

Nelson Mandela Bay residents now have a tool to tackle municipal failures

By: Brian Helsby

What is the role of the church in society?

This is an often asked question. Many Church leaders see that their role is to provide for the spiritual needs of their “flock”, to assist them in their relationship with God, to help them with their prayer and worship life.

But the Bible, and especially the teachings of Jesus requires the church to go deeper.

While the message of Jesus calls us to love God, it also instructs us to love our neighbour and to have special concerns for the sick, the poor, and strangers, including people from other countries and communities.

Social justice issues are a strong emphasis in the Bible.

So what is the response from Christians when we see that things in our community have gone wrong?

We all know that for many reasons our municipalities, are struggling to stay on top of things.

Uncollected garbage, potholes, sewerage, burst pipes, derelict parks are all part of a growing problem.

Does the Church have a Christian responsibility to roll up their sleeves and to try to improve their communities? The Bible says yes.

And the Church in Nelson Mandela Bay metro has a history of making a difference.

It is being supported by the launch of a new platform by Heartlines, a Christian NGO, and will make the job of the Church and all positive minded citizens much easier to fix things.

A bold new citizen-led platform, Fixlocal has gone live in 18 municipalities across South Africa, offering practical tools and inspiration for the Church and communities to report, escalate and help solve local service delivery problems.

It empowers South Africans to take action on failing municipal services.

From potholes and power outages to leaking sewage and dry taps, communities across the country are feeling the effects of crumbling infrastructure.

Fixlocal gives people the means to act either by working with their municipalities or by holding them to account and demanding action and improvement.

This free, easy-to-use platform – available via www.fixlocal.org.za and WhatsApp (060 061 1111) – provides step-by-step guides, tools and templates to help users report problems to their municipality; escalate unresolved issues; mobilise communities for collective action; safely blow the whistle on local corruption; and fix what they can by themselves, safely and legally

Fixlocal also collects and shares real-life stories of people and communities working together to fix the infrastructure and other issues in their neighbourhood or town. .

As Garth Japhet, CEO of Heartlines, says “South Africans care deeply about their communities – they just need the tools to act. Fixlocal makes citizen action accessible and achievable. It’s about restoring agency and hope.”

Mark Heywood, social justice activist and driver of the Fixlocal project, added: “Our democracy does not begin and end at the ballot box. This platform is about turning frustration into action – showing people how to use their voice, their networks and their power to demand and drive change.”

An app is in development and the platform will expand to more municipalities later this year.

In the Nelson Mandela Bay metro there are many active citizens who are committed to making the city a better place for all its residents.

Among these is the Transformation Christian Network (TCN).

They are committed to mobilising and networking the Church to work with Business and local government to see the change we all long for. And they see that Fixlocal can be an excellent, practical and useful tool to drive local transformation.

So the potential to see the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropole become a place of excellence, a home that we can all be proud of, is strong in many people's hearts. But for this to happen we need to roll up our sleeves and to be part of this change.

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