



The Anglican Church of Canada



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Canada

“Our Solemn Promise”; Lutherans, Anglicans called to public reciting of the promise to “never commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women”.

November 25th marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. It is followed by the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence which ends on 10 December, United Nations Human Rights Day. Statistics continue to reveal the awful truth that no country rich or poor, dictatorship or democracy has come close to eradicating gender based violence. It is a global issue.

This year the world has witnessed horrific atrocities in Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Gaza and Sudan. It is well documented that the majority of innocent victims of war are women and children. By far the greatest number of human beings trafficked for the sex trade are women and girls.

The Lutheran World Federation has launched the theme for the 500th anniversary commemorating the Lutheran Reformation in 1517 – “Liberated by God’s Grace”. Three subthemes for the commemoration focus on Salvation – not for sale, Creation – not for sale and Human Beings – not for sale. The Lutheran churches invite all churches to participate in this resolve in addressing human trafficking.

The Anglican Communion Office has recently launched an initiative “Anglicans Ending Gender Based Violence”. It urges the churches “to not remain silent about this tragedy but to speak up and take action in addressing it”. It calls us “to provide safe space for victims of violence”, and “to promote and model safe, equal, respectful relationships between men, women, girls and boys”. It calls the churches “to teach young men and women to honour themselves and each other as human beings cherished equally by God.”

As Canadians, many of us were horrified by the November 7th beating of Rinelle Harper, a 16 year old Grade 11 student in Winnipeg. Viciously beaten and thrown into the Assiniboine River, she managed to crawl out of the river upstream, only to be beaten again and left unconscious. Thankfully she was found, hospitalized and is recovering. She came so very close to being numbered among the more than 1000 missing or murdered aboriginal women in Canada, but she survived.

Her beating is a stark reminder of the brutality suffered by so many aboriginal women and girls. According to the Federal Government Report “Invisible Women: A Call to Action” (March 2014), aboriginal women and girls are two times more likely to be victims of domestic abuse and three times more likely to be the target of a

violent attack. The report calls for action through all levels of government in increasing police and emergency measures services, and in increasing the number of shelters, safe houses, and second stage housing for those escaping violence. It also addresses the need in Canadian society at large to break the silence about gender based violence.

Throughout the “16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence” initiative, thousands of people will gather in vigil in public squares, at town halls, Band Council offices and provincial legislatures. We will light candles in memory of all victims of gender based violence. We will pray for all who remain imprisoned in its vicious cycles, for all making an escape, and for all who counsel and empower them in reclaiming their dignity and their life itself. We will be invited to make the promise associated with these sixteen days, “I will never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women”. A group of Canadian men wrote this promise in response to the horrific murder of fourteen young women at the École Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6, 1989. Now it is made in more than sixty countries around the world.

While the promise is particularly for men to make, it is in truth a promise all of us can and ought to make as people of faith – for in every respect it reflects our baptismal vow “to respect the dignity of every human being”.

Accordingly we call the Church, on one of the Sundays within the sixteen days to a public reciting of this promise, “I will never commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women”.



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