

*'So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.'* Genesis 1:27

As Christians we believe that all people are made in the image of God and therefore all people, both men and women, have the same innate dignity.

The behaviour of Jesus in the Gospels affirms this dignity. He shows all people great respect, even going beyond the religious and social boundaries of the day. He spends time with tax collectors and prostitutes, he heals the woman who has been suffering from haemorrhages for 12 years and he talks to the woman at the well. Not only is she a woman, but she is also a Samaritan. Despite both these reasons to stay away from her Jesus talks to her of God and reveals that he is the Messiah.

Unfortunately the dignity of women is not always reflected in human behaviour. Inequality in the balance of power in relationships between women and men means that many women experience violence at the hands of men in their family, community or by police, military or state officials.

Gender-based violence affects both women and men and is maintained by gender stereotypes where men are expected to be dominant and in control and so use violence to express their frustration.

Domestic violence is the most common form of gender-based violence, however there are many others, such as rape, which is used as a systematic weapon of war. Due to their lack of power in the relationship, women are often trapped in the abusive situation. They are often economically dependent on their abuser and may be shunned by the rest of the community if they leave.

There are no simple answers. Pope Benedict XVI called for Christians to promote 'a culture that grants women, in law and in everyday life, the dignity that is theirs by right.'

But work needs to be done with both women and men to redress the balance of power, so that all people live in right relationship with each other.

Loving God,

Give courage and strength to those who suffer violence. Help them to redress the balance of power and reclaim their dignity. Open the eyes of the violent so that they can see the damage that they cause and recognize the need for a change in their behaviour. Help us all to see that we are all equal in your eyes. We ask this through Christ our Lord, who treated all people with respect. Amen.