

Metro church needs to tackle poverty and corruption

Danie Mouton

God sends the church to the world to bring joy and flourishing life, testifies the World Council of Churches in its document, *Together Towards Life*.

“The Creator’s joy and wonder in creation” is one of the sources of the church’s action. God’s joy and wonder is magnified where the church promotes flourishing life.

Nelson Mandela Bay can surely do with a collective church that engages poverty, inequality, darkness, corruption, greed, misuse of power and weak leadership. We need real joy, a flourishing economy and sustainable prosperity for all.

Practically speaking, the task to promote flourishing life consists of four primary challenges for the church:

- (1) A clear, compelling vision for social transformation;
- (2) A strong metro-wide network of Christian leaders to drive this vision;
- (3) Concrete do-able strategies to implement the vision, and lastly
- (4) Effective execution of the vision.

A clear, compelling vision is the first requirement to bring about improved life for all in our metro.

To this effect a representative group of church leaders has formulated the Nehemiah vision. It is inspired by the biblical account of Nehemiah’s practical response to the news that the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins.

Gaining the favour of the king who held God’s people in exile, Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to form a network of people rebuilding the walls, section by section.

Our own Nehemiah vision advocates the rebuilding of our broken, impoverished metro by laying the foundation of strong unity in church and society.

On this basis we join hands across the 60 wards to create jobs, alleviate poverty, further education and constrain corruption. We do so in the mode of servant leadership, opposing self-enrichment.

The Nehemiah vision is spelled out on the Transformation Christian Network’s website (<http://tcn.org.za/nehemiah-vision-2/>).

So, we can tick the first box on the checklist of our four challenges: we have a compelling vision.

More daunting is the second task. We need to create a strong network of well-connected church (and civic) leaders to take hands and build together.

A vision is only a nice collection of words without a strong, metro-wide, collectively focused network of leaders.

The momentous challenge lies in the enormous divisions between South Africans, including its churches.

History has divided churches. We are wounded by the deep scars left by centuries of injustice and devilish discrimination, sponsored by imperial theologies steeped in colonialism.

Not only history and injustice, but also the barriers of race, class and language divide us. Different communities still live isolated from one another.

If you are a pastor of a suburban church in Summerstrand, what is the chance that you will know a pastor of an African Independent Church in KwaNobuhle? What has Helenvale to do with Soweto on Sea?

Division is also caused by denominationalism and our self-aggrandizing sense of theological or ecclesial superiority above other Christians “because we have the Bible right”.

The religious sector is hotly contested for membership and support. The more members, the bigger church. Leaders are tempted to build for their own church rather than to build for the Kingdom of God and the flourishing of human life.

We need to repent of these attitudes and change our ways.

Only by joining forces can we beat the forces of darkness that inhibits life and keeps our people in poverty and despair.

The third ingredient is concrete action plans and the fourth real time, effective execution of these plans.

In terms of the Nehemiah vision the sky is the limit of what can be attained.

However, let us stay with the second challenge, a strong team.

The Nehemiah vision advocates a network of freely cooperating church leaders where a common vision and mission binds us together. Everyone brings their energy, spiritual gifts and talents to the table.

Networks do not have command structures. It is a space for self-giving service.

Really basic first steps are necessary. Firstly, church leaders need to get to know one another – and we are going to use social media to make the initial connections.

We are creating a Facebook page, Celebrate our Pastors, where a picture of the pastors of the metro with some biographical details, information their ministry and some contact details.

In this way we build an informal database of pastors and ministries that bring the rich tapestry of God’s involvement in our metro to the fore.

We encourage pastors and churches to like this Facebook page. Please visit <https://www.facebook.com/CelebrateOurPastors/>

In order to spark conversation, we will reach out to pastors on their birthdays.

Online birthday greetings can prompt phone calls, which in turn lead to meeting over coffee and visiting each other’s churches.

Please engage with the page with a prayerful heart, trusting the Spirit of God to point out to you who your best partners in the network of church leaders may be.

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