comfortable.
- Structures/Forums to address issues affecting women are being formed outside of the church – some women are taking initiative to create their own support in the community
- Religious leaders need Empowerment/Capacity Building/Counselling Skills

b.) What are the Faith challenges that DV Survivors experience? What is the church doing to embrace people?

- The women (perhaps) disconnected themselves from the Faith Institutions
- Survivors give up hope because of their experience of not being helped in the past
- The counsellors in the church don't always understand the problem
- The counsellors must have the knowledge and experience concerning the problem of domestic violence
- Religious leaders remind women of their vows in which they promised to stay for better or for worse.

c.) What are the resources we can draw on?

- SAPS – Trauma Centre
- Day Hospital – Life Line Child Line
- In the church is nothing – no training
- We must transform some of our traditions



Loretta Burgers

2. Interventions with Men who abuse their Intimate Partners

This roundtable discussion was facilitated by Dr Marcel Londt, an expert on intervening with sexual and domestic violence offenders. The major points that were raised by participants can be summarized as follows:



Dr Marcel Londt

- The fact that the church is not effectively speaking out against domestic violence on women, and because of this some women believe that it is acceptable for their husbands to abuse them.
- In many cases the husband holds a leadership position and/or he is highly respected in the church. Victims might thus feel that the person acting as counselor, for example the minister, will not believe their story as it describes their husbands in a completely opposing manner than that which the people are accustomed to.
- It is also proven that abused women tend to keep to themselves and are not comfortable talking to a counselor, but instead are more likely to confide in a family member.
- Another huge problem in our communities, and specifically church organizations, is that many of the counselors or ministers are not adequately qualified to provide the necessary assistance to victims of domestic violence.
- The government should become more focused on investing in such training and thereby making quality counseling more accessible. This problem is also prevalent in schools, thus affecting numerous children, seeing as their teachers may not be properly trained to identify signs of domestic violence.

It was stressed that faith communities have a tremendously important role to play in combating and preventing domestic violence. However, such roles must be fulfilled in collaboration with the government and NGO's.

3. Intersection between HIV/AIDS, Domestic Violence and Faith



Rev Desmond Lambrecht facilitated this roundtable discussion. The main points that were raised in this discussion related to the following:

- * Participants expressed the value of support groups in fostering important dialogue and conversations.
- * The challenge involved in reaching out to HIV infected persons in the faith communities is still prevalent
- * Mention was made of unfriendly legal and justice departments

Participants noted the importance of starting with the self i.e. as fathers, brothers and parents.

It was said that children must be affirmed in the home by their parents and family members.

The discussion concluded with a strong recommendation that communities of faith need to prioritize the topic of gender-based violence and its intersection with **HIV and AIDS**.



4.

Intimate Partner Abuse in LGBTI Relationships.

Rev Laurie Gaum and Rev Judith Kotze co-facilitated this roundtable.

The discussion started with input from the facilitators. They explained that Inclusive & Affirming Ministries (IAM) has a vision of faith communities in Africa that are welcoming and affirming, where Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people can participate fully and be strengthened in their spiritual, psychological and sexual identity as human beings.

IAM works towards this vision through programs that support and empower the LGBTI community, parents, family and friends (PFF) to stimulate dialogue in building welcoming, affirming and inclusive faith communities. The starting point for discussion was problematizing and unpacking the notions of both 'faith' and 'family' as contained in SAFFI's name.

It was noted that these terms are often used quite exclusionary when it concerns LGBTI's. Faith is a problematized concept for LGBTI's as particular interpretations of holy texts are continued to be used to disregard them as part of the fold. The question would be how LGBTI's can be empowered to reinterpret these texts for inclusion and

reclaiming the faith as well as the spaces in which this faith operates.

One of the participants noted "Both 'faith' and 'family' play a large role in an organisation like Errol Naidoo's Family Policy Institute which was just this week appeared in the news using notion of 'family values' to exclude LGBTI's - in protection of family values. Cape Town should not be promoted as a gay holiday destination (as he interpreted it to be) etc."

Could this notion therefore be broadened and reinterpreted to be more inclusive?

Participants and facilitators noted that when intimate partner abuse (IPA) occurs in LGBTI relationships, it is so much harder to access help from faith communities. The silence around IPA in LGBTI relationships is overwhelming.

Faith communities must come to terms with LGBTI individuals and families in order for it to extend services of support as is desperately required. There is a lot of work ahead to raise awareness about LGBTI in all faith communities and traditions.

5. Sacred Text and Religious Teaching.

Rev John Oliver and Dr Miranda Pillay facilitated this roundtable discussion. The discussion was summarized by the scribe, Eugene Baron, as follows:

- **Interpretation of Text**
- Both Buddhist and Islamic representatives underscored the misinterpretation of religious texts in their respective religions
- Charismatic representative posited that often religious leaders try to theologize their cultural experience, instead of the religious text informing our behavior.
- Approach to text. The need to consider how we approach Sacred Text was noted as vital.
- **Translations**
- Tools of interpretation
- Who has the voice to interpret? Are women's voices not co-opted in our different religions?
- Contextualize Sacred Text with real life experience
- Feminist Biblical scholarship not a swear word "men and women"
- Agency and accountability
- "Out of context" readings must be addressed by religious leaders
- Selective reading – participants were cautioned against using selective readings that are not helpful to people in their intimate relationships and family life
- Re-read liberatively
- Divine order is not contradictory to gender justice
- We need to articulate a faith that will provide women (men) with resources for strength rather than endurance





Survivors

Panel Discussion after Roundtables:

Rev Barry Isaacs, Chairperson of SAFFI, welcomed participants back from the roundtable discussion. He introduced the panellists with a special acknowledgement to the keynote input from Rev Dr Marie Fortune.



Elizabeth Petersen,

Founder and Director of SAFFI, remarked that the choice to launch SAFFI through roundtable and panel discussions is indicative of the complex nature of intimate partner abuse and its impact on individuals and families for whom faith is central. “We move from the understanding that there is no ‘one size fit all’ answer to this very private, yet very public crisis. For too long gender activists and religious leaders have been reluctant to engage each other on this matter. We need to listen to each other and share openly the obstacles, challenges, resources and opportunities to collaborate

for the healing of individuals and families. We believe that the time has come – in fact those deeply affected by gender-based violence, require of all of us to combine our efforts to expand support services to them. The gender justice sector and the religious sector have invaluable resources that if pulled together, can bring about radical positive change. SAFFI seeks to establish faith as a pivotal partner in the quest to prevent, reduce and combat intimate partner violence.” She concluded her remarks by thanking all present for their participation in launching this important aspect concerning the work of enrolling religious leaders and faith communities.



Lungiswa Memela, Director of the Western Cape Network on Violence Against Women expressed the network's gratitude and welcomed the launch of SAFFI. She stressed the importance of the faith sector in combating violence against women and children.

She noted that the faith issues, as experienced by domestic violence survivors, remain a complex reality. She appealed to religious leaders to speak out against gender-based

violence and to raise the scriptures that emphasize the human rights of women and men.

Furthermore she reported that in her roundtable discussion, women of faith from an organization called WE CAN explained how they struggle to find expression within their own faith communities.

Through their determination they continue to serve their communities through various economic development and social upliftment initiatives to bring about positive change in society.

She concluded her remarks by emphasizing the importance of SAFFI in the gender-based violence sector.



Dr Marcel Londt (Specialist: Interventions with Sexual Offenders & Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Senior Lecturer: UWC Social Work Department) highlighted the critical

role that religious communities play in addressing violence and abuse within the family. She reported that most of the men that she encounters in her practice are affiliated to a faith community. These men often use their faith as a source of oppression and a means to justify their abusive behaviour. Religious leaders have a responsibility to address the misuse of the Bible and religious teaching when they deal with perpetrators of gender-based violence. Dr Londt welcomed the launch of SAFFI and its objectives in mobilizing the faith sector.



Rev Desmond Lambrecht (Director NRASD Public Health programme and SANAC) reported that participants in his roundtable discussion shared experiences of how faith communities address the issue of HIV & AIDS.

Whilst many churches seem to be aware of HIV & AIDS, we still have a long way to go in terms of preaching about it in our faith communities. The intersection between domestic violence and HIV & AIDS is still not discussed in faith communities.



Rev Judith Kotze (IAM) informed the SAFFI launch gathering that LGBTI people face challenges on two levels. As extracted from her notes, they include:

Firstly within faith communities there are:

The need exists for organizations like SAFFI to continue to raise awareness about this intersection and build capacity in faith communities regarding how to intervene.

Rev Lambrechts ended his remarks by stating that he is deeply moved by the launch of SAFFI.

He pledged his personal commitment as a religious leader and as a father to go home and ask for forgiveness from his family for times that he may have failed them. He urged other religious leaders present to do the same.

He said: *“we have to start in our own homes first and then take it to the faith community where we are called to serve God’s people.”*

- A lack of understanding of the diversity in sexuality and religion due to fundamentalism, patriarchy and homophobia (closed minds).
- An apathy towards and a lack of exposure to the hurt experienced by LGBTI people (closed hearts).
- A lack of safe spaces, welcoming and affirming communities where LGBTI people of faith can fully be themselves (closed doors).

Secondly the LGBTI community (including PFF) are disempowered on various levels:

- Most LGBTI still do not realize that although they may not be religious,

fundamentalism in Africa is affecting their human rights, and by not addressing this effectively, they are abdicating their voice of change.

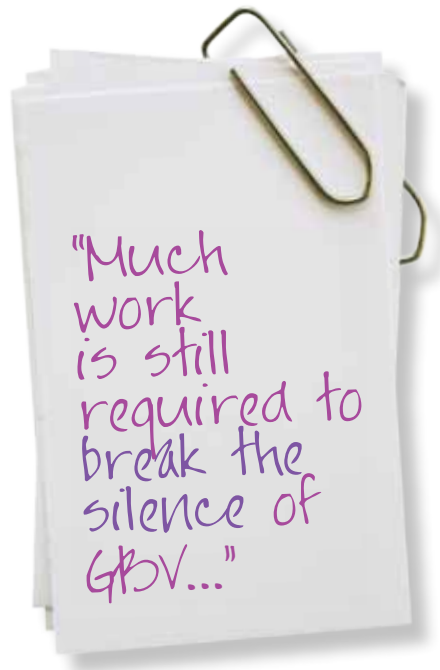
- An exodus of LGBTI people from faith communities due to rejection is resulting in no alternative voice advocating inclusion in faith communities (churches).
- Most LGBTI individuals are in the faith closet where there is no integration between their spirituality and sexuality, often resulting in self-condemnation and lack of mature self-esteem.

(At a recent conference attended, a well-known activist said, "why are you bothering with the Church – The Bible condemns homosexuality, highlighting this fact, that although she rejected all religion she still believes the lie of fundamentalist groups that all sacred text and even God names us an abomination and that there is no room for diversity in interpretations").

- A growing reactionary activism against faith communities lead to many LGBTI's ending up in the gay subculture, alienated from their families and communities.
- PFF have no sounding board within their faith communities and become increasingly alienated themselves.
- LGBTI people in African countries are therefore at the mercy of homophobia and consequent persecution.

It was furthermore brought to the attention of the SAFFI launch that LGBTI people find it extremely difficult to step forward and access help when they find themselves in abuse intimate relationships.

Much work is still required to break the silence of GBV in the LGBTI community.





Dr Miranda Pillay, lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religion had the following to say: *One of the Ethics modules I teach at UWC, is "Moral Discourse on Gender and Human sexuality. An overarching outcome of the Module is to reflect on the basis for our beliefs and attitudes about gender stereotypes and human sexuality with all its complex, relational ramifications. Without fail, every year the responses include (amongst others):*

- *Because that's the way it is... (it's natural)*
- *My values... (the way I've been raised and taught)*
- *Because it is wrong (according to the Bible)*
- About homosexuality students often recall what they've heard or read somewhere:
"The Bible says God created Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve."

All three typical responses are problematic as often they could explicitly or implicitly justify, perpetuate and maintain patriarchal violence in the family. I would like to illustrate this by making by the following statement:

A couple of years ago during the period of Sixteen days of Activism of no Violence Against Women and Children, a local Cape Town radio station invited listeners to call in and comment on the fact that there is a marked increase in gender-based violence, such as rape and violence against female partners in relationships.

A woman called in and explained in Afrikaans that the reason why husbands beat their wives is because women 'don't know their place any longer'. When prompted to explain what she means, she was adamant that the Bible clearly states that "Vroue moet hulle mans onderdanig wees want die man is die hoof van die huis" which means "women must be obedient/ submissive towards their husbands because the man is the head of the house [hold]". This caller's views were both challenged and defended by other listeners who called in to participate in the radio talk-show.

To hold the view as expressed by the caller is to justify, perpetuate and sustain the hierarchy of patriarchy. Women often accept and defend

patriarchy as “the natural order of things” based on androcentricism and dominion.

Patriarchal privilege rooted in ‘male headship’ perpetuates and sustains skewed gender relations.

The Bible is used to justify patriarchal privilege which upholds male domination and female subjugation.

Biblical texts are often quoted and interpreted out of its literary context which then also results in missing (or misinterpreting) the theological thrust of (for example) letters in the New Testament.

The following texts come to mind:

- *Colossians 3:18-19*
- *1 Pet 3.1-2*
- *Ephesians 5:22-33*

Also consider some Old Testament texts:

- For example, in Genesis 19:6-8, the Bible ‘says’ that Lot offers his daughters ‘who had never slept with a man’ to the men outside his house to ‘do what you like with them’ because Lot did not want the men outside his house to harm his male guests since “they have come under the protection of my roof.” This does not justify sexual abuse of girl children, nor does it ‘sanction’ parents to sell their girl children into sex slavery.
- Neither is Tamar’s rape ... or blaming her for it; Neither should Bethsheba be blamed for David’s lust.
However, holding women responsible for the sexual morality of men has become ‘natural.’ Remember, it used to be only the unwed pregnant woman who had to sit in the ‘sondebank’ (bench of sinners) in church – not the man. Now this might not be the case any longer but it is true that some mothers today still warn their sons to be careful of girls who ‘want to catch them’ (fool them into marriage) by falling pregnant.

Consider that earlier this year *15 Feb 2010 BBC News* reported that 11-12 year-olds were interviewed on the subject of violence in relationships: 80% of the children interviewed said that a man “had cause to slap his partner because she did not have the dinner ready on time”.

While this attitude amongst young children in the 21st century would be cause for concern given Europe’s advanced democracy it poses a dilemma especially in an AIDS era. To what extent is glamourising men ‘sowing wild oats’; or (a more African expression) eating from different trees; or ‘normality’ of roaring forties extra-marital affairs really violence against women. We

should consider that such behavior violates a woman's dignity and puts her health at risk. The irony of course is that the woman is made to be the one responsible for the transgenerational nature of the disease when we speak about MTCT.

I am aware that domestic violence also involves violence against men by women and other men in the family, but I have chosen to focus on patriarchal violence because discrimination against women justified by Scripture of the Abrahamic religions is alive and thriving! The texts of the Torah, Bible and Quran continues to be used (abused) to justify discrimination against women; sustain the subjugation of women, and condone violence against women!

With reference to Qu'ranic teaching on wife battering Faried Esac states pleads that, "Driven by the call to justice and compassion we should admit the male-biased context of the text".

New Testament scholar Elna Mouton reminds us that:

Through a lack of credibility on the side of preachers and theological institutions, mainly because of repressive ways in which the Bible has been used in the past, many people seem to have lost their trust and confidence



in the liberating power of the Word of God. For such people to be surprised (again) by Scripture's transformative and liberative power, and to be persuaded by virtues such as truthfulness, authenticity and integrity (while lacking appropriate role-models), have indeed become an enormous theological challenge to Christian theology.

Moreover, Mouton aptly reminds us that the Bible does not supply direct, simple answers to moral questions raised in contemporary society. She suggests that:

- ...we [Christians] have the obligation and responsibility to involve ourselves in the creative tension of the liminal space between the dynamics of the biblical texts and the needs of contemporary society.

This, I believe is an urgent call for responsible theological reflection. Marie Fortune notes that *"We need . . . to begin articulating a faith that will provide women with resources for strength rather than resources for endurance."* To this end I want to say that being aware of the social and ideological inclinations, perceptions and practices which underpin all texts and recognising that God continues to inspire humankind through the reading of Scripture, we should search, be open to and listen for texts that could serve as a Christian resource towards *"repenting of the historic patriarchy of our faith"*.

Ways to do this could include:

- * **Re-thinking and reconfiguring Christian values such as...**
 - * **Forgiveness**
 - * **Unconditional love**
 - * **Suffering**
 - * **Sacrifice**
 - * **Personhood**
 - * **Womanhood ... a woman's personhood and human dignity**
 - * **Redefine masculinity**
- * **WWJD - "What would Jesus Do"**

The Gospels is explicit: Jesus' authority was rooted in his obedience to the Father. To care about others and to care for others: Jesus did. To challenge the 'natural order of things'. Jesus said, *"you were told, but I tell you..."*



Keynote Address by Rev Dr Marie Fortune (Founder and Senior Analyst: FaithTrust Institute)

I am honored to be here for the launch of the South African Faith and Family Institute. And I am honored to be here to support my colleague, Elizabeth Petersen, in her work to address gender based violence in the faith communities of South Africa. As I reflect today on this work, there are several basic assumptions that I would share.

1. Violence against women (gender based violence) is not a women's problem. Women everywhere have to deal with the consequences every day. But the problem belongs to men who most frequently are the ones who choose to use coercion and violence to seek the control of women. It is a choice that some men make in relation to women and unfortunately it is behavior that is often reinforced and not challenged by the cultural and religious values of our patriarchal society. Until men decide to interrupt this socially acceptable behavior, we as women will only be able to resist the way things are. We cannot change the way things are.
2. One dimension of the challenge to our understanding of gender based violence is the absence of acknowledgement of agency on the part of men who do abuse women. It is most apparent in the way we discuss gender based violence in English: "She was raped/beaten/murdered." Nowhere in this sentence do we see the person who does the violence. The voice is passive. Violence doesn't happen; rain and snow happen. "He raped/beat/murdered her," tells the whole truth about her victimization. The other manifestation of this problem is the ease with which we continue to "blame the victim": what did she do/say/wear that caused this violence. This is the default position in our collective consciousness when we encounter a woman who has been victimized.
3. Faith is fundamental to ending gender based violence. Sadly we continue



to live in societies where religion is in service to patriarchy. Culture has hijacked our faith traditions and too often uses the power of religious teaching and practice to justify the mistreatment of women. For those of us who are part of various faith traditions, it is our job to challenge the distortions of sacred texts and teachings that support gender based violence and to lift up the resources within our traditions that affirm safety and justice for women.

4. So the question we are asked by victims and survivors of gender based violence is: "*Is there no balm in Gilead?*" [Jeremiah 8:22] Are there resources within our faith traditions for healing? The African-American spiritual answers in the affirmative: "*There is a balm in Gilead.*" There only is this resource if we bring it, name it, preach it, teach it.

This is the work of the South African Faith and Family Institute.

FaithTrust Institute [in the U.S.] is privileged to come alongside SAFFI as a sister organization. We pledge our support and prayers. We pledge to share access to resources to further this important work in mobilizing faith communities in South Africa to challenge gender based violence. We anticipate a long and fruitful relationship.





On behalf of the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum, Rev John Oliver shared the following words:

“Religious communities and particularly those from the Abrahamic faiths, have a lot of work to do when it comes to women.

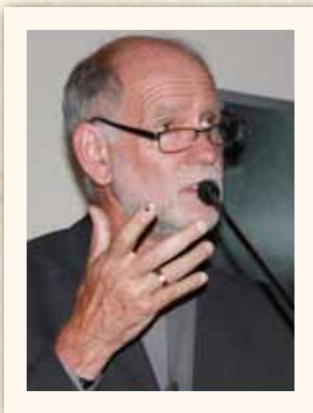
We have been reminded once again today of the ancient and abiding ambivalence in monotheism towards everything feminine, an obsession with sexual transgression and misogyny in our churches and communities that has never

ceased to denigrate, demean and disempower women.

That tradition and theology have been constructed in such a way as to perpetuate a culture of male superiority and male privilege is a corporate failure to which we as religious leaders must strive to make amends.

We have also heard of the irresponsible use of sacred texts used to justify oppressive behaviour against women – and one of the commitments of WCRLF is to encourage theological engagement with these so called problematic texts. While we have the greatest respect for our diversity of thought and culture, and while we are aware that religious consensus is sometimes hard to come by, I would like to think that as part of our cooperative venture, we can support each other in letting go of all morally or theologically indefensible positions.

Around the reality and prevalence of domestic violence and the systemic abuse of women there has been a conspiracy of silence. And even today it has not been easy to mobilise the religious sector around this issue.



The tendency has been to ignore, deny, and as has been mentioned, even to excuse.

So the WCRLF welcomes the South African Faith and Family Institute into the interreligious landscape as one of our partners. We welcome SAFFI, not to do the work for us, but to prod our conscience and our hearts, to provide a voice to those whom we have denied, and to hold us accountable as religious leaders in providing not just compassion and support but a determined and

prophetic 'speaking out' and 'speaking into' the issue of gender and intimate partner violence.

On behalf of the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum may I congratulate SAFFI on its launch and pray that God will bless and strengthen this critical piece of justice making and peace building. We pray that the one God will bring us to a new heart and a new mind knowing that, as we read in sacred scripture,

God created humankind in his own image, male and female he created them and he blessed them.



Religious Leaders Sign Pledge of Commitment ...



...to Collaborate with government and existing gender justice organizations to END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Commitment to Collaborate to End Violence against Women and Children:

RELIGIOUS LEADERS PLEDGE

We the Religious Leaders of the Western Cape are deeply disturbed by the escalating scourge of violence against women and children in our city and country. It is completely unacceptable that Cape Town is regarded as the Rape Capital of the world. As people of faith, we are strongly opposed to the fact that our women and children live in one of the most dangerous places on earth. We believe that God has created the earth for all to enjoy and live in peace and harmony. We stand united against any form of violence or abuse of women and children.

TO THE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, WE SAY:

- We realize that we have failed many of you when you reached out to us for help. We have often failed in our pastoral duty to respond to you with integrity and compassion
- We have failed you every time we suggested that you must pray harder and be more submissive to your abusive husband
- We have turned a blind eye when some leaders have violated you
- We acknowledge that we have been silent when we had the power to speak out
- We pledge our commitment to join the efforts of others to bring offenders to account

TO THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDER, WE SAY:

- Your abusive behaviour will not be tolerated in our communities
- You have to take responsibility for your behaviour
- You must get the professional help that is required to help you work through your abusive behaviour
- God is calling you to account for every woman and child that you have ever hurt
- We will work with other professionals to help you to find repentance and healing

TO FELLOW RELIGIOUS LEADERS, WE SAY:

- We commit to holding each other accountable for any form of sexual misconduct against women and children

TO THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS, WE WANT TO SAY:

- We realize that we have been silent and perceived to be complicit in violence against women and children
- We see our responsibility and commit to equip ourselves to understand the complexities around domestic violence
- We will seek to become Pastoral Caregivers that women and children can rely on
- We commit to finding ways to make our Places of Worship sanctuaries of hope and healing
- We commit to help hold perpetrators accountable and work towards restorative justice interventions
- We will seek to develop Domestic Violence Intervention Policies and Pastoral Care Guidelines in our faith communities

TO THE GOVERNMENT, WE SAY:

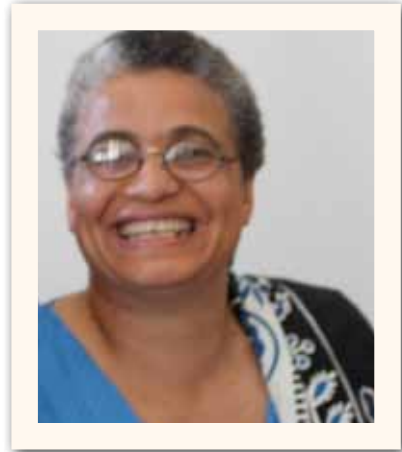
- We thank you for acknowledging that violence against women is a national priority
- We thank you for the Domestic Violence Act and other legislation aimed at securing the human rights of women and children
- We urge that Domestic Violence be criminalized, if we are serious about the safety of our women and children
- The Domestic Violence Act must be amended to make Protection Orders immediately available to victims. Police must be authorized to give the protection order at the scene when they are called out to an incident
- The Police must be authorized to confiscate fire arms immediately in cases where there is domestic violence
- We need more services for perpetrators of domestic violence
- We need more services for children who have witnessed and experienced domestic violence

Conclusion & Final Remarks



Dr Yvette Abrahams from the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) publicly endorses SAFFI and indicated that CGE is committed to working with SAFFI in its mission to mobilize the faith sector in combating gender-based violence.

Rev Joy F Kronenberg, vice-chair of the South African Council of Churches congratulates SAFFI on its launch and stated its commitments to work with SAFFI.





Acknowledgements

Elizabeth Petersen gave the concluding remarks and acknowledged the various partner organizations, the USA State Department, Faith Trust Institute, Rev Dr Marie Fortune, the esteemed panellists, the participants and the volunteers for making the official launch of SAFFI possible.

A special acknowledgement was given to Jacqueline Hoorn for the excellent office support and event organization skills that she is sharing with SAFFI.

Rev Gail Avery (Episcopal priest and colleague) who came especially to offer logistical and other support to SAFFI was also acknowledged.

Ilse Els from MES and Patrick Petersen were acknowledged for assisting with catering.

Religious leaders were invited by Rev Barry Isaacs to sign the pledge which was read out. Nicolene October rendered another song item called "What about the Children." Rev Isaacs again thanked everybody for their support and active participation at the launch and invited all to network over a finger lunch in the foyer.



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Lunch & Networking

