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May 2024

*Praying for our newly elected Politicians*

**Election Day 2024**

**Preparing for the Elections**

**A Knight in Shining Armour**

**The Leadership Role of Catholic Schools**



**Light and shadows in the elections**



**Arrested or abducted? We await answers**



**Prof Al Gini back in South Africa**

## **ELECTION NEWS**

South Africa is abuzz as results come in for the National and Provincial elections which took place on 29 May. And as always the DHC has played its part in promoting democracy.

As a registered voting station, we were pleased to welcome almost 1,000 citizens exercising their constitutional right to vote. As well as people who live and work in our area, which includes a good number of students, the voters also included several homeless people whom we had enabled to register, working closely with the IEC.

This is the third time that we have hosted a voting station and we feel that Archbishop Hurley and Paddy Kearney were beaming down on us from on high since they had struggled so hard to help bring about democracy in South Africa. The fact that, in the

morning, the line of citizens waiting to vote was alongside the line of homeless citizens waiting to eat a meal reminded voters (we hope) that we are called to choose politicians based not on our own interests but on the common good of all in society – especially those who are most vulnerable.

They day went more or less smoothly: our queues were apparently shorter than at other places and we at least provided seats for people while they were waiting. This might have inadvertently resulted in people trying to vote at the DHC who were supposed to vote elsewhere (which for this election they were not allowed to do); this caused some tensions later in the day as people were anxiously trying to make sure they could vote but the IEC and the police worked well to defuse the situation. The election officials and party agents were generally pleased with how the day went, especially because they were served a meal: our cook Nonhlanhla Ndlovu just boosted the number of meals when she was preparing lunch for the homeless.

Our empowerment manager, Stuart Talbot recruited some members of staff and a homeless woman to join the group of official election monitors. They underwent training with Defend our Democracy and were deployed on the day at voting stations around the city. Philile Zulu, one of the health workers in our clinic, showed the value of her training when she was able to point out at her voting station in Umlazi that one of the ballot boxes had not been sealed properly. Wendy Tomo, one of our social workers commented: "I had a wonderful experience and have learnt so much from interacting with people from different diversities. I have now become a firm believer that every vote counts and may the best party win!".

Stuart was an independent observer at the DHC. Along with our caretaker, he was there until the last vote was placed at 10pm (only 1 hour after the planned closing time); furthermore, he agreed to be locked in and observe the count of the votes which did not finish until 8.45am! We are waiting for more results around the country but we can announce – subject to verification – that the votes placed at the DHC for the national poll (and roughly the same for the Provincial and Regional polls) were: 39.5% MK, 26.7% ANC, 12.9% DA, 6.5% EFF and 6.0% IFP. The posting of results on the wall outside the DHC was a good sign that, whatever you think of the results, democracy was done and was seen to be done.

*Photo by Wandile Msomi: Voters waiting patiently under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi and Chief Albert Luthuli who both fought and died for democracy. More of Wandile's evocative photos can be seen on [our Facebook page](#).*



## **PREPARING FOR THE ELECTIONS**

As well as our work on Election day itself – and for the two days of special voting beforehand – we were also involved in various initiatives to prepare for the elections.

Stuart has been struggling at the Department of Home Affairs to secure IDs for homeless people who had lost theirs – so that if they were registered they could actually vote on the day. It is such a shame that the DHA continue to refuse to send one of their mobile ID vans to the DHC which would enable them to process a large number of needy people in one go. The fact that they also have to pay R140 for a replacement makes it hard for homeless people not only to vote but also to access a wide variety of other Government services to which they are entitled.

We wrote last month about the ‘Town Hall’ meeting that we organised to give homeless people a chance to listen to and talk to contenders from some of the parties – at least the ones that bothered to turn up! We have also been working with our staff, interns and volunteers to help them prepare.

Sphamandla Mhlongo from DDP ran a training session to address some of the concerns and confusions that people had about the elections so that they in turn could debunk the myths that people around them were voicing. And then Prof Geoff Harris, from DUT’s Centre for Non-Violence, led a session to help staff voice their own political opinions in a safe space (*pictured at the top*). They learnt how to peacefully ‘agree to disagree’ and experience for themselves why that is so important in a democracy.

We also worked with Diakonia Council of Churches to try to create a prayerful ‘Bridge’ between Easter and the Elections. The plan had been to produce a set of on-line resources for every week – not telling people what to vote but instead encouraging them to prepare thoughtfully and prayerfully about how to vote. We worked with clusters of churches to produce the material for each week and though, in the end, we did not have enough momentum to cover all eight weeks, it seems that what we did prepare was well received. The material is still available to view [on our You Tube channel](#).

And we continued our ‘Challenging Indifference’ collaboration with DUT’s Drama Department (which started at the Good Friday Service). They produced a work at the Courtyard Theatre called ‘After Isimangaliso’ (*After the Miracle*) which explores the possibility of daring for a better future, particularly for South Africa’s youth. Another piece produced by the students based on interviews with some of our homeless community will be performed for the homeless and passing public, outside the DHC this Thursday (6 June at 11am).

Elections are not just about the big picture results but also the slow and steady work of building a culture of democracy and we hope that in our own small way we are contributing to that.

*Photo by Val Adamson: Students from DUT exploring democracy in ‘After Isimangaliso’.*



Whilst the recent return of the Travel Indaba was good news for the Durban economy, it was bad news for those homeless people who were targeted by the Municipality.

Big events slowly returning to Durban's ICC means that the city is beginning to regain some of the ground that has been lost in recent years. Tourism and conferencing play a big role in the city's economy and also in generating some of the lower-level jobs that are needed to reduce unemployment. The massive rise that we have seen in the number of homeless people in central Durban – by our estimate up by 50% - is due to the combined effect on the local economy of COVID, riots, floods and municipal mismanagement and their impact on employment.

But sadly, City Hall has also it seems returned to its clumsy pre-COVID strategy for making the city look good. So just before Indaba, there was a sudden increase in the number of Metro Police working their way along the beachfront and harassing homeless people. Of course, we are not opposed to the police doing their job and prosecuting criminal behaviour when they have evidence. But that does not give them the right to stop people they think 'look like criminals' or remove people because they feel they should not be there.

The actions by the Metro Police on the beachfront did not go unnoticed. And they were particularly noticed by a knight in shining armour: in this case a knight with a social conscience in the sportswear called 'Under Armour'. Vishalan Naidu is a senior advocate who was jogging along the promenade and saw what the police were doing.

As an officer of the court, he legitimately asked why they were questioning people, on what basis they were detaining them and what charges they intended to make. The police's response was evasive, refusing to give their names (even though they are legally required to do so) and claiming that they were 'rounding up foreigners', though this hardly seemed to match the facts on the ground. Adv. Naidu took photographs as the police loaded people into vehicles and drove them away. Incensed, he contacted us and we have been investigating.

The UKZN law students who come to the DHC as part of the Street Law project were immediately able to identify people who had been affected, or whose friends had been removed, and gather together reports of what was happening. We sent a strongly worded letter to the City Manager and the Head of Metro Police asking for an explanation to which we have still received no reply.

So we have publicised our findings with 'The Post' newspaper ([see link and photo below](#)) and are now working with Adv. Naidu and UKZN's Law Clinic to explore bringing a legal action against the Municipality on behalf of those illegally removed or detained.

The 30th anniversary of liberation in South Africa, which we have just marked with the elections, was precisely to counter a political attitude that assumed that Government could do what it likes when it likes and judge people based on their appearance. The rights enshrined in South Africa's constitution extend to all people – whatever their colour, but also whatever their social or economic status. Part of the role of the DHC is to be a voice for the voiceless and we are honoured that concerned citizens are willing to work with us to defend rights for all.

WHERE WERE THEY TAKEN?

# Homeless 'abducted' ahead of travel indaba

PHOTO: PHILIPPA

Homeless people were abducted from the streets of Johannesburg ahead of the annual travel indaba, a gathering of industry leaders and stakeholders, which took place from May 19 to 21 at the Sandton Convention Centre.

The abduction of the homeless people was reported by the Daily Sun newspaper, which said that the homeless people were taken to a secret location in the city.

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## Fuel stations a 'hunting ground' for criminals

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## Couple robbed of cellphone

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## REFLECTING ON THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Archbishop Hurley, as well as working hard for democracy, was also devoted to the cause of education. So as part of our Hurley Anniversary celebrations, we partnered with the Catholic Schools Offices in Gauteng and KZN to deliver a seminar looking at the leadership role of Catholic schools in South Africa today.

Present were principals, teachers, parents, governors, priests and sisters and they heard three different sources of inspiration: a broad view of history, a personal view of history, and a reflection on the philosophical underpinning of Catholic education.

In Johannesburg, we heard from Sr Bidy-Rose Tiernan who has been involved with schools and the Catholic Institute for Education for 50 years; in Durban, Dr Tony Akal the first lay principal of St Henry's Marist College and a close collaborator with +Hurley. Each of them talked about the pressures to conform to Government models – whether under Apartheid or after Liberation – and how important it is for our leaders to have the courage and the conviction to stand up for the special contribution of Catholic schools.

Also, in each city there was someone who during the time of Apartheid had benefited from a Catholic school. In Jo'burg we heard from Sim Tshabalala the CEO of Standard Bank who spoke fondly of his time at the Marist Sacred Heart College (*pictured below with our Director*). In Durban, the speaker was the highly distinguished Prof Paulus Zulu who after 80 years still recalled vividly the memories of the nuns who taught him at a 2-room farm school in Ixopo. Interestingly in different contexts, and 30 years apart, they both had the same experience: that a Catholic school had taught them how to understand and to hold on to key values. The fact that neither of them was Catholic showed the importance of Hurley's view that Catholic schools (and indeed the whole Catholic church in South Africa) should be 'Community serving Humanity'.

The third speaker in both cities, was Prof Al Gini of Loyola University Chicago. Drawing on his own experience of working for a Jesuit university for 51 years, he stressed that the importance of a Catholic education was in its breadth of interest in all issues. He quoted Terence, the Roman writer originally from North Africa: "I am human and nothing human is alien to me."

Prof Zulu pointed out that unless Catholic schools had a vision of what they wanted society to be they would simply conform to the vision (or lack of vision) of others. The participants spent some time imagining what that vision should be though much more thought is needed on that.

However in closing, Prof Al gave us a good catchphrase which can steer us in the right direction. It was from a poster in Chicago advertising the Catholic De Paul University.

“Join us – do well! Leave us – do good!”

*(A full copy of Prof Gini’s speech is attached. June’s ‘Southern Cross’ contains a profile of Sr Biddy-Rose; and the July edition will have a longer report of the seminars. You can buy a copy at your local Catholic church or [click here](#) for a print or digital subscription.)*



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