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DENIS HURLEY CENTRE

UPDATE

Care • Education • Community
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May 2022

Blessings at Pentecost for our Jewish and Christian readers

- London Reception celebrates 10 years**
- Threat to put 550 homeless back on the streets**
- Synod discussions from non-Catholic leaders**
- What the homeless really want from churches**



Will this veg garden survive?



Honest conversations



Even more honesty!

DENIS HURLEY'S LEGACY BEING CELEBRATED IN LONDON

During the dark days of Apartheid, friends of Archbishop Hurley were likely to have been outside London's South Africa House protesting. This month, they were inside this magnificent building on Trafalgar Square at the gracious invitation of the current High Commissioner, Her Excellency Nomatamba Tambo. She recently hosted a reception to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Denis Hurley Association (DHA).

The event was possible because of Sheila Hyde-Bailey who recently joined the DHA Trustees. She brought together 40 guests: present and past Trustees, old friends of +Hurley, established donors, potential new donors and some of

the doctors who have volunteered at the DHC. The High Commissioner (which is how the SA Ambassador to the UK is termed) spoke warmly of the legacy of +Hurley, a name she recalls being mentioned by her parents Oliver and Adelaide Tambo. She praised the ethos of the DHC and shared how much she looked forward to seeing the centre for herself when she is next in Durban.

Mick Perrier, Chair of the DHA, explained how it acts as a UK fundraising arm and has raised over R3.5 million for our work. Sr Marie-Henry Keane OP, who worked closely with the late Archbishop, spoke passionately about him: “a magnificent human being, generous, big hearted, compassionate, brave, intelligent, a fearless defender of all who suffered injustice.” She also shared with the UK audience how the DHC continues +Hurley’s tradition of working both with Christians across the denominations and also with people of all faiths to serve those in need.

Thanks to Sarah Finucane (of UK Irish magazine The Craic), each of the guests received a lovely ‘goody bag’ containing a beaded SA bookmark, a candle with +Hurley’s motto (‘Where the Spirit is, there is Freedom’) and a jar of jam from the Dominican sisters. Among the guests was Christine Allen, Director of CAFOD, the British Catholic development agency which was so supportive of both +Hurley and Paddy Kearney back in the day. She commented: “Archbishop Hurley, like Saint Oscar Romero, and indeed Pope Francis today, was the vital voice of the Church speaking out against inhuman treatment towards people who are poor, homeless, or refugees. Hurley was clear in reminding us all that Love is what matters: our sisterhood, brotherhood and common humanity.”

Photo (Sarah Finucane): Two Patrons of the DHA at the reception: High Commissioner ‘Tembi’ Tambo and Brian, Lord Gill (formerly the most senior judge in Scotland and an occasional Justice of the UK Supreme Court).



550 HOMELESS PEOPLE BACK ON DURBAN’S STREETS?

One of the COVID legacies in Durban are the Safe Open Sleeping (SOS) sites that were created as emergency shelters during lockdown. Three of them have stayed open, run by the Municipality and providing a safe and sheltered place for 450 homeless men and 100 women to sleep.

But with the end of COVID emergency funding in April, the Municipality stopped servicing the toilets and sent out messages telling people that they had to prepare to leave. Commercial shelters are too expensive for most SOS-residents, so they would be back to looking for places to sleep in shop doorways, in parks and on the beachfront, at risk of harassment (and worse) from the police and others.

An emergency meeting to challenge the closure was convened by Prof Monique Marks of DUT’s Urban Future Centre and attended by 25 people including seven homeless residents from the sites. All present recognised how closure of these sites would be a step backwards, especially after eThekweni had led the country with its caring and effective response during lockdown. In particular, Metro Police officers said that the situation was better than before COVID and that they would be disappointed if the SOS were to close.

Several of the residents shared how their lives had been transformed by staying at the sites - they had kept themselves healthy, they had stayed off drugs or accessed harm-reduction services, they had been able to get work

thanks to a stable living environment. It was also reported that the food garden at one site had produced R2,000 worth of income last month for the homeless men who run it and that this had the potential to be expanded into a wider city food garden scheme.

Nomusa Shembe from eThekweni's Safer Cities department promised that eThekweni would continue to provide services to enable the three sites to stay open - security, cleaning materials, ablution blocks, sanitation, utilities. In front of the group, she confirmed that no one would be moved out of the current sites in the short term and that the Municipality remains committed to developing a permanent SOS. In addition, Nomusa Shembe undertook to refer to the Department of Social Development any disabled or elderly men or women at any of the sites so they could access appropriate homes (any children are already being identified and referred).

The meeting closed with the homeless residents and the other stakeholders relieved by the reassurances given them by Nomusa Shembe who agreed to be held accountable for this process. The toilets at one of the sites had only been cleaned once in 25 days! At time of writing, the cleaning service is back in place but we will continue to keep the Municipality and the media informed about the state of the sites (and send them photos of any uncleaned toilets....).

Photo: The vegetable garden created by homeless men at the Jewish Club site which is threatened with closure.



"IT WAS SO HURTFUL TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE TABLE"

The Denis Hurley Centre has been running discussion groups recently to get some views about the Catholic Church that will (eventually!) be fed back to the Pope himself!

Pope Francis has called Catholic bishops from around the world to meet in Rome in October 2023 to discuss 'synodality' - an ancient Greek term that emphasises the Church not as a top-down hierarchy but rather as a group of people meeting to discuss and discern the future together. It was a principle that +Denis Hurley was really committed to; in fact he convened the first Catholic Synod in Africa in modern times for the Archdiocese of Durban in 1967.

In preparation, bishops around the world have been inviting Catholics to reflect on some key questions and pass on their comments. The Chancellor of the Archdiocese, Fr Brett, asked us to assist in making sure that a wider range of voices gets the chance to speak. So we have run discussion groups covering Christians of other denominations, people of other faiths and homeless people. (Refugee Pastoral Care has responsibility for collecting feedback from foreign nationals).

The discussions explored how effectively the Catholic Church brings people together ('communion'); how it involves people in what it does ('participation'); and how it impacts on the world ('mission'). The output has been really eye-opening, with good lessons not just for Catholics but for all people of faith.

The group of leaders of other Christian denominations described how they appreciated that Catholic priests and bishops now engage with them (unlike in the past). But some were worried that sometimes it was done with a tone of presumed superiority: "they want to work together but it is always on their terms." It was also feared that among ordinary people there was still a lot of

suspicion towards Catholics and from Catholics. "We need to educate our people about how the ecumenical situation has improved." The thorny issue of shared communion came up: "For example at a funeral, we were all united in grief and then half of us were told we cannot receive communion; I don't think the priest knew how hurtful it was to be excluded from the table".

People of other faiths really appreciated the scale and resources of the Catholic Church and how these were put at the service of the community: "their schools have always been such a blessing for everyone!". They also really acknowledged opportunities to pray side by side. But both groups noticed that a lot depended on who was in charge: "In the days of +Hurley and now with Pope Francis we know that there is a welcoming spirit. But it should not just depend on a particular person."

Photo: Hailey Fudu (Bahai), Ela Gandhi (Hindu), Mxolisi Nyuswa (Congregational) and Hoosen Vawda (Muslim) at one of the Synod discussion groups.



"THE WORK OF THE CHURCH IS TO GIVE PEOPLE HOPE"

The most arresting comments from this exercise came from the homeless participants. All of them had been brought up in a Christian tradition and yet none of them now felt they would be welcome in their church. Interestingly this was their experience of almost all Christian denominations.

It was as if the parables of the Bible were still happening today: one person recalled being told to sit on the back row (Lk 18:10); one homeless woman was looked down on because she was not wearing high heels (Lk 16:19), one man was scared to go to church because he had nothing to put in the collection (Lk 21:1-4). They pointed out that it was rarely what people said but the way they looked at you, or ignored you, or shifted to the side if you sat next to them on the pew.

"We don't feel that we are welcome...I feel like I don't belong....there is too much judgement....They look at me as if I am in the wrong place." When asked if they would go into a church when there was no-one else there just to pray, most said no because they were worried about the security guards. "They assume that we are not there to pray but have some other agenda."

One of the participants pointed out that when you are on the streets you cannot cut your hair, you do not have nice clothes, you are not wearing proper shoes, you may not shower very often. "So a visit to church instead of lifting you up just brings you down because of the way other people look at you." Because of that they would be wary of going back into a church - "I know the doors are open for everyone but perhaps if someone invited me I would feel more welcome."

One man had had a positive experience of Church when a pastor came and spoke to him: "he was not preaching at me, he just wanted to sit and listen - I felt a weight was lifted off my shoulders." They appreciated the efforts that churches put in to providing food, clothes and other services. "But I don't just need to be fed physically! As a human I need to be fed spiritually; if I am dead spiritually then I know that soon my body will be dead as well."

We are therefore keen to hear from priests/ ministers/ pastors in the Durban area who are willing to come in regularly to the Denis Hurley Centre to provide such spiritual support for our homeless guests.

The group was very taken by the words of Pope Francis: "The Church should be the place that welcomes everyone and refuses no-one." But when asked to grade churches on how well they did in living up to that vision the results were very mixed. One homeless man used words that we believe Francis would like: "The work of the Church is to give people hope." That vision should give all people of faith pause to reflect.

Photo: Homeless men and women at one of the Synod discussion groups in the Denis Hurley Centre café.



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