



**Y**es, it's that time of year again when, for a few short weeks, we place our nation's children and family life in the spotlight. And it is only right that we do so. This year, as we focus on the welfare of our precious little ones during Child Month, we were given the opportunity to renew our commitment to make our homes safe places in and from which love and laughter can reverberate.

On Mothers' Day, May 14, we feted and honoured the matriarchal queen in our life for her self-sacrificing love and tender care; and, of course, on Fathers' Day, June 18, we'll have a chance to express our appreciation to our men who have played a significant paternal role in providing for our needs, protecting us, and moulding us through discipline and example. But, all is not well. We continue to observe frightening levels of violence in the home, as family members maim and murder one another. Our families have now become veritable breeding-grounds for violence, much of which is perpetrated by men against our women and girls. In a word, then, domestic violence tends generally to be *gender-based*.

Gender-based violence against women is defined as "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately."<sup>1</sup> This has risen to epidemic proportions in recent years. Today, it is estimated that, one out of every three women somewhere in the world and at some point in her life, has been the victim of abuse, whether physical, sexual, emotional, or some other form of mistreatment. The prevalence of this kind of violence reflects power inequalities between men and women in the wider society. Thus, instead of seeing the woman as created equally in the image of God, men generally see themselves as superior. Such imbalances tend to fuel abuse, from the family setting all the way to the corporate boardroom!

This picture, to a great extent, is the outcome of the long-practiced double-standard in our homes. Girls are kept indoors to do "housework," such as cooking, cleaning and ironing, and are often told by parents what they are not "*supposed to do*" and where they are not "*supposed to go*," while our boys are usually left to fully enjoy the freedom of the outdoors! It all starts with the way we socialize boys and girls differently in the home. And so, the words of the prophet Hosea now ring through: "sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7). Contextualized, this statement means that our faulty child-rearing methods will inevitably lead to far-reaching consequences, including gender-based violence. What is also alarming is that women have joined in the abuse of women. Recently in a Sunday Gleaner it was reported that mothers in a section of our society are renting their girls; pimping underage girls to men!

We need to start changing the conversation within our society, beginning at the level of our own family. What we socialize our children to believe about themselves and others goes a long way in sustaining or curtailing violence against women. Mothers, fathers, grandparents, and other adult family members, start empowering the girls in your family today by building their self-awareness so they will know that they are truly precious in God's sight, made in God's likeness; and start teaching and demonstrating mutual respect among every family member of your household. Start teaching and demonstrating to your boys the value of women as equal partners on this earth, so they learn to appreciate and respect their gifts. Indeed, we can pave the way to a just and peaceful society ... one family at a time. Please, do your part to make this happen. Remember, children live what they learn.

**Let us teach and model respect and value God's gifts of girls and women, men and boys as we work towards a peaceful society**

*Rev.*

<sup>1</sup> Article 3d, Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.