



# WOMENALITY

## 2019

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JESUS · Sigebaar, Vosbaar, Verstaanbaar

| TRENDS



## INTRODUCTION

The role of women in our modern society remains a sensitive issue for many people. Whether applicable to business, politics, sports or entertainment – the role of women is being rethought, debated and adapted everywhere.

Hopefully all this attention will have a positive effect on the sphere of influence, but in many cases we see progress still taking the back seat out of fear for what a possible uncertain future may hold.

With this in mind, *echurch* published a trend report titled *Vrouerskap* in 2012. The report focused specifically on the role of women in leadership positions in the fields of art, culture, business and politics. The conclusion of the report was that women have a unique way of applying leadership, one that the world desperately wants and needs right now.

In this report we will take the discussion around the role of women on the world stage a step further. We will widen the lens and look not only at leadership, but also at other areas of participation, and how the role of women changed over the past two years.

*Why do we look specifically at the role of women? Why don't we publish reports focusing exclusively on men?*

Historically, women's influence and authority had been undervalued in society. Traditionally they were seen as less important, especially in running a business or making important decisions. We see proof of this in ancient times, right through the Middle Ages and the Industrial Revolution. And to the detriment of our own growth, we still see substantial bias against women and their contributions today.

This report isn't necessarily a Part 2 for the original "*Vrouerskap*"-report. It is rather a conversation that, although in the same tone, tries to look at the challenges that women of today face, as well as real action steps that local congregations can take to overcome these obstacles, and in doing so, open the way in terms of gender equality and fair positioning of women.

This is a translated quotation from the first "*Vrouerskap*" report:

*It is as if we are caught up in cultural streams that lead to both a more homogenous and a more diversified society where gender is concerned. Although this situation can lead back to more traditional and conservative approaches, it also offers unique opportunities to the local church. Congregations and non-profit organisations throughout South Africa are confronted by issues like that of female leadership and the impact it has on a changing world.*

May we not only touch on a controversial issue in a meaningful way in this trend report, but may we also awaken your interest in the role that you can play in helping us move, both locally and globally, towards a society where God's entire creation is used to show His love to a hungry world.

## INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

In order to arrive at a holistic view of what is happening with the role of women, we will have to look far beyond our horizon to form an impression of what is happening around the world.

The birth of the #metoo and #timesup movements placed fresh global emphasis on women. Another influential international factor was the election of Donald Trump as the American president, and how his personal comments and policies influence the general impression of women. We will use this lens to look at all the areas of participation, to find out what the current controversies are, and how it can bring about change.

### In Business

Even in a first-world business society like Australia, the empowerment of women in leadership is a challenge. According to a *Bloomberg* publication, the *2018 Chief Executive Women (CEW) Senior Executive Census* determined that the rise in the number of women in executive positions happens too slowly and not anywhere near the set quotas.

The report also highlights a possible cause of this slow progress:

*Line roles are a critical pathway to the top job," said Chio Verastegui, a partner at Bain & Co., who led the data collection and analysis for the survey. "Moving the needle towards gender balance across all levels of leadership will require a bolder, multi-pronged approach. Companies could consider strategies to rotate female talent across operational business areas to grant them broader exposure, and a more deliberate approach to succession planning in key feeder roles.*

Another gender equality issue in the world of business is that of remuneration. Unequal pay for the same work by men and women respectively leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of those affected negatively by it. This aspect is perhaps the most obvious way in which the industry discriminates against women.

According to *Forbes Magazine* American market is the slowest economy in terms of equal pay for equal work.

*According to JUST Capital's 2017 Rankings, 78 of the 875 largest publicly-traded U.S. companies have conducted pay equity analyses, while only 54 have established a policy, as well as targets, for diversity and equal opportunity – that's 9% and 6% of these corporations, respectively.*

In England, starting in 2018, every company with more than 250 workers is required to declare their pay gap.

*Initial results from reporting show that, to no one's great surprise, men are paid more than women – and certain industries stand out particularly for their wide pay gaps – airlines, major fashion brands, and financial firms.*

Last year, Iceland declared it unlawful to pay men more than women. This revolutionary legislation came into effect on 1 January 2018 and aims to eliminate professional gender inequality.

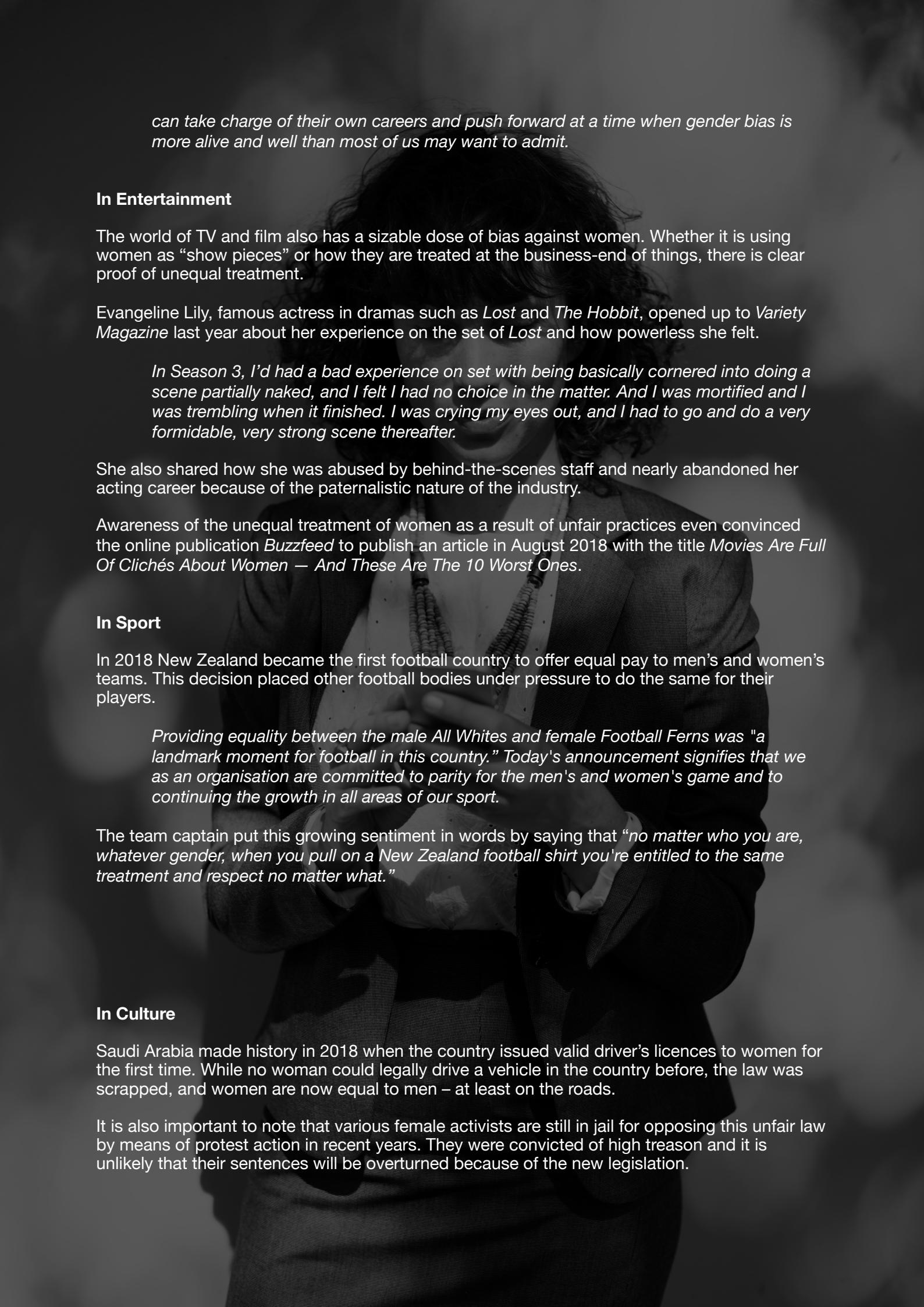
Dagny Osk Aradottir Pind, of the *Icelandic Women's Rights Association*, had the following to say to *Al Jazeera*:

*The legislation is basically a mechanism that companies and organisations ... evaluate every job that's being done, and then they get a certification after they confirm the process if they are paying men and women equally. It's a mechanism to ensure women and men are being paid equally.*

Possible one of the most influential works of 2018 was Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In: Women, Work And The Will To Lead*.

Although the book received much criticism from both extremes of the gender debate, it placed the issue squarely in the middle of the public sphere, and once again made all of us aware of the underlying tension between the sexes. In her *Forbes* article *10 Things Sheryl Sandberg Gets Exactly Right In 'Lean In'* Susan Adams writes:

*But mostly "Lean In" is not so much about the balancing act of parenting versus working as it is about the challenges women face in trying to get ahead. Sandberg devotes only three of the book's 11 chapters to work/family balance. The rest are about how women*



*can take charge of their own careers and push forward at a time when gender bias is more alive and well than most of us may want to admit.*

## In Entertainment

The world of TV and film also has a sizable dose of bias against women. Whether it is using women as “show pieces” or how they are treated at the business-end of things, there is clear proof of unequal treatment.

Evangeline Lily, famous actress in dramas such as *Lost* and *The Hobbit*, opened up to *Variety Magazine* last year about her experience on the set of *Lost* and how powerless she felt.

*In Season 3, I'd had a bad experience on set with being basically cornered into doing a scene partially naked, and I felt I had no choice in the matter. And I was mortified and I was trembling when it finished. I was crying my eyes out, and I had to go and do a very formidable, very strong scene thereafter.*

She also shared how she was abused by behind-the-scenes staff and nearly abandoned her acting career because of the paternalistic nature of the industry.

Awareness of the unequal treatment of women as a result of unfair practices even convinced the online publication *Buzzfeed* to publish an article in August 2018 with the title *Movies Are Full Of Clichés About Women — And These Are The 10 Worst Ones*.

## In Sport

In 2018 New Zealand became the first football country to offer equal pay to men’s and women’s teams. This decision placed other football bodies under pressure to do the same for their players.

*Providing equality between the male All Whites and female Football Ferns was "a landmark moment for football in this country." Today's announcement signifies that we as an organisation are committed to parity for the men's and women's game and to continuing the growth in all areas of our sport.*

The team captain put this growing sentiment in words by saying that “*no matter who you are, whatever gender, when you pull on a New Zealand football shirt you're entitled to the same treatment and respect no matter what.*”

## In Culture

Saudi Arabia made history in 2018 when the country issued valid driver’s licences to women for the first time. While no woman could legally drive a vehicle in the country before, the law was scrapped, and women are now equal to men – at least on the roads.

It is also important to note that various female activists are still in jail for opposing this unfair law by means of protest action in recent years. They were convicted of high treason and it is unlikely that their sentences will be overturned because of the new legislation.

## In Politics

As mentioned above, one of the biggest factors in our understanding of the role of women is the election of the current American President and his subsequent actions. The current administration turned the international political landscape upside down and had a significant impact on America's diplomatic relations, especially where women play a deciding role.

In November 2018 Axios published a survey, which was broadcast by HBO, which claims that '*President Trump would lose the 2020 election against every woman mentioned as a possible Democratic opponent*'.

The report further elaborates on how Trump's often hostile comments towards women will become a deciding factor in the upcoming 2020 elections.

*Trump is underwater with women voters (64% of women view him unfavourably), and particularly among white suburban women — a group that will be critical in 2020. Look for Democrats to turn to their top 2020 female candidates after Tuesday's election. A record number of women are running and a record number of women are expected to vote and win.*

## In Sexuality

A new type of sexual revolution has shaken the foundations of our understanding of women in the last two years. By revealing sexual misconduct, blackmailing and other unsavoury activities against women by well-known men, the vulnerable nature of women was once more placed under the microscope.

In a shocking revelation, 80% of American women admitted they have had to endure some form of sexual harassment or abuse.

This global awareness is aided by the establishment of the #metoo movement:

*The "Me Too" movement (or #MeToo movement) is a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault. #MeToo spread virally in October 2017 as a hashtag on social media in an attempt to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace. It followed soon after the sexual abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein.*

The movement enjoyed unparalleled popularity and support, especially on social media. CBS News published the following predictions about a year ago:

*The "Me Too" social media movement, which went viral after actress Alyssa Milano shared it on Twitter, has reached dozens of countries and millions of people. Twitter confirmed to CBS News that over 1.7 million tweets included the hashtag "#MeToo", with 85 countries that had at least 1 000 #MeToo tweets.*

Over the past year these figures have sky-rocketed, and there is virtually no one who can say that they know nothing about the #metoo and #timesup movements.

The church was also not exempted from this upsetting trend. In August 2018 Willow Creek Community Church launched an investigation into the decades-long lead pastor, Bill Hybels, after allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment.

Tyler Huckabee wrote in his article that the root of the evil, even in the church, was that we rather believe men in position of power than the women who serve under them. He wrote the following:

*Believe women. That's it. Well, that's not all of it, but it's where we start. Believe women. The horrifying scandals at the heart of America's #MeToo movement were allowed to fester for so long because we thought higher of the accused men than their victims. The horrifying scandals at the heart of #ChurchToo are no different. The solution is to stop doubting women and start believing them. It quite literally is the least we can do.*

The Chicago Tribune reported as follows:

*In April, Hybels stepped down from the helm of the northwest suburban megachurch and the Willow Creek Association, its affiliated nonprofit group that hosts the summit, after a Tribune investigation revealed allegations of misconduct with women — including church employees — that spanned decades. Women have continued to come forward with allegations, including his former executive assistant. The New York Times reported this week that she said she was sexually harassed and fondled by the pastor for over two years.*



### **WHAT ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA?**

Although we at the southern tip of Africa have our own unique context and applications, we still see that issues in developed countries have a huge influence on us. We feel the ripple effect of global trends and how local trends tend to reflect what is happening in the world.

Here are two specific areas in which global events broke through the surface on home soil.

## In Business

In South African businesses we see that women have played a leading role in building out the economy. Local consultation company *Fluxtrends* identifies a specific group, “femmetrepreneurs”, as part of their *New Urban Tribes 2018* research report. *Fluxtrends* specifically mention women’s ability to access funding for their business ideas, and that they are currently far more successful than their male counterparts.

They describe this effect as follows:

*The boy’s club approach to funding means that many good ideas are stillborn. Side-stepping the VC model could see companies catering to hitherto neglected demographics, bolstering both their own and governments’ bottom line. As this trend gains momentum, we will start to see increased diversity in products and services. Business ideas conceptualised by women will help create a more inclusive, less male-centric world and economy.*

However, women in local leadership positions seem to have made no progress at all over the past 13 years. Grant Thornton says the following in his 2018 report *Women in business: New perspectives on risk and reward*: ‘

*The percentage of women business leaders has not changed significantly since the start my research 13 years ago, when this figure was at 26%. Unfortunately, we have a very patriarchal culture in Africa, including South Africa. Until we make a concerted effort to change our mindset on the role of women in the workplace, at home and society at large, we’re going to continue to battle with inequality in the workplace. Change starts with how we treat children – we should be striving to raise boys and girls equally in a gender neutral environment.*

## In Sport

In a surprising move, *Ashburton Investments* adjusted their financing of the well-known SA National Mountain Biking Series to pay equal prize money to both men and women. The decision came after a well-known local and international cyclist, Ariane Lüthi, decided to

boycott the series because of their unequal treatment of male and female competitors.

Ariane explained her reasons for the boycott in detail: ‘*I didn’t race the Ashburton National Marathon in Grabouw, because the prize money for the top woman wasn’t equal to the men’s. I engaged with organisers openly and at length, offering many compromises. In the end I have to follow my heart.’*

Ashburton, in turn, opened the way for similar reformations in the world of local sport.

*We are firmly committed to the series, and as such we want to encourage the participation of every rider. The prize money should be equal, and our hope is that this will further encourage more women to enter and compete. We would like to thank miss Lüthi for bringing it to our attention, and that we are able to rectify this discrepancy for the remainder of the series.*

## HOW DOES THIS INFLUENCE THE LOCAL CHURCH?

In spite of church leaders caught up in the #metoo movement, local congregations still have an important role to play in the understanding of women and their unique role in the world.

As believers, our understanding of women and their contribution in our modern society is supposed to be based on Scripture, as well as how it should be interpreted for current circumstances and situations.

We can learn much from other traditions, especially those that preceded us in the early church. The Episcopal Church have a progressive understanding of the gender of God. By placing less emphasis on masculine vocabulary to describe God, they managed to bring their understanding of the different sexes more in line with the concepts of gender equality and fair treatment of women.

David Wheeler-Reed writes in his article *What the early church thought about God’s gender* about various instances where the gender of God can be re-interpreted to be more inclusive of women.

*Instead of pointing to and evoking the reality of God, [our images] block the possibility of religious experience. In other*

*words, limiting God to masculine pronouns and imagery limits the countless religious experiences of billions of Christians throughout the world.*

Keeping the above in mind, local congregations and Christian leaders have a responsibility to lead the way in gender equality. We should follow in the footsteps of Jesus in our interactions, respect, opportunities and empowerment of women, especially when it goes against current practices in business, politics, sport, entertainment and church matters.





## **PRACTICAL STEPS**

Here are five practical steps that congregations can take to ensure that the issues of gender equality and the fair treatment of women are placed centre stage in the coming year.

***1. Facilitate public discussion***

Make sure that the issue of gender equality isn't swept under the carpet. Facilitate public discussion on appropriate platforms where the challenges and opportunities can be examined.

***2. Stand up for the vulnerable and the victims of sexual misconduct***

As and where applicable, be a voice for those who cannot talk for themselves because of intimidation and/or victimisation. Do this especially where the perpetrator is a prominent person in society.

***3. Launch an awareness campaign on behalf of women and gender equality***

Think of creative ways in which the principles and practical applications of a gender equality strategy can be communicated and marketed.

***4. Study and communicate healthy, sustainable gender principles by means of a dedicated sermon series***

Bring the discussion into the faith community with a Bible-based sermon series that touch on all the sensitive points in this matter.

***5. Make sure that women are represented on all leadership structures***

This is perhaps the most important of all the action steps that a congregation can take. Make sure that all decisions and leadership structures not only make space for women, but that they are designed and implemented by women too.



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