

Rebuilding the city by taking responsibility for our neighbourhoods

Richard Crompton

The second week of January is a good time to reflect on the year behind us.

If we are all completely honest, 2024 was a difficult year for our metro.

To start with the good news, the long running drought was finally broken, and we had lost count of the number of days since we last had load shedding.

Concerns about the drought and loadshedding were replaced by a wave of crime, and the gradual collapse of our municipality. Sadly, our city is still in ruins.

What does God expect us to do about our city?

Jesus launched His ministry in the synagogue of His hometown of Nazareth and pronounced this:

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’s favour has come.”

This is called the Messiah’s mandate.

Jesus came to save, rebuild and restore those who are lost, in captivity, blind and the oppressed.

This is the message that the church preaches, but there is more to the passage in Isaiah 61 that Jesus quoted, it continues: “They will rebuild the ancient ruins, repairing cities destroyed long ago.

“They will revive them, though they have been deserted for many generations”. (Isaiah 61:4).

This passage tells us that those whose lives are truly transformed by Jesus, who have experienced salvation, deliverance and restoration will rebuild and repair their city. Jesus expects us to rebuild and restore Nelson Mandela Bay.

This seems like an impossible task.

The history of our metro confirms that our city government is not about to come and rescue us and rebuild the city.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem it was in a much worse state than Nelson Mandela Bay, yet he managed to rebuild and restore it.

He did this by persuading the people of Jerusalem to take responsibility for rebuilding their part of the city. This proved to be a highly effective strategy, which our city should also adopt.

This is our only option.

The first steps we can take are very simple.

A good place to start would be to clean your home and business neighbourhoods.

History teaches us that cities that are allowed to decay attract crime and drive prosperity away.

New York City was rebuilt and revitalised under the mayorship of Rudolph Giuliani in the 1990s.

They did this by adopting the broken-window theory. It states that, wherever urban decay sets in, crime immediately follows.

The New York municipality was able to drive the crime rate down by repairing the broken windows in the area and keeping it clean.

There was an inverse relationship with how well the city was maintained and restored and the crime rate.

Crime has always been a problem in the slums of our city, where people were pushed into because of apartheid, but traditionally crime was less of a problem in the parts of the city that were well kept.

As the signs of urban decay, such as litter and disrepair of buildings and roads has moved into the suburbs, so we have seen an alarming increase in crime across the whole metro.

We can start reversing this by cleaning the part of the city in which we live and work, repairing our buildings and lobbying our ward councillors to repair the roads and municipal infrastructure in our areas.

We can also accompany those who pray in police stations on a weekly basis and join or establishing community efforts to restore the parks and community spaces in our city.

The best way to restore our city is for you to go to church and allow Jesus to transform you, and then invite your friends and family along so that their hearts too can be changed.

Once you have done this you should invite your enemies and tell them about how Jesus has transformed your heart so that they too can experience transformation.

If we can all do this, the city will be filled with people who have been transformed, are full of hope and vision, and care about our city.

Then our city will be rebuilt and restored.

If we allow Jesus to change us, we have a lot to look forward to in 2025.

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