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March 2023

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DANCE AND DISCUSSION TO RAISE AWARENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Sometimes our role at the DHC is to initiate creative and challenging events ourselves; sometimes it is to connect organisations and encourage them to spark off each other. We were thus pleased on Human Rights Day (the anniversary of the 1961 Sharpeville Massacre) to bring together Amnesty International and Mhayise Productions, the dance group directed by multiple award-winner Musa Hlatshwayo.

Musa's vision of the role of the arts in the community is what has drawn him repeatedly to the DHC; he voiced this powerfully for us during lockdown on this video (from 6'15").

"I have always believed in the power of the arts and the impact of cultural and creative expression. I believe in fostering dialogue through my creative work on socio-political issues that continue to affect us with the aim of elevating people above the challenge of disempowerment and marginalisation. Asserting our stand as the change we want to see, through our creative work, while exercising our rights is always on our agenda."

By coincidence, both his group and Amnesty had decided to focus their activities for Human Rights Day on the on-going injustice of gender-based violence: a scourge in South Africa where a person (usually a woman) is five times more likely to suffer violence at the hands of an intimate partner than the global average. When you read that 76% of SA men admit to having used violence against a woman, you can see why the President has described this as a pandemic.

With the irrepresible encouragement of nonagenarian Coral Vinsen, the local branch of Amnesty International (including the student chapter from UKZN) organised an interesting interactive programme on domestic violence. The 40 participants also heard a presentation by local waste-pickers: a group often overlooked, even though they perform a key service to the city in reducing landfill and keeping the streets clean.

As the Amnesty activists were arriving, they were greeted by a performance outside the DHC created by Musa's dancers. They come from five outreach groups that have been formalised through a partnership with Assitej and now receive a stipend through the Social Economic Fund. The performers showcased a creative fusion of works-in-progress that placed them into a space where the pedestrians become active participants/ performers. They interacted with the public, inviting them to respond to the images and actions that were being staged. Some even contributed towards the soundscape and the creative rhythmic chant-and-jam that ended the work.

Musa commented: "My favourite moment was the section where the girls 'run away' to hide behind street poles and pedestrians. The snooker-playing taxi drivers outside Paddy Kearney Way left their game and came closer to shout: 'What's going on there? Leave those girls alone!'. They continued watching through the gate and cheered the group with whistles. They then moved closer into our space while vocalising their responses showing how they felt about the images they were witnessing. This marks a huge achievement for us."

The words of encouragement from our homeless guests, local shoppers and Amnesty activists testify to the need for more public performances of this kind to happen in various spaces across our city.

Photo below by Simanga Zondo.



LENT AND RAMADAN COINCIDE IN 2023

An annual interfaith iftaar – the ritual breaking of the fast during Ramadan – has become part of the DHC calendar. Our proximity to the Jumma Masjid (the Grey Street Mosque), our close partnership with several Muslim organisations, and the historic commitment of both +Hurley and Paddy Kearney to inter-religious dialogue mean that we are well placed to bring together Muslims and non-Muslims during Ramadan.

This year, because Muslim lunar months move through the calendar, we had the interesting addition that the beginning of Ramadan and the end of Lent have coincided. So our interfaith iftaar spent time exploring these two traditions.

A group of about 50 people gathered around the Denis Hurley statue on the ground floor of our building and participated in a dialogue facilitated by Rev Lauren Mattheu from the Methodist Church and Sifiso Duma from IPCI. They talked about the origins of Ramadan and Lent, providing references from their respective Scriptures. While Ramadan is 29-30 days and Lent lasts 'forty days and forty nights' (as the hymn puts it), Lauren pointed out that for Christians Sundays during Lent do not count as fast days and so that can make it easier.

Lauren explained how she loved the reflective nature of Lent for personal growth; Sfiso emphasised the discipline that Ramadan fosters and the solidarity of the recitation of the Quran in the community around the world. The two of them looked at the ways in which both traditions have a minimum

practice of fasting but also encourage adherents to go further: through a greater commitment to prayer, self-sacrifice and giving alms for the poor. A focus on 'the forgotten ones' of society is a theme which links Ramadan and Lent, and also connects with the DHC.

Just after sunset, the group moved out into Paddy Kearney Way to hear the call to prayer from the mosque and all were then invited to break the fast with the traditional sharing of dates and water. Some members of the group joined in the *maghrib* prayers held outside. Everyone then enjoyed a tasty meal and there was a lively exchange of stories. People learnt about some oddities like the symbolism in hot cross buns, the tradition of eating fish on a Friday, and why some Christians eat salty pretzels during Lent!

We wish blessings to our Muslim brothers and sisters as they continue the holy month.

The tasty iftaar meal was served in the Nkosinathi dining area which is where we are usually preparing 300 meals a day for homeless people, for whom 'going without' is rarely by choice.



LENT CULMINATES IN HOLY WEEK AND THEN THE JOY OF EASTER

For Christians, Lent is almost over and Easter is round the corner. In the Northern hemisphere this coincides with the lengthening of days and the coming of Spring. In South Africa, we do not have nature to show us signs of new life at this time of year, which is why it is even more important to draw on faith to give us a sense of light in the midst of the many causes of darkness around us.

In the darkness of a lockdown Lent in 2021, the DHC worked with dozens of Christian churches across the city to create a virtual 'Durban Holy Week'. Two years on, we encourage you to go back and draw inspiration from this material. For each day of Holy Week, from Monday to Friday a cluster of churches in a different part of the city worked together to create four ten-minute elements: a musical call to worship, a personal testimony, a reflection,

and words of encouragement and prayer. These are all available to view in any order that you choose. And they build up to a spectacular and very Durban beachfront celebration of Easter.

People who are physically in Durban will be able to mark Holy Week by participating in two traditions that owe their origins to +Denis Hurley. The ecumenical Good Friday service organised by Diakonia dates back to 1985 when the Archbishop (encouraged by Paddy Kearney) led a group of Christian leaders to the wall of the prison to pray with those who were secretly detained. Whilst protests were banned, the authorities were scared to stop what +Hurley presented as a religious act, even when hundreds of other Christians joined in, albeit silently.

The political situation has changed in 38 years but the need for the Church to be 'a voice for the voiceless' - to speak out against uncaring, corrupt and self-serving politicians and public servants - remains as strong as ever. As Paddy reminded Diakonia every year, when Christ is condemned by a politician to carry his cross on Good Friday, he is walking in 'com-passion' with all those who continue to suffer today.

The carrying of the cross is one of the many dramatic moments that are being re-created on the stage of the Playhouse as part of the Durban Passion Play ([click here to book tickets](#)). When planning a huge Catholic event in 1952 (the Marian Congress) +Hurley encouraged Fr Noel Coughlan to ask the world-famous German town of Oberammergau if Durban could produce a local version of their Passion Play which dated back to 1633. The Durban Catholic Players Guild remain the only organisation in the world to have been granted this permission, and the play has been performed every five years in Durban (though because of COVID the 2021 production is only happening this year).

The cast and crew of 130 people include many supporters of the DHC - and we are especially proud that Jesus will be portrayed by Dale Collings, the son of our former Chair Ursula. A full history of the Durban Passion Play is being written and if you have any memories to share please contact the current director, Dawn Haynes. The March and April editions of the 'Southern Cross' contain extensive articles about the play - including the controversy which caused +Hurley to withdraw his patronage for a few years. You can read more by [subscribing on line](#) or buying copies, available at most Catholic churches in South Africa. (If your local church does not stock the 'Southern Cross' then please contact the office).

We wish blessings to our Christian brothers and sisters as this holy period of Lent transforms into Easter.

Archbishop Hurley leading a silent crowd for one of the Diakonia Good Friday processions in the 1980s. The original black and white photograph has been kindly colorised by the 'Southern Cross'.



LINKS WITH THE UK

South Africa House - effectively the Embassy in the UK - is in the heart of London's iconic Trafalgar Square. Last year, the then High Commissioner Thembi Tambo hosted a reception there for supporters of the DHC. Immediately next door is the beautiful Anglican church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, famously the King's parish church. But for all its reputation for

architecture and music, the church also has played a key role over many decades in responding to homelessness.

Our Director, on a recent visit to the UK, renewed acquaintance with Rev Richard Carter who oversees the church's social outreach ministry. Their story sounds very familiar: a church with a social problem literally on its doorstep, initially providing help in a makeshift way, then creating a more professionally run drop-in centre which has grown and developed, and now acting as a catalyst for national initiatives to help the homeless. We have not been around as long as they have, but it feels like we are fellow-travellers.

It was very interesting to hear how effectively they have integrated homeless people into their life as a worshipping community. They are wary of the danger of social outreach being seen as 'sub-contracted' to the NGO and thus letting the parish 'off the hook'. Instead, they work closely with homeless and non-homeless people to ensure that liturgical life and prayer groups feel accessible to both. One of the ways of doing this is to ensure that the homeless feel that they have their own chaplain who helps them connect with the wider parish activities. This is a pertinent challenge to all faith-based organisations who are involved in helping the homeless.

Though with considerably more resources than we have, they are also committed like the DHC to working closely with artists and performers as can be seen from the music in their on-line services. If you follow [this link](#), and scroll forward to 22'30" you will see that Durban gets mentioned in the prayers!

While in the UK, our director was also able to speak at all the Masses across three Catholic churches in the town of Chelmsford in Essex to thank them for their great generosity in supporting the DHC over the years. One woman surprised him by declaring proudly that her grand-daughters are regular volunteers: they attend Fatima Convent School! The new parish priest, Fr Martin Hardy, welcomed Raymond back to his 'home parish' and stressed to parishioners the importance of being a truly Catholic Church, united in prayer and support with other communities around the world.

UK supporters are reminded that all donations to support the DHC are increased by 25% thanks to Gift Aid. And that, if you are a higher-rate taxpayer and want to reduce your 2022/23 tax bill, you can do so by making a donation before 5 April.

The South African flag flies proudly over Trafalgar Square with the spire of St Martin-in-the-Fields standing behind.



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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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