Tool 1:
Becoming inspired

"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."
Galatians 3: 28-29

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Catch the vision

Time to talk

Read the following story about a church that is trying "to do church differently", and then talk about it together with others in your church:

"The first time I sat down in this church in the main street of this small town, I knew I belonged. People looked relaxed, and small children were making little noises now and then without their mothers having to take them outside. Some were very well dressed, but others looked more like me. During the Peace, or congregational welcoming, many people came up and introduced themselves to me, even though I was not well dressed. One man invited to me to tea after the service.

A pregnant girl, who could not have been older than 16, stood up to read the first Bible reading in the local language and people could follow in English in their pew bibles. I wondered how she was still allowed in the church, and even to read in the service? I was told later that she and her boyfriend had met with the pastor, and were undergoing counselling to work through what had happened and how to deal with the consequences together. She had told the congregation that she was dealing

with it as she would any other sin, since 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' *(Romans3:23).*

The pastor stood up and welcomed us all. She told us that we were all children of God, and that God loves us as we are. Her sermon was on Jesus' parable about the woman who had lost her coin and would not give up looking until she had found it. The pastor told us the old lady must have been very poor, because she had very little light in her house, and people were taxed on the size of their windows. She told us that Jesus used this old poor woman to show us that God looks for us and does not give up until God finds us! Does Jesus mean that God is like a poor old woman who cannot even afford windows in her little house? And that God even cares for a lost coin like me? Wow! I want to get to know this God a bit better after all.

At the end of the service, different people stood up and shared notices. The women's fellowship announced that they would be having their monthly meeting about their care centre for victims of gender based violence, and my ears pricked up. Maybe I should go along there and ask for help? No – I was afraid they might judge me and force me back to my abusive husband. But the lady specifically mentioned that it was a place for victims of violence to come and get support. Maybe I will go.

The chairperson of the men's fellowship stood up and invited the men to their monthly friendship meeting, and the theme was about the new national Constitution and the freedoms it offered women. He said it was a chance to talk about their concerns and worries.

The chair of the Church Council stood up. He told us about a joint project with the women's fellowship starting for unemployed men and women to come and learn different skills. 'Hmm', I thought to myself: 'Maybe I should go there, and maybe I will find work?"

I became involved in the church in different ways, and am now on the Church Council. I am learning a lot, because all new Council members have been meeting weekly to learn about leadership and how democratic committees work. I had heard they do this, otherwise I would never have agreed to be nominated onto the Council. Maybe one day I will be chairperson!"

Talk about the following questions:

- What are the main things that happen in this church that are different to other churches you know?
- Talk about each one. Do you agree with the way things are done?
    - ☐ What is good about it, and what does not work for you? Why or why not?
    - ☐ How could this church improve the way they are doing things in each case?

- What is the underlying message that this church sends out about who God is, and how Jesus relates to all people? (Refer to Bible texts if you want. See also Tool 3, pp 41-44)
- How do things work in your church, in relation to the different things mentioned above?
- What would you like to change in your church?
- What could you do to make change happen in your church?

Who is this toolkit for?

If you want to see your church look more like the one in the story above, then read on!

It does not matter if you are a pastor, priest, chair of your church council or an ordinary member. If you want to see your church working more consciously towards win-win relationships between men and women, to both women and men in leaders using their leadership in the ways Jesus taught; and if you are also willing and open to change yourself, then this Toolkit is for you.

Even if you don't have much background in the Bible or theology, this toolkit offers a set of tools to help you to think and talk with others about gender within your church, and bring about changes for the better. It will give you the information you need to be more informed and feel more confident in this important work to enable your church to model the mind of ministry that Jesus modelled: a ministry that is inclusive, that enables everyone to recognise God's love and grace, and that allows anyone, regardless of their sex or other difference, to use their gifts freely.

Why should the Church work towards gender equality?

The Church's mandate to bring Good News

According to the Bible, we are called not only to preach the good news of salvation, but to share in Jesus' ministry that *"they may have life, and have it abundantly"* (John10:10).

Throughout the Old and New Testaments we see that God sides with the poor and the marginalised, the hungry and oppressed; and is very critical of political and religious leaders that advantage some people over others. That is why the church is called to work for all forms of social and economic justice in society.

Of course this also means that we as churches have to ensure that all our internal systems, structures and relationships are just.

Gender – the meanings attached by a society to what it means to be a 'real' man or a 'real' woman, including:

- correct behaviours
- appropriate roles in the home, work place, church and public life
- expressions of emotions
- expressions of one's sexuality and sexual preferences.

Gender is not the same as **'sex',** which just refers to biological differences.

The Church in many parts of Africa has a proud history of championing the cause of the poorest and most marginalised.

But who are the marginalised?

Marginalised people are those who are excluded from what is considered as important in society. Today they are largely women – young, black, poor women; and to some extent, men who are uneducated, unemployed, are not physically strong or are seen to be 'soft'.

To be true to our faith in the God who sides with the poor, the Church in Southern Africa today is being called to work towards gender justice as an essential aspect of social, economic and environmental justice.

Some people are afraid this will mean giving all the power to women over men, or to undermine African cultural traditions.

But it is none of those things. We are called to be inclusive: to enable the women and the men in our churches to listen to each other better, to question underlying reasons for the problems we often have between us, including the violence between us; and to work together for healing and transformation.

Gender inequality is one of many forms of discrimination

Gender is often seen as a battle between individual men and women, but it is much more complicated than that.

In a way, gender justice issues are similar to racial, social or economic justice issues: Although they are about the individual choices we make, these are influenced by belief systems and values in broader society.

All injustice can be linked to struggles over limited resources and power struggles between groups. Our skin colour, cultural and education background, how rich or poor we are – as well as our gender - can all contribute to this conflict, and to some extent determine our status.

Gender inequality hampers economic and social development

Any society that restricts economic or social leadership to only certain types of people is not using all the wealth of human resources it has available. In most countries of the world, women do not have the same rights and access to decision making power and resources as men, and so only half of the population is available to make a contribution to wider society. This makes it difficult for such a society to really prosper and develop a strong economy.

But it also makes life in general much harder for women than for men, and that is why it is a human rights and a justice issue. For example, if a woman does not get a good education, her job opportunities are limited; if she cannot get a good job, own land, or open a bank account, she cannot earn a decent livelihood. And she will always be dependent on someone else to look after her and her children.

There are health implications as well: women who are denied the right to decide when and with whom they want to have sex, are vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and even premature death.

Women and men working together. Rev Dr Chiropafadzo Moyo, Mrs Zwana and her husband Reverend Dr Zwana during the Zimbabwe Council of Churches Golden Jubilee celebration, Harare. *Source: Loveness Jambaya Nyakujarah*

Gender inequality is part of an exclusionary social system called patriarchy

The dignity of both men and women is undermined by patriarchy, which is a system designed to privilege the few. Patriarchy is not just about men imposing power on women. Patriarchy does not only disadvantage women through limiting their access to land, power or life choices. It also disadvantages the many men who do not fit into the norm of what it means to be a 'real man' (e.g. men who are not good sportsmen, gay, unemployed, or choose to stay at home with their children). On the other hand, there are women who find (often sexual) ways to win the favour of powerful men and gain real power themselves, but who then also misuse their power to benefit themselves only.

Patriarchy - the prevailing social system that asserts male dominance in all spheres of life. While all men are presumed to dominate over the women closest to them, not all men qualify to dominate over women as well as other men who do not meet the criteria for being a 'real man' (such as wealth, good looks or sporting talent).

Time to talk

Read the following stories about two people, and answer the following questions:

- Why do you think these people are suffering? Is it because they are men or women, or because of other things in their lives?

- Talk about how they must feel. What would they have to do to bring about real change in their lives? What would need to change in society for this to be possible for them?
- How might we as the church support them?

Jacob *has not had access to a decent education, and has only sometimes been able to get menial short term work in the informal sector. He feels like a failure as a man because he cannot provide adequately for his family, and he is treated like a child by his current employer.*

Mary *had to give up school because she fell pregnant. She is unable to protect herself from HIV because her unfaithful husband refuses to use condoms. She has to listen to her children cry themselves to sleep from hunger every night. Mary feels threatened by men who whistle at her or make rude remarks on the street because they find her 'desirable'.*

The Church cannot ignore the struggle for gender justice. It is not just a struggle of individual women against individual men, no more than the struggle against colonialism in Africa was a battle between individual blacks and whites. It is about struggling to realise Jesus' vision of abundant life for all.

How can you use this toolkit?

This toolkit has grown out of a booklet that came about after gender audit research projects were done in 2007 in Malawi, South Africa, and Zambia (which did another one in 2008); and in Zimbabwe and Lesotho in 2012.

In 2013, a small study was done to follow up on how the churches in these five countries have taken forward the work of transforming relations between men and women since then. The study looked at what has changed and what has not changed, what still needs to be done and what we can learn from the experiences of the churches in these countries.

Important lessons we have learnt are shared in Tools 6, 7 and 8.

The other tools in this toolkit tackle a variety of issues related to gender and the Church. The topics were chosen by ordinary church men and women in the five countries in the study, who were asked what they might find useful.

There are lots of other issues that may interest you. You are invited to use the list of useful organisations, documents and other media in the last Practical Toolkit as a starting point to find the information and support you need.

The ideas in this Toolkit can help you in the following ways:

- To help you to become a critical gender "researcher" in your own church so you can find out what aspects of the life of your church need to be changed. There are self-review questions in Tool 6 (and a full list of guiding questions in Practical Toolkit 1) for thinking about how men and women relate in your church, and what the church is doing to improve the lives of women as well as men in your church and in the community.

- To equip you with information and ideas to support your gender work and give you confidence to challenge gender discrimination in your church.

- To join with other concerned people in your own or other churches to draw up an action plan for gender work in your church.

Foundation stones

This toolkit:

- offers useful information about gender transformation in churches in Southern Africa, and introduce some of the debates amongst leaders and ordinary people in churches in some Southern African countries;
- opens space to talk (dialogue) about gender matters in a non-dogmatic way, where everybody's opinion counts and is open for debate;
- encourages reflection on experience through stories, quotations, audit findings, and questions.

The **purpose** of this Toolkit is to help churches to bring about meaningful transformation in:

- our personal knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, and relationships that promote inequality and unjust or even violent actions;
- uncritical (and/or incorrect) Biblical interpretations and doctrinal assumptions that reproduce patriarchal norms that undermine gender equality and justice;
- policies of churches that undermine justice and the freedom Christ has promised; and
- the organisational culture and structures of the churches in Southern Africa.

The **vision** is to work together to learn to do church differently, so that we can truly become inclusive communities of hope and healing.

Values

The basic **assumption** is that not one of us is perfect - we all are walking together on a journey towards our own healing and towards changing our own lives as much as to change our churches and societies.

Every tool contains many opportunities to stop and reflect, and for groups to have conversations and discussions about important aspects of gender equality in the Church. They can be recognised by the headings: "Time to talk"; or "What happens in your own church?"

'Correct' answers are not provided, because it is not possible to legislate one specific set of opinions as the only truth. This only causes divisions and confusion. Instead, information is offered as a basis for further discussion and debate. This is because we recognise that we are all on different journeys of reflection and discovery, and we all live in different situations, with different influences on us. What may be a solution for one may be a problem for another.

But this toolkit is founded in a number of **fundamental beliefs and values**:

- God created man and woman to be equal partners in ministry and grace;
- Each person is travelling on a journey into God's truth for their lives;
- Basic to everything is Jesus' call to "love others as yourself". When in doubt about what a correct course of action it, just ask if you would like to be on the receiving end of that attitude, word or action.
- Jesus has called us to join in His ministry to bring 'abundant life to all'. (John 10:10)

Source: ICASA

Structure

This toolkit has been designed so that you can make copies of any one of the tools for use in discussion groups, bible studies or planning meetings.

Although you need not use all the chapters, or go through them in order, **it is important that you work through Tools 1 and 2 before you work with any of the other tools.** Make sure that whoever is coordinating discussions related to any of the other tools has a good understanding of the basic concepts and the different gender discourses in our churches that are introduced in Tools 1 and 2.

The first five tools can be used to explore gender from social, theological, cultural and human rights perspectives.

Tools 6, 7 and 8 sum up the findings of the follow-up study to the churches' gender audits conducted in five SADC countries, and draw out the most important lessons from their journeys. These form the heart of this Toolkit. They are designed to empower concerned groups to **do-church gender audits** to understand what the concerns are in their churches. This will help make sure that their gender awareness raising and advocacy work is useful to their church.

Tools 9 and 10 go a bit deeper into perhaps the two most urgent dynamics that need to be transformed in and by the churches: Leadership and gender based violence.

Tool 11 and the four Practical Tools offer practical guidelines and support for church activists to take the gender transformation agenda forward in their churches and faith based organisations. A brief **Guide for Facilitators** is also found in the back of the toolkit. **Tools 12 and 13** have been added to the second edition, by special request of the Church Councils, to deal with two special issues: involving men as an important part of the solution; and dealing with the thorny issue of sexual diversities (in some countries where it is safe to do so).

You will find a **Glossary** of the most commonly used gender terms at the end of this toolkit.

Notes

Please send your feedback for this tool to
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