

## **Social action needed to combat violence**

Danie Mouton

Violence has become yet another instrument to get what you want. Not only hardened criminals, but ambitious politicians, business people, fundamentalists and often ordinary people use fierce violence to reach their goals.

A week ago, Alvinesha Brookes, 12, died in Bethelsdorp (The Herald, 01.04.2019). She was caught in the crossfire between rival gangs. Why? Probably another senseless battle about turf, or excessive retribution.

Violence snowballs. In this case an angry mob unleashed their anger about the murder on two young men in a nearby house, killing one, seriously injuring the other and vandalising the property.

Full marks to the police who made arrests and eventually contained the violence. But notice the escalation of the violence. Aggression spiralled out of control and led to further death and destruction.

Violence is viral, contagious, like a wildfire out of control.

Violence has many faces. It is often cold-blooded, calculated and intentional, a strategy to protect or further your interests. Business assassinations or political killings comes to mind.

Violence became normalised in our society. Some may say: If everyone does it, why wouldn't I?

Others expect it. It doesn't alarm us anymore. Apathy reigns. Only the most horrendous deeds, like Alvinesha's death, the gunning down of innocents in mosques in Christchurch or innocent girls abducted by Boko Haram in Chibok draws our attention. For a short while.

We need social action against violence. We need a strong commitment to non-violence.

The church is a powerful social agent. What can we do to cultivate non-violence?

The church will have to witness publicly against violence. The faithful should get together at places of violence, e.g. where Alvinesha died, to pray with the family, support the community and condemn violence.

The church has contact with gangs or other perpetrators of violence. We should use this influence to oppose the use of violence. Ministry in prisons, and ministry by former convicted criminals who turned to Christ, makes a valuable contribution.

The violence of crime-ridden areas in our metro is the responsibility of the whole church. We need to support our brothers and sisters in those areas in order to tackle the tremendous challenges. Preventative action and constructive ways of dealing with pent-up anger are part of the solution. Schools are important partners for church action.

The Bible also emphasises the importance of what today is called a proper criminal-justice system. The state has the responsibility to meet out justice in such a way that it liberates communities.

The church has to be vocal and visible in its support the public justice system. We can motivate witnesses to come forward and to testify. We need to visibly support them when they do so.

We can support the police, who are often overwhelmed and understaffed.

We need to continuously teach people not to take the law into their own hands.

Church leaders must be visible in society and have themselves trained in order to facilitate in situations where violence may flare up.

We are in an election year. To vote peacefully is an act of non-violence and communal care. It is to put your trust in the political process as a way of promoting peace and justice. Church should urge members to register and vote.

But we need to go deeper.

The church needs to shape non-violent people by telling and re-telling the history of God's loving and redemptive action in the world. In this way we form Christian identity.

Our world was created for peace, justice, joy, love and harmony. The Biblical account of creation witnesses to an ordered world where fulness of life is possible. God's world overflows with sustenance for all, ample resources and dignified living.

The Gospel reveals the futility of violence.

Violence did its utmost to extinguish the Light of the World. Violence focused all its might on the broken body of the Saviour on the most brutal instrument of rejection, torture and execution ever devised.

However, the power of violence itself was broken on the cross. The brutal cross became the source of new life, testimony to the power of God's love.

The cross reveals the power of servanthood, care for others, and obedience to God.

God affirms Christ's obedience by waking his broken body into new life, beyond destruction and death. God empties the tomb. The risen Jesus is the surety that God's new world is on its way.

Love trumps violence.

It takes extreme courage and effort to be non-violent. It is a choice to take care of others, to serve, respect and love. It is never easy. Violence or apathy is always the easier way out.

Non-violence, in the style of Jesus, makes us responsible for others. It means we cannot turn our backs on the victims of violence. We will have to get involved. The Gospel shapes us this way.

We know: God's love wins.

Dominee Danie Mouton is the executive director of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Eastern Cape.