



**THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
NATAL COASTAL DISTRICT
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NOVEMBER 2012 COMMUNIQUE

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM BECOMES REAL IN THE BISHOPS OFFICE....

On Tuesday morning 27 Nov I was busy preparing for our District Executive meeting. My concentration was interrupted abruptly by a young woman's repeated screams. Hazel rushed to the front door and said someone is being attacked. I rushed out. A very distressed, crying young woman stood against the wall. Her umbrella and sandals lay in the road. She had just been sexually assaulted by a young man. Hazel came out and took the young woman inside to our office, and cared for her. Myself and the security guard from the healing centre across the road, set off in the direction in which the young man ran. He had been apprehended by community members in Umbilo road. It was amazing to be part of this non-racial community effort to catch this young man.

When asked what he had done the young man said he made a proposal to her. He did not know her. There was no remorse or regret, just a wry smile out of the corner of his mouth. (Perhaps nervousness?) Other witnesses saw that it was an assault. The SAPS were called. A cynical white woman said she doubts if they will ever arrive. I say to her let's not get ahead of ourselves. She replies that she is a realist. I say not all SAPS are bad. She ends up agreeing.

I then go back to the office at which time both parents of the young woman and the SAPS arrive with the perpetrator in the back. The father gets angry I have to hold him back as he tries to accost the perp. We managed to calm father down. The mother was sobbing. They all left for the Police station to lay charges against this young man who I estimate not to be older than 22. The young woman was about 19.

The 16 Days of Activism 25 November to 10 December became real for us.(see attached)

I shared this with the District Executive later and added that I was also concerned for this young man who had no respect for women, who thought he could take any woman at any time as he pleased. What made him think and do these things? What examples does he have? Jail may exacerbate this young man's criminal tendency – what he needs in addition to jail time is gender-sensitivity education.

This young woman will now be afraid to walk the streets even in broad daylight. Her parents are going to increase their protectiveness of her. They will become captives because of the idiotic, shameful and diabolical behavior of this young man.

In society there is still a belief among men that they can own any woman they like (this cuts across all cultures and class). The belief is that a woman must give men sex if and when they please. The 'No means yes' culture still prevails.

Even in the church one witnesses our male ministers making sexual inference toward female colleagues and other female congregants. One observes how male ministers get touchy feely with younger attractive women and they seem to think it is okay. One woman minister told me once that a male colleague said to her that he had not had sex in a long time. This woman minister was decidedly uncomfortable and did not want to take matters further.

Ministers preach with great authority that wives must be submissive to their husbands. Please go and do your homework on these passages and understand what it actually says – it does not justify oppression of women whatsoever. My opinion is that this type of sermon and teaching gives oxygen for sexual predators and young male minds to feel justified in what they did. This is not dissimilar to anti-Semitic teachings by the church which contributed to giving oxygen to the NAZIs to kill six million Jews.

Even women are complicit in this oppression. One cannot make sense that a so called progressive organisation such as the ANC Women's League feels that women are not ready to be President. Really?? Don't we know of many women in the MCSA who say exactly the same thing and undermine women ministers and women in leadership?

In the church you can have a lazy, mediocre, and troublesome male minister and people will tolerate this. When a women minister behaves in a similar way, her gender is blamed. It's because she is a woman, it is said. Woman ministers have to work twice as hard to maintain a sense of acceptance in the Church.

My rant can go on... but let us end here by reminding ourselves of the teachings of Paul. Paul seems to ramble on about many things and through this we get a sense of his own evolving growth in understanding his journey with Jesus the Christ, and then, a real 'aha' moment happens for him. It is like an intense revelation by the Holy Spirit and he says to the foolish Galatians (3:1). There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, **there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.**"
(3:28)

Let us take this to heart so that we as men can become better role models for young men like this sexual predator and others and that they in turn will come to find a better way of being male, Jesus-like male.

I would encourage you to visit the 16 Days of Activism display at the Botanical Gardens, Durban (SEE ATTACHED)

PEACE AND BLESSINGS

Bishop Michael