

**ADVENT CELEBRATION : 2007**  
**Diakonia Council of Churches**  
**Address by Bishop Barry wood, OMI**

Good evening and welcome.

I am very aware that we live these days within a culture of death. Every weekend sees hundreds of funerals every weekend being performed. The war in Iraq sees many killings every day. In Sudan and Darfur we see ongoing violence, hunger and war. In neighbouring Zimbabwe we see widespread starvation. And in our own country we witness murder, hijackings, abuse of women and children and other forms of violence on a daily basis. Just the other day we saw an Austrian shot while playing golf on the South Coast.

I am reminded of the vision of peace, harmony and tolerance as expressed in the following passage from Isaiah. In this passage we see no victims, no perpetrators and no predators. We see a way of living which rejects the culture of death and we are offered an opportunity during Advent to make the vision of Isaiah our own – to develop the riches of our hearts...Caring, Sharing, Compassion, and Love.

Reading: Is. 11: 6-9

*“The wolf is guest of the lamb  
The leopard lies down with the kid  
The calf and the young lion browse together  
The lion eats hay like the ox  
The baby plays by the cobra’s den  
The child lays his hand on the adder’s lair”*

Soon we will be embarking on 16 days of activism against violence on women and children. One Saturday night I was called out at midnight to a block of flats near the church. When I arrived I found the young mother of the family, covered in blood and cowering behind the sofa, the children were in their room screaming hysterically. I found the father in the kitchen, drunk with an empty bottle of vodka on the table.

Anger welled up in me as I took in the scene and my first reaction was to beat up the drunk who had caused all the pain and mayhem. I did not do it. Having called in those who care for the abused, and the police to deal with the father, I sat down in that flat and cried. Why this suffering, degradation, abuse and pain? We cannot allow the evil in the world to overwhelm us and destroy the riches of our hearts - love and compassion.

Fr Albert Nolan O.P. says “If we are going to be honest and sincere, as Jesus was, we must face the full horror of human suffering and allow ourselves to be outraged by the unimaginable cruelty of many of our fellow human beings. Jesus was overcome with compassion for all who were suffering and he abhorred every kind of cruelty.” At the same time he extended his compassion to all, the good, the bad and the ugly.

That drunk had come from a dysfunctional and abusive family, where his goodness, self-esteem and confidence had been beaten out of him by a cruel parent. “*Be compassionate as your heavenly father is compassionate.*” We hear these words clearly when dealing with victims and our hearts go out to them in their pain. But it is difficult to feel the same way for the perpetrators, we need tough love, tough compassion to deal with them. We hate what they do but we cannot hate them. In our family lives, in our neighbourhoods, in our nation and in our Church we need to add compassion to the ingredients. That scenario in the flat that night is being played out in our up-market golfing estates, our suburbs, townships and rural areas every day. South Africa has one of the highest rates of rape and domestic violence in the world. One out of every 8 women has been beaten up by a partner, there is a rape every 83 seconds and at least one million rapes a year in our beloved country.

During these days of activism against violence on women and children let us join hands together to reach out especially to victims and, even more difficult, to the perpetrators. Do not let anger overwhelm us but let us develop the riches of our hearts and in so doing help others develop their full potential as beloved daughters and sons of God.

An old man was caught one night in a storm and could not cross the river to his home because it was in full flood. One horseman came by and passed through the river, as did another a few minutes later, a third horseman came by and the old man shouted and asked for a lift through the river. The horseman jumped off his horse and lifted the man onto the horse, went through the raging waters and delivered the old man to the door of his home. The horseman was intrigued and asked the old man why he did not stop the two who preceded him. The old man replied “because when I looked into your eyes I saw compassion.”

What do people see when they look into your eyes?

*(This sermon was delivered by Bishop Barry Wood, OMI, who is the current Chairperson of Diakonia Council of Churches, on 27 November 2007. Please visit us at [www.diakonia.org.za](http://www.diakonia.org.za))*