

Discussion Document - The Church of the City Nelson Mandela Bay Church Leadership Group

1. Preamble:

The following document has been drafted in preparation for an in-depth discussion of the NMB Church Leadership Group, on the 15 October 2015. It is a culmination of work through the past year, as well as ongoing discussions within the Bay for an even longer period. It is an attempt to combine both the narrative and the strategy of the Christian Church's role and impact within the Nelson Mandela Bay community, and to balance the necessary tension between creating a movement and delivering tangible change through structured intervention. Consider it as 'notes' on the start of a conversation.

2. Introductory reflection:

'Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace" - Nehemiah 3:17 (The New Oxford Annotated Bible)

"There have been numerous queries and concerns about whether the church of today can help to reinvent hope in pursuit of a new, healthy and prosperous metro in and around PE. In answering this question we need to understand that all human beings, in their divine origin, are God's gift on earth. The first role of the church is to call forth gifts from people - to evoke the treasure of personality (ubuntu), and to find joy in enabling others to find their worth. The truth is that we do not experience ourselves as a gift until we are engaged in the act of creating.

Why spend effort rehabilitating the most corrupt officials in this metro? We need to equip a new generation of leaders from our pulpits by helping them to understand that in leadership what matters is not how many people you know but how many will feel a lasting loss when you are gone. In our sermons and in our lifestyle we need to model the reality that, sometimes, our value is best understood after we are gone. - Bishop Andile Mbete

"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" - Jeremiah 29:7 (The New Oxford Annotated Bible)

"The Church through her membership and leadership should physically locate herself where the most vulnerable members are living and struggling. We should hear their voice literally and travel alongside them in their marches of liberation. As now they may appear as sheep without a shepherd" – Bishop Lunga ka Siboto

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" - Matthew 5: 14-16 (The New Oxford Annotated Bible)

"Local churches need to reconnect with their communities" - Bishop Bethlehem Nopece

3. Where we are:

In 1994 South Africa became a democratic state and embraced the vision of a “rainbow nation”. Apartheid had been defeated; the transition was relatively peaceful – heralded by many as a miracle – and upheld worldwide as a model for a negotiated path to peace.

A large part of the success of the change process was due to the active role civil society (and the church as part thereof) played in ensuring that – in the lead-up to the transition – issues were confronted in a constructive, consultative and in-depth manner.

Twenty-one years on and a disproportionate (and increasing) number of youth remain unemployed; crime and corruption are a daily and very real threat to the safety and security of all citizens; cities and towns (and social institutions within) still remain largely divided along racial and socio-economic lines; inequality and the poverty gap are widening; state enterprises have become dysfunctional; the majority of schools are unable to meet their development mandate; service delivery failure is a common cause for violent protest action and the intended NDP growth rate of 5% remains a pipe dream as the rand value declines to record levels.

While the daily reality of ordinary citizens holds no hope of tangible change, the original vision of the rainbow nation is increasingly being brought into question as the public (and social media) debate becomes polarised around whether apartheid or political leadership is to blame for our current problems. The recent events on the campuses of UCT and Stellenbosch bear witness to this tension. In addition, Marikana happened - a travesty we never envisaged back in 1994.

It is not the future we expected. It is a future without the hope of democracy saving the day.

Within that context it appears that the church as a whole – possibly like the rest of civil society, in stepping back to allow the new government room to operate, has become internally focused and removed from the communities they service. Once the focal point of community interaction and a critical pillar of civil action, the church has been relegated to a largely ceremonial role, where administering the last rites to victims of crime and opening political rallies with prayer have become its main contribution to civil society.

It is the view and intent of the Church Leadership Group of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropole that we need a different story; that the church has a necessary and significant role to play in civil society, in the communities it services; that as citizens we must become active in the project of building a South Africa that reflects the Kingdom. That as the church we must become engaged in God’s mission of developing the full potential of humans; of enabling their “flourishing”.

The church, in our view, has the dual role of both bringing the people to God and God to the people. Our evangelical mission is the one side of the coin; the other is that the church becomes relevant to the daily reality of people’s lives.

The following suggests how we think this can be done.

4. Key guiding questions:

- Who is the church? Is it just the clergy and respective Christian institutions or, more broadly, all believers?
- How does the church become, and remain, relevant to the communities within which it occurs?
- What is the role of the church within communities and the city of NMB based on its unique contribution?
- How does the church speak with one voice and maintain the necessary independence of each denomination and congregation?
- How does the church mobilise its constituents to ensure tangible change, without becoming encumbered in organisational and operational realities?

5. Vision:

We believe that as a church we need to have a clear view of what we believe the city should look like, namely:

1. Of our city:

A prosperous people, city and future - Nelson Mandela Bay is a great city to live in; a city that works; a city that innovates; a city that builds; and a city that nurtures.

2. Of the church within the city:

A visible, active and present Christian church that cooperatively engages in (and facilitates) an active and responsible citizenry, and aligns its social action.

6. Our theological understanding:

The call for active engagement is grounded in the theology of:

1. The **Nehemiah vision** (to cover all 60 of the City's wards and relevant domains such as: church; business; education; government; family; media and communication; arts and entertainment; and sport, as well as a canopy of prayer).
2. The **Jeremiah calling** (engage authorities, question the priesthood, challenge the people).
3. The **Missio Dei** (God is active - the redemptive work of God through prophecy, priesthood and royal service).
4. A **Kingdom of God** orientation (as contained in the Lord's Prayer).

7. The critical issues within our society:

Our call to action is in response, specifically, to the pervasive issues that our current NMB community is struggling with, namely:

- a) Violence as means of achieving ends (*Xenophobia, violent crime, women and child abuse, homophobia/LGBT victimisation*);
- b) Dysfunctional families and homes;
- c) Disintegration of communities;
- d) Polarisation of society;
- e) Failure of schools to create nurturing environments and to educate;
- f) Lack of meaningful work (specifically for our youth);
- g) Poverty;
- h) Failure of basic service delivery;
- i) Culture of dependency;
- j) Pervasive corruption throughout society.

8. The Unique contribution of the church:

In addition to our evangelical strengths, we believe the church has a specific role to play within civil society and that it should play to its strengths in becoming part of the active citizenry. We see those strengths as:

- a) A message and story of reconciliation and hope;
- b) A voice of moral authority and humility;
- c) Access to networks (across churches, congregant networks, NMBM, NMMU, NMB Business Chamber, unions, sporting codes);
- d) Congregant skills and roles within their workplaces;
- e) Counselling depth and experience (trauma, grief, pastoral care);
- f) Existing organisational platforms (legal entities, admin support, existing infrastructure);
- g) Learning about diversity - from managing and operating within a diversity of belief and people, we have some insight into understanding how diversity can operate positively and negatively;
- h) On-the-ground/in-the-community presence.

9. Strategic framework:

After a process of engagement within the Christian church in NMB over the last year, we believe the way forward is to agree on a strategic approach that is multi-faceted and allows each person and group to find its unique place. Specifically that we:

1. **Build an “active citizen” movement** – a movement (as opposed to an organisation) is needed to drive change, a movement that promotes both collective and individual initiative for positive change within the city.
2. **Focus on five core areas of intervention** (each having a dedicated project team, facilitated by a “champion”, that identifies key projects and promotes existing initiatives rather than re-inventing the wheel), namely:
 - a. **Youth development** - focusing on local schools to become effective and community “owned” – *addressing education*.
 - b. **Wellness** - supporting the existing health infrastructure in ways that build the levels of current service, and facilitating an understanding of wellbeing within our congregants – *our focus on health*.
 - c. **Employment** - facilitating productive work opportunities and strategies that deliver both meaning and sustainability for individuals and families – *in response to the issues of poverty and unemployment*.
 - d. **Safe and working communities** – addressing corruption, crime and service delivery failure through local church involvement and support of community-driven initiatives – *dealing with corruption and crime*.
 - e. **Restoring value** – through programmes such as *Unashamedly Ethical* and, from our pulpits, values such as integrity, empathy, respect and excellence as a core societal focus. Values rather than expediency or patronage become the benchmark for decision-making.
3. **Act on the basis of a peace and development matrix** (see table below) - allowing persons, churches and organisations to “*find their place*” within each core area and to identify where they can best contribute, based on their own vision, capability and capacity. The matrix has three levels - congregation, denomination and city, as well as three areas of engagement – peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building (see point 9).

4. **Actively participate in the city vision** – facilitate across congregations, what their vision of a great city would look like and get the church actively engaged and participating in the city’s own planning process (IDP and development forums).
5. **Align the Bay’s church organisational (communication and operational) structures through:**
 - a. **SACC** – formal representation of the church denominations to comment and engage government on matters of mutual concern.
 - b. **NMBCCC** to become the prophetic voice, the place of theological dialogue across the City. It convenes a regular plenary of church leadership to comment and discuss about the call to be a Christian within the city.
 - c. The **Church Leadership Group** – made up of clergy, plus select community leaders/experts (it meets monthly to share and reflect on a narrative of successful intervention across the city).
 - d. **TCN/Secretariat** – a convening agency/management support for the Church Leadership Group, it supports the Core Project Teams; convenes a monthly leadership prayer and reflection session; and seeks concrete actions, processes and structures to implement agreed-to actions.
 - e. **Metro Faith Unit:** An interfaith forum through which the church can engage with other faiths on matters of common interest and input formally into the municipal.
6. **Drive the message of hope and reconciliation through:**
 - a. Agreement on key messages that promote and underpin the call for engagement;
 - b. Encouraging clergy to address these in their sermons and public engagements;
 - c. A strategic task team/media liaison committee that acts as a filter (building a multi-media communication team that can respond quickly);
 - d. Response to societal challenges/events with a unified press response;
 - e. Using the monthly Church Leadership Group prayer meetings to convey messages.

10. Specific city-wide initiatives identified, or already underway:

The following seeks to give examples of initiatives currently under way, or possible future initiatives, with the intent of showing what a broad range of activities can be launched, and that there is sufficient scope for all to find their place.

10.1 Youth development:

1. Develop the concept and learning of **community schooling**, through initiatives such as the 4-school pilot.;
2. Start a school or negotiate the multiple utilisation of existing buildings (*assuming that only 10% of church physical space is actually put to use during the week, by “sweating our assets” better we can open churches to a wider range of community activities that are needed*);
3. Local churches “adopting” local schools;
4. Promoting parent participation in SGB’s and school life;
5. Empowerment of SGB’s through focused training;
6. Specialise in offering specific subjects i.e. maths and science etc - coffee clubs where pupils teach other pupils;
7. Homework clubs;
8. Volunteers – find and nurture more Sapphire School approaches;
9. Establish Church Education Desks at a congregation level;
10. Youth initiatives that go to where the youth are - Doxa Deo style.

10.2 Wellness/ Accessible health:

1. Project Sparkle (3 public hospitals & 51 ward clinics);
2. Church Health Desks.

10.3 Employment:

1. Support existing initiatives such as Work for a Living (Siyathetha-sebenza) and Harambee ;
2. Promote and train congregants in the ABCD development approach.

10.4 Building safe and working communities:

1. Corruption Project/Task Team;
2. Actively participate in the Civil Society Coalition;
3. Help facilitate the Safety Plan for the Metro which is still under development;
4. Support established structures - consider establishing a Corruption Hotline;
5. Adopting a local SAPS station and encouraging congregations/ congregants to become involved in NW/CSFs;
6. Becoming active in local ward development committees and liaise with councilors;
7. Using PCRD-type service delivery technology programmes through local churches in order to map and report local service delivery challenges;
8. Drive peacekeeping at all levels through training of mediators etc.

10.5 Restoring value

1. Restoring value to values - by supporting and driving programmes such as **Unashamedly Ethical** and **Character Transformation** (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship);
2. By challenging leaders within society to commit to a values-based approach (e.g. challenging the metro political parties to a value-based electoral campaign).

11. Principles for intervention:

In creating a movement, it is the idea that must take root, not an organisation. However, for it to be effective it must be active it must be seen to do something. We suggest the following to guide our actions -

1. Start with simply listening to your community – take time out to have deep conversations about what the daily issues faced are (and the community's views on these) by persons and sectors within your reach and exposure;
2. Find your place – each person and group needs to decide where best its effort and talent can be utilised (without shutting down other people's initiatives);
3. Identify local institutions and structures already in operation and strengthen them before creating new structures;
4. Support existing initiatives/NGO/projects through partnership, rather than reinventing the wheel;
5. Use a "champion" to drive it;
6. Tell the story of what was tried, what worked, what was learnt, what the remaining challenge is;
7. Select a limited number of projects at a city level;
8. Get Synods to adopt this document in full (or appropriate parts thereof);
9. Get congregations to commit to where and what they wish to become active in.

9. A peace and development framework:

How it could work

	<i>Peace Keeping</i>	<i>Peace Making</i>	<i>Peace Building</i>
<i>Congregation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train congregants as peacekeepers • Liaise with local police and CPF/SCF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet local councillors • Meet with local schools • Message to congregants from pulpit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with schools and local clinics (<i>congregations to voluntarily “adopt” schools and clinics within their area</i>) • Seek membership on CPF/SCF, Resident Associations, school boards
<i>Denomination</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation panel • Provide training for clerics/pastors (socio-economic, governance, ABCD - development) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core messages to congregants that cover citizenship and provide teaching on core societal issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal newsletters to promote message and celebrate positive achievements • Arrange for joint services across denominations
<i>Church Leadership Group/ NMBCCC</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide skilled mediators/facilitators for intransigent conflicts • Engage other faiths (Muslim, Jews, Hindu) • Build on relationships and partner with business, NGOs & NMMU • Press release team that issues statements on urgent matters (e.g. statues/heritage, xenophobia/looting) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input into the city’s IDP • Engage city leadership on a regular basis • Monthly TCN “dialogue” sessions (invite guests to share and learn) • Just One Hour • School’s project (4 schools) • Promote key NGOs/partners • Multi-faith peace and development conference in NMB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New social contract (focuses on education, health, poverty/unemployment, crime/corruption, service delivery) • Vision of the future NMB • Agree on a core, unified theology (peace, love, hope, integrity, forgiveness, embracing difference/diversity) • Use media to communicate message • Develop a NMB city agenda (framework) to guide engagement with local authorities