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UPDATE

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April 2024

Blessings for the final night of Passover

Showing Solidarity between Faiths
Homeless Manifesto for the Elections
Local Corporate celebrates Street Lit
Eco-discussions under +Hurley's gaze



Why an empty chair for the ANC?



Illa looking especially happy



Two men who hear the cry of the planet

SHOWING SOLIDARITY WITH OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS

At the DHC, we believe that it is critical for people of faith to show solidarity with each other – history is too full of wars waged in the name of religion and it is important to show that religious people can also be instruments of peace. That is even more true in the world at the moment when there is so much conflict and violence being experienced.

Our annual interfaith iftar was especially poignant this year. It comes after months of seemingly pointless violence in the Middle East. It was also just after Christians had completed Holy Week and so had been especially focused on the territory known as the 'Holy Land'. Sadly, KZN also has a history of electoral violence – there have already been several politically motivated deaths this year – and as we approach the elections on 29 May we need to keep staying focused on peaceful ways to resolve disagreements. (If you want to join in The Bridge, a prayerful way to help Christians prepare for the

elections, then subscribe to our What's app channel. Or you can access them directly on You Tube: this week's reflections were prepared by the Denis Hurley Centre team).

As always, we are indebted to Dr AV Mahomed, Chair of the Jumma Masjid Trust and one of our Patrons, for bringing together such an interesting group of people for our annual iftar. We had a suitably mixed group in terms of religion, age and background. Given the overlap, once again this year, of Ramadan and Lent we spent some time sharing about how both traditions have an important focus on alms-giving as part of the spiritual preparation. Sarah Montgomery of CAST talked about the Christian custom of tithing and we heard about the Islamic model of zakat – both of them requiring the adherent to dedicate a proportion of their wealth to helping those in need.

IPCI (Islamic Propagation Centre International) provided the delicious dates for breaking the fast and the snacks for feasting afterwards. They are based opposite us and throughout the year we are pleased to work with them to arrange tours of the mosque and presentations about Islam for visitors who come to us – from far away and sometimes just from other parts of Durban.

A special guest this year was Josie Ratcliffe who has recently arrived as the United States Consul General in Durban. We are proud to have had excellent relations with every US CG since we opened and we look forward to that continuing. The US Government have supported our work in the past with generous grants and also by sending visitors to see the DHC as a model of interfaith collaboration in action.

April has indeed been a holy month in Durban. Many of our Hindu friends were involved in the annual Festival of Chariots over Easter weekend. Food for Life, part of the International Krishna Consciousness Movement (ISKCON) were key players in that, serving tens of thousands of free meals to the visitors; we are grateful to them for regularly assisting us when we need to feed large crowds. And as this newsletter goes out, we pray for the Jewish community – 'our older brothers and sisters in faith' – as they celebrate the end of Passover.

We cannot solve all the world's problems from Durban – but we can continue to be an example of how much can be achieved if we focus on what unites us rather than what divides us.

Photo: Mutiple traditions gathered to celebrate iftar (left to right): Omie Singh, Dr AV Mahomed (DHC Patron and Chair of the Jumma Musjid), Josie Ratcliffe (US Consul General) and Raymond.



THE VOICES OF HOMELESS VOTERS ARE HEARD – AT LEAST BY SOME POLITICAL PARTIES

There was a pleasing symmetry in the DHC diary last week. One day, our Director was invited to a very 'larney' political breakfast in a posh hotel in Umhlanga – an opportunity

to talk about the homeless in a rarefied atmosphere. The next day, we hosted 250 homeless people for our own 'political breakfast' in the more down-to-earth environment of our Gandhi-Luthuli Peace Hall. But in both cases, there was a room full of voters wondering how to cast their ballots; and in both cases, a panel of politicians setting out their wares.

This is the 3rd time that we have hosted a 'Town Hall' meeting before an election and it is pleasing to see how engaged and passionate the homeless were. It was they who decided which five parties to invite. The DA, EFF and IFP were all there on time, and each put up a senior representative who spoke articulately about their party's position; MK arrived only once the event was two-thirds over and with no real apology. The ANC – despite our multiple attempts to make sure that the invitation was seen by the right person – failed to send a representative or an apology: the homeless drew their own conclusions from their empty chair.

The debate was ably chaired in English and Zulu by Sphamandla Brian Mhlongo from DDP, the Democracy Development Programme. He made sure that everyone who wanted to had a chance to speak and he kept the discussions respectful and focused.

Many of the homeless present have been able to register as voters, thanks to our close partnership with the Independent Electoral Commission. But some have not been able to because it has been so hard for us to get replacement IDs for people from the Department of Home Affairs. In fact, the call for speedy and free replacements of IDs is a main demand in the National Homeless Manifesto.

This was presented at the meeting by Simphiwe Khoza, someone with a lived experience of being on the streets, and who recently attended the National Homeless Conversation. He pointed out that being without an ID not only undermined a homeless person's right to vote but actually made it hard to exercise a number of other rights that the South African Constitution guarantees to all citizens.

This is finally something which at least the Mayor has noticed since he recently made a specific promise to deliver 200 IDs to homeless people. City People worked with the Municipality to organise a great jamboree and there were long speeches: nevertheless, on the day not a single ID was issued and 3 weeks later still no one has received an ID. But to be honest, writing in an Op Ed in 'The Post' our Director admitted that we did not have high expectations.

Such failures were cited by the homeless as yet another example of their general disappointment at the gap between the promises that are made by government and how little is actually delivered. Interestingly, at the Town Hall no one from the floor spoke in the ANC's favour. The homeless also heard promises being made by the other parties who are challenging for power in KZN. Who they actually believe will become apparent when they vote. But in the meantime, the feeling was that they had been heard and that some parties at least were not ignoring the homeless.

Photo: crowds of homeless gather at the DHC to hear from politicians. The event was extensively covered by the media: SABC TV news, SAFM radio, East Coast Radio, the Daily News, the Independent on Saturday and the Sunday Tribune!



HOLLYWOOD FOUNDATION SUPPORTS STREET LIT

World Book Day on 23 April was the perfect day for the much-anticipated handover of goods donated by Hollywood Foundation to the Street Lit project.

The staff of Hollywood got behind the project and did an inter-departmental book drive: an impressive 1300 books were sourced and donated to the project from the staff, with the winning team being guests of honour at the morning function held at their head office in Umhlanga.

“We were treated like kings”, said book vendor Richard Nzima. He and fellow vendor Eric Badise represented the project, both publicly giving testimony about how the project had changed their lives.

They each explained the circumstances which led to them being homeless and unemployed, and how joining the project has led to purpose and dignity. “When we sell books, we speak to all kinds of people – from shoppers in malls, to advocates at the music concerts. We are all united in our love of books,” they explained.

As well as the abundance of books, Hollywood Foundation donated two types of fancy new Street Lit tablecloths; branded lined anoraks for the vendors to use in rainy and cold weather; pull-up banners and bookmarks.

“We are delighted with all our new goodies!” enthused Illa Thompson, project coordinator. “Christmas really has come early for us! In order for our project to sustain itself, support from partners such as Hollywood Foundation, is crucial. We simply would not be able to easily afford expensive items such as branded tablecloths and anoraks otherwise. We want our vendors to look smart, and for our book tables to look professional at all times. It is through the generosity of corporates such as Hollywood Foundation, that this is possible,” she said.

The function afforded DHC Director, Raymond Perrier, an opportunity to speak about the work of the DHC, and for Illa Thompson to speak about the Street Lit project. She also appealed for ongoing help and support in continuing to source quality pre-read books for the project, and for the Hollywood team to be on the lookout for places where the vendors can trade.

Hollywood Foundation has made a substantial financial contribution in 2023 towards the ongoing running and staffing costs of the project.

Another important contribution from Hollywood Foundation, is featuring Street Lit on their extensive media platforms, as one of the NGOs which they support. Their video unit did

an in-depth two day shoot for a feature on the project, and there was extensive social media coverage.

Being World Book Day, much was said about the transformative power of books. Shakespeare – whose 460th Birthday was celebrated, was quoted: “Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them.”

Among the “great people” acknowledged were Hollywood Foundation’s Cara Noble, and her team, for their donation and support, and the tenacity of the Street Lit team in using books to achieve personal greatness.

World Book Day also saw vendor Sbusiso Mngadi feature in the *Independent on Saturday*, and he was one of the guests at a City’s Library Dept special event at TAFTA Home for the Aged. Khanyisile Cele was a guest at a school World Book Day event in Tongaat. Unfortunately, after much planning and scheduling, our vendors were very disappointed that they could not sell at the City’s annual *Articulate Africa* literary event which was postponed at the last minute.

To quote the Bard again, and this is something our booksellers have learnt, we need to take responsibility for whether we succeed or fail: “Men at some time are masters of their fates. The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.”

Photo: the Street Lit team of vendors, with volunteer Mette Bunyan and driver Lindani Ngubane, say 'Thank You' to Hollywood Foundation for the donation of books, jackets, tablecloths, banners, bookmarks - and support funding.



ECOLOGY IN AFRICA DISCUSSED AT HURLEY’S OWN SEMINARY

250 men and women from Catholic religious orders across Africa – who are training to be priests and sisters – gathered recently at Cedara outside Pietermaritzburg to discuss Ecology in Africa. They were all students at St Joseph’s Theological Institute and were

joined, at this annual conference, by South African lay experts in theology, government and science.

Archbishop Hurley played a key role in the foundation of SJTI in the 1950s and his statue has a place of honour in the Denis Hurley Library (see *photo at the top*). Right next to it is a bust of a French Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who had a huge influence on +Hurley. Teilhard's desire to integrate evolutionary theory with his profound faith in Christ led to the development of a cosmic theology that saw his writings banned in the last years of his life. But, despite the silencing, +Hurley quoted from Teilhard at the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and called him 'a loyal son of the Church'.

The shadows of +Hurley and Teilhard loomed large over this 2-day conference that vindicated them both by treating the environment, and the role of human beings within creation, as a mainstream focus of modern theology.

One of the keynote speakers was Rt Rev Sithembele Sipuka, Bishop of Umtata and, as +Hurley once was, President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. He stressed that the redemption of humanity and the redemption of the planet went hand in hand. As late-comers in the history of evolution, human beings have a duty to steward what the Creator has entrusted to us, and shift away from 'an aggressive attitude of exploitation'. Bishop Sipuka described this as the movement "from Rupture to Communion". He had a warning, though, against Christians who attend eco-conferences but then carry on as usual and do not change their own behaviour. He wondered, for example, how many Catholics when they go to confession admit that they wasted water or that they did not recycle?

A paper was presented via video by a South African priest, Fr Dumisani Vilakati, who works in Rome with the 'Dicastery for Integral Human Development'. This is the Vatican department responsible for social teaching and a special video greeting from the 'prefect' in charge, Cardinal Michael Czerny, was also played and can be seen [on our You Tube channel](#).

The other papers covered a wide range of subjects from local municipal initiatives, to waste treatment, the life of St Francis, the challenge of home-making, the threat from animal farming, and models from Scripture, the Early Church and indigenous religions. Many of the speakers referenced Pope Francis' two important documents on the environment from 2015 and 2023 and the worldwide *Laudato Si'* Movement that has created some [excellent on-line resources](#).

The DHC was a co-sponsor of the conference given the link with Archbishop Hurley. Hurley's ministry as a bishop was focused on: responding to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, synodal decision-making, ecumenical partnerships, respect for other faiths, and being a voice for the voiceless. More than 30 years later all of these have also become important themes of the papacy of Francis.

For more information about the conference, or to register to receive the published papers, [email Fr Wilbert Gobbo](#).

Photo: key figures from the conference (left to right): Fr Wilbert Gobbo M.Afr., Prof Jaco Kruger (St Augustine's College), Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, Sarah Alsen (Bio-Regional SA), Fr Joe Phiri OMI (President of SJTI) and Prof Philippe Denis OP.



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