

Assault campaign at church

A provincial government anti-sexual offence campaign was taken to the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa

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THE increase of sexual offences targeting women and children has forced North West authorities to seek the intervention of the church.

The provincial community safety department started a campaign to visit churches and spread the word on why communities ought to put a united fight to the problem.

The department said communities were under siege as most of the crimes were committed by people who ought to love and protect the victims.

The first target was Boitekong township where department officials and police joined a service at the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa.

The visit was part of the anti-sexual offence campaign and the purpose of the campaign was to create awareness as well as empower one another in the fight against sexual offences and abuse of women and children. But the campaign was also meant to encourage community members and organisations to report such crimes.

Const Ketshepile Mathelela from Boitekong police station said the township, on the outskirts of Rustenburg, was facing major challenges.

"Though there are other crimes committed like house break-ins and car theft in Boitekong, there is also a high rate of sexual offences and rape committed against women and children. Most of the perpetrators are people close to the victims, some are uncles, stepfathers, neighbours or siblings.

"Most of these cases involving close family members and neighbours are



INTERVENTION: Crime prevention's Boitumelo Maraba in discussion with church members in Boitekong.

not reported. There is fear. Some buy favours and others make arrangements to silence people.

"The victims continue to suffer the physical, social and psychological effects on their own," she said.

"We urge the community to work together with the police in their fight against these crimes."

Boitumelo Maraba from the department's crime prevention unit explained the different kinds of sexual offences

to the congregation.

"Rape and sexual assaults are acts of sexual violation and are committed without the consent of the victim. This kind of criminal act should be reported to the police all the time.

"Sexual offence is a serious issue that happens not only to young girls and women, but also to young boys.

Hence we need to start talking and educating our young boys and girls on these issues.

"What women wear should not be used as an excuse. We should teach our boys from an early stage of life so that we can change the mindset of our sons.

"Motswana are 'lo ojwa le sale metsi' which means teach 'them while they are still young and tender at heart'.

"Our boys must grow up to be responsible men and fathers who love and respect women, girls and boys," she said.

Maraba said the battle could only be

won if communities, churches, the government and the police stood together to protect the vulnerable.

"The saamtrek and saamwre approach to issues that continue to rage our communities by violating precious women and girl-children get us the necessary results, reduced and ultimate stoppage of this scourge of crime.

"Let's make it our responsibility as churches and communities, as well as men and women, to prevent gender based violence.

"We should teach, nurture and guide our young boys from a young age about how to treat and respect women. Men and boys must refrain from alcohol and drug abuse which are of excuses submitted in defence of crimes committed against women children," she said.

Church leaders were challenged to encourage congregants to report crimes to the police in order to help eradicate this scourge.

"Let us say no to violence. Let us say a violence free life. Let us say no to my name. Let's chase the perpetrator out. Let's report all the gender based violence. Let's support the victims."

"Let our communities become havens for the victims and help root out this gender-based violence. Crime is crime, even when committed by siblings, parents, fathers, brothers or sisters in the family, neighbours or elders in the family, neighbourhood," Maraba said.

The programme will be taken to other churches going into the future.

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