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UPDATE

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December 2022

Blessings of Hannukah, Christmas and the New Year!

Meal of Reconciliation restored
Justice and Peace Lecture
A life saved and transformed
A chance to say thank you in 2022



One 'Arch' honours two others



Finding light in the darkness of our city



More good news stories of empowerment

MEAL OF RECONCILIATION RETURNS IN FULL FORCE

South Africans have now become accustomed to calling 16 December 'the Day of Reconciliation'. But it was while doing research for his recently submitted PhD that our Director discovered that Paddy Kearney himself was one of the first to coin this phrase, back in the 1980s, when he started imagining a new role for the 'Day of the Vow'. The term began with Diakonia, was picked up by the media in Durban and spread from here, so that in 1995 it became an officially sanctioned public holiday.

Thus, celebrating this day is especially important to us at the DHC and our iconic event – the Meal of Reconciliation – returned after a 3-year COVID-enforced absence in full force.

Our original reflection back in 2015 was that all religions have a shared meal as a way of showing solidarity – communion, iftaar, prasad, seder – but generally they only include people from within that faith community. Why not create a meal that unites people from a range of religions and enables them to sit at the same table? That is what our Meal of Reconciliation aims to do, bringing together people from across divisions of religion and also of class,

age, race and nationality.

This year 350 homeless people and 100 non-homeless came together to share food, conversation and festive cheer. Each person began by making a personalised card for someone else. It was literally a room in which you might find yourself with a homeless person on one side and an American diplomat on the other! Especially moving was the presence of people who had never been to the DHC before but had heard about this miraculous event - for example, a couple with three young children from Durban North; visitors from the UK and Spain (who are linked to the historic Parsee community in Durban).

The meal would not have been possible without a range of benefactors: our breyanis came from the four main faith communities (Blessed Liberat Catholic parish, RAUF/ SANZAF, Food for Life and the Union of Jewish Women). There cannot be many places where Christian, Kosher, Halal and Krishna-conscious food is served side-by-side. Thanks also to Boxer Superstores for cool drinks, to Eric Apelgren for arranging a donation of 500 crackers from eThekweni, and to Sidney and Gaynor Lazarus and family for covering all the incidental costs.

There was great coverage in the press and on national television so maybe Durban once again can inspire a national movement. More photos on our Facebook page.

The Day of Reconciliation in SA marks the official beginning of the Christmas season; in a similar way, our Meal of Reconciliation has been the start of a series of festive meals over this period. We will have served meals on all our usual days and are grateful to staff and volunteers who made this possible, especially on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day - hangovers notwithstanding! On each day, we have tried to do something special: roast chicken and five colours of veg on 25 Dec; and then special dishes, extra sweets and desserts on other days.

Sadly, there is no holiday from being homeless but we do hope that our homeless guests will have felt some part of the joy and generosity that marks this season.

*Winston a business consultant wrote a poem in his card to Robert:
"Reconciliation / Needed in our nation / Beset in Alienation / Despite our
Liberation.*

*So time to make a friend / While neighbours make amends.
A green card, a black pen / This poem will have to end.
But love will last forever / Hope and faith with never
Fail if God is for you / His blood has made the world anew
Breaking down the walls / God makes brothers of us all."*



CHALLENGING WORDS IN THE 1ST HURLEY-GABUZA LECTURE

A few years before Archbishop Hurley died in 2004, the Justice & Peace (J&P) department of the Archdiocese of Durban instituted an annual lecture in his name; over the years a number of illustrious speakers have delivered this.

Archbishop Abel Gabuza was due to succeed +Hurley's own successor, but he tragically died because of COVID and was never able to take on the role. Previously, when Bishop of Kimberley, he had been the lead for the Catholic

bishops on J&P, a position that +Hurley had also enjoyed at various points over the decades. It was thus decided, very appropriately, that the annual J&P lecture be re-launched as the 'Hurley-Gabuza Lecture' and the first of these was held at the beginning of December.

Kalie Senyane, the Archdiocese's J&P officer, praised the two bishops as "men of peace who loved justice, who were not afraid to stand up when it was needed". He said it was especially appropriate that the lecture was happening during the annual '16 days of activism against gender-based violence' since this was an issue of injustice happening in the heart of our families and communities.

Bridget Phillips of the 'Institute of Healing of Memories' introduced the guest speaker Rt Rev Stephen Brislin, the [Catholic] Archbishop of Cape Town (*both pictured at the top*). Reflecting on the loss of +Gabuza, he pointed out that 'Abel' in Hebrew means mist and that we might reflect on his departure as being like the mist that disappears quickly but leaves behind the beauty of the morning.

+Brislin explained that with his title 'The Refugee crisis - a blessing or a curse?' he wanted us to face up to one of the pressing issues in South Africa today. He later went on to say that the trust that the Church enjoys means it can lead 'courageous conversations': he showed that he was not afraid to do this himself. He positioned the refugee crisis (which is happening all over the world) in the context of other global phenomena like rapid technological change, consumerisation, and changing social attitudes. "All of these can be sources of good and evil; they bring out the best and the worst in people."

But he pointed out that global economic systems that serve the rich and not the poor, not only lead to more people being on the move, but also the clashes that can then happen when there is competition over seemingly limited resources. In that environment, the Church must stand up for the vulnerable on all sides, and take seriously the concerns that different groups have.

Archbishop Stephen feared that, instead, communities become defensive and territorial: "Everyone withdraws into their own group. It is 'us' and 'them': the SA tradition of retreating into the laager." He pointed out that we see this in the growth of fundamentalism in politics and religion.

He hoped that COVID had reminded us all of the fragility of life and forced us to look at ourselves and make an honest assessment. "We can no longer see ourselves in a God-like way: we do not have complete control of ourselves. That means we have to adjust our relationship with others, with nature and the rest of creation."

The Archbishop listed four verbs that Pope Francis stresses in the context of migration: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. He recommended that every parish develop a plan to demonstrate that the Church is the universal family of God and that we embrace people from all nations. "Foreigners are not foreigners in the Church. The challenge we have is to ensure integration at the parish level - and that someone is actually assigned to this task and that we hear the voices of all in our parish communities."

In giving the vote of thanks, our Director commented on +Brislin's own stance on justice issues such as Israel/ Palestine and the Secrecy Bill, applauding him for being in the fearless tradition of +Hurley and +Gabuza. A copy of the speech can be obtained from justiceandpeace@aod.org.za.

A wide range of supporters was present to hear the Hurley-Gabuza lecture at St Joseph's Church Morningside



LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS AT CHRISTMAS TIME

The underlying theme of Christmas is of God's light coming into the darkness.

Remember that, in the Northern Hemisphere, the feast coincides with the Winter Solstice: all the traditional decorations of candles, fairy lights, tinsel, stars and shiny angels are to dispel the gloom of mid-winter.

In central Durban, the darkness we deal with is more social than climactic: the result of poverty, exclusion, broken families, bad education and addiction; with corruption and indifference then undermining some of the efforts made to address these. After three years in which we have had COVID, riots, floods and decaying Municipal governance, it feels hard to find light in this darkness.

So let us share the story with you of just one man who brightened our day recently. Kwazi Mchunu (he was happy for us to use his real name) had been addicted to whoonga (low-grade heroin) for 11 years influenced by older friends. He was inevitably thrown out by his family (who only live 30 km away) and ended up on the streets of Durban, eating wherever he could, including at the DHC.

In the end, he collapsed outside our clinic and we discovered that, on top of everything else, he had contracted TB which had damaged his hearing. We accompanied him as he was admitted to Addington (the local government hospital) and then arranged for him not to be discharged back to the streets but instead transferred to the phenomenal Hillcrest AIDS Centre which has a well-deserved reputation for bringing people back from the brink of death. After three months there, he continued to the (Government-funded) Newlands Park which provides a two-month rehabilitation programme. He is now clear of drugs and has been for over a year.

What is more, aged 27, he finally has an ID card so has the possibility of completing his education, taking his Matric and looking for a job. None of those is easy - and he will join a long queue of other young men who are in the same situation - but this is a position of 'stability' that he never imagined he would get to. And the best news is that his family have taken him back!

Families are a recurrent theme at this time of year: families coming together in joy to celebrate the season; families being divided by work or war or poverty when they want to be together; families discovering how hard it is to be with each other when there are issues that still lie unresolved. Christmas cards give a rather unhelpful view of the 'Holy Family' as a kind of ready-made ideal.

The reality is that Jesus was born into an unconventional family without a home, who then suffered violence and rejection almost immediately. It took the outcast shepherds and the foreigner magi to recognise the light in the darkness of Bethlehem. We pray that others like Kwazi and their families will also learn to be light in the darkness for each other.

Kwazi Mchunu seen here with Nonhlanhla Nhlangulela, the social worker in our clinic, showing the importance of matching social care and health care.



SOME MORE GOOD NEWS STORIES: AND THANK YOU'S!

Large-scale projects to help homeless people become financially stable would be wonderful but remain elusive. Meantime, smaller scale initiatives can still make a difference to the individuals involved.

We have written often about our wonderful Street Lit booksellers (*for example, pictured at the top*): they want to say a special thank you to the customers who have bought books from them as Christmas presents, to the people who keep donating thousands of books so we can keep our stock up to date, to St John for being our host partner, and to the venues (especially malls, theatres and markets) at this time who have provided selling spaces.

We have also had an emerging project working with women to create craft items – earrings, cards and now Christmas gift boxes – using techniques they learnt from our visiting Sri Lankan sisters (*pictured below*). And we are also delighted to report that the homeless gardeners who captured the media's attention during lockdown are back in operation and, with regular opening hours and support from specialist NGO Bioregional, are now expanding their permaculture onto an even bigger scale.

The success of the DHC – and our ability to provide a range of services – continues to benefit from collaboration with a wide range of partners. We thank all those who have worked with us this past year. If, in reading this, you think that you have a set of skills or a project or an NGO that could contribute to our work, don't be shy. The New Year provides new opportunities so do get in touch and let's talk.

And finally a big thank you to our donors, without whom none of our work would be possible. Some of you are individuals, some faith communities, some corporates; some in Durban or elsewhere in SA or further afield; some give regularly, some in the form of unexpected gifts. But be assured that all of it is well received and well used. Everyone is finding the economic situation tough at the moment, and we had anticipated a decline in funding in 2022. In the end, we actually did 21% better than we expected though we still did not cover all our costs of R5.6M [£270,000] and so will be drawing down R200,000 [£9,700] of the money we set aside for 'a rainy day'. (And let's be honest: we had a lot of rainy days in 2022!).

To cover our 2023 budgeted expenses we will need to raise R17,000 [£820] per day (7 days a week). Increases in the cost of living affect us all so, if you are receiving a pay rise in the New Year, can we ask you to consider making a regular donation or increasing your existing commitment? We remain confident that our donors, new and old, will see a donation to the DHC as an investment in the vision for a better and fairer world.

Can we therefore close with these words which resonate for all people of faith. They are from 'The Holy City' (by Stephen Adams, 1841-1913), a song frequently heard at Christmas. They were sung beautifully at our Meal of Reconciliation by the wonderful Nozuko Teto, leaving not a dry eye in the house:

- *And once again the scene was chang'd/ New earth there seem'd to be.*
- *I saw the Holy City / Beside the tideless sea.*
- *The light of God was on its streets; / The gates were open wide -*
- *And all who would, might enter / And no one was denied.*

The DHC might not (yet) be the new Jerusalem; but each year we hope, with your help, that we are giving people more and more reason to sing 'Hosanna!'. May we wish you blessings at this holy time, and peace and prosperity for 2023.

Trainees Sizakele (far left) and Sebenzile (far right) learning new skills with craftswoman Mara and our auxiliary social worker Zama.



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If you wish to support our work, you can donate by EFT:
First National Bank Durban Main branch 221426
Account: Denis Hurley Centre Trust A/C No. 622 0426 1002

For more information, and to donate from outside South Africa, see:
www.denishurleycentre.org

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