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South Africa, 2000

## Nurturing and building community

### The challenge of pastoral care in urban South Africa

topics:

- *theological method for an analysis of urban processes*
- *problems of urbanisation in South Africa*
- *responses of the church to urbanisation*
- *pastoral practise and community-building in urban context*

source: *Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling* No 6, 2000; pp 16-22

#### Introduction

We live in a world that is increasingly urban – for the first time in history more than 50% of the world’s population live in cities. More than 75% of the people of South Africa live in urban areas. I live in Pretoria, the capital city of South Africa, which is growing at a tremendous rate, as is Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. Some of our larger urban communities have doubled within the past five years; yet, the church-at large has probably not yet come to terms with the reality of the urban challenge.

In Genesis 1 we are called into close communion with God and each other. We are called to be good managers of God’s creation. But these relationships of intimacy and communion have been destroyed. Today, in the cities of the world, we are called to restore communion. All over the world there seems to be a new hunger for communion with God, for living in community, probably because this has become such a scarce item. And if we are called to be managers of God’s creation today and in the new millennium, we better learn how to live and work in cities - because this is where the majority of people are.

We now live in a broken world of broken nations and broken cities and broken people. It is the same everywhere – in Berlin, in Pretoria, in Calcutta. Yet, God wants to restore communion to his people, and to the places where his people are supposed to live.

#### Community-building as pastoral response

In this paper I want to speak about the challenge of community – to nurture and to build community in the cities of South Africa. This refers not only to the community of Christians or disciples, but also to the secular community, the community

of citizens, the community of humanity, the communities in which we walk and live and work every day.

I want to suggest that this goal is at the heart of the pastoral challenge in our cities. Christ's death and resurrection, mediated in our pastoral work, should be understood not only in narrow individual terms, not only in private spiritual terms, but the death and resurrection of Christ should also be understood as actions of protest against death in all its forms : against the loss of communion and intimacy on a personal level, against the walls between different ethnic groups or nations, against the destruction of justice and creation. Our pastoral task in the inner city of Pretoria has to go beyond mere individual counselling or therapy; it needs to embrace the public challenge of pastoral care, mediating humanisation and social justice in dehumanised and exploited communities.

### *The theological method*

My reflections come from inner city of Pretoria, and I will share from the perspective of our journey over the past seven years. I would offer the reflections and narrative by way of using a specific theological method. *Holland* and *Henriot* introduced the pastoral cycle, which has been used extensively by many other people since, often in adjusted forms. Their pastoral cycle offers a contextual approach and method to doing theology.

A contextual approach to theology is, as Segundo suggested, part of the liberation of theology. It is a new way of doing theology; a new way of understanding, of knowing (a new epistemology) which is more responsive to the context: it is doing theology not in academic classrooms alone, but from the bottom-up; not merely through the eyes of establishment theologians, but through the eyes of the poor; it is not about maintaining the status quo, but has as its goal transformation; it does not operate in a contextual vacuum, but takes the challenges unique to our contexts seriously; it is not a "pure" or objective science, but affirms that our subjective experiences, our stories, are valid; it is not concerned only with orthodoxy or the right teaching, but also with orthopraxy – the right praxis, the right actions to bring about real change.

The cycle of Holland and Henriot has four moments or phases:

*The first phase is that of insertion.* Insertion describes our entry into a community, as well as our observations, experiences and actions. In this phase questions are formulated which arise from the initial experiences.

*The second phase is the phase of analysis or research.* Whereas the first phase is a more subjective description, the second phase is supposed to be a more analytical exercise, dealing more specifically and thoroughly with the different questions introduced in phase one. The second phase has as its task to provide a broader and more in-depth understanding of certain critical issues in the context.

*The third phase is the phase of theological reflection.* In this phase different sources for reflection are brought to the table, i.e. the insights from the contextual analysis, the Word of God, church tradition, personal background, and so forth. Insights from these various sources are brought to bear on specific questions or issues under discussion, and in dialogue with these sources we reflect theologically and develop a theological or pastoral perspective on the issue at hand.

*The last phase is the phase of planning for pastoral praxis.* On the basis of earlier descriptions, facts gathered in the analysis and research, and new insights gained in the theological reflection, a pastoral plan is now developed.

This cycle should be understood in a flexible way, as the user can go back to prior phases for greater clarity and more in-depth inquiry. Furthermore, the cycle is not to be understood as complete in itself, but rather as an on-going cycle, facilitating ever increasing insight, growing knowledge and understanding, and continuous improvement in our praxis of ministry. It facilitates a theological process or journey, rooted in a particular context of ministry.

### **Insertion: describing our context, marked by brokenness**

#### *Our cities*

The cities of South Africa have been marked by planning and design that superficially hindered black South Africans from establishing themselves in the cities. South African cities were designed intentionally in ways that restricted black people and the poorest people to the urban periphery. Our cities were structured against community and interdependence, and facilitated by its very nature the potential for division and conflict. In the new South Africa since 1994, amazing changes have occurred in the urban landscape which at the same time implied new challenges and great pressures for the infra-structure and governance of our cities. The question has become : how do we transform our cities to become inclusive communities of all its people, with equal and fair access to all its opportunities.

#### *Socio-economic change*

Socio-economically our inner city communities have become catch-basins of very poor people after 1994 – they flock to the streets of the inner cities to be closer to the concentration of economic opportunities. Children on the streets, refugees from central Africa, homeless people from rural areas or urban townships, all move into inner city areas, and place huge demands on the existing infra-structure and services. On the other hand established businesses disinvest from the inner city at an alarming rate, exchanging it for suburban shopping malls.

#### *The cultural transition*

The cultural dynamic after 1994 needs to be managed in order to facilitate and ensure a creative, peaceful and diverse community, that will indeed model the miracle of South Africa's transition. Most inner city residential buildings now accommodate people from all racial groups, who until 1994 have never lived together in the same residential areas. This is still very new and still requires hard work. But this is our challenge: to translate hope into action and to witness the miracle of what Archbishop Tutu coined "the rainbow nation".

#### *The "God"-experience*

Different people in the inner city experience God in different ways. Many black people have rejected the God of "white South Africans", the God who condoned

apartheid cities and who supported apartheid rulers. Millions of black South Africans rejected the Western models in which Christianity have been offered to Africa. Single mothers in high-rise buildings in the inner city might call themselves Christians but by and large seem to be distanced from the institutional church. The poor on the streets of the inner city struggle to worship God in authentic ways in local churches, because very few, if any of the churches, have been able to incarnate ministry to the point of becoming ministry (or churches) of and with the poor. Homeless inner city dwellers and children on our streets, both find themselves on the margins of the institutional and new churches.

It is indeed a challenge to find new ways in thinking about God and in making God's presence known. It is also a question whether those at a distance from the church is necessarily distant from God, or do they experience God in unique ways that we need to learn from as churches. Have God indeed been revealed to those on the margins in ways that we do not yet understand? And how can we discover that God whom the poor have encountered?

### *The churches*

The churches of the inner city are at different places of transition. In the past most of the traditional English-speaking churches were suburban, middle-class churches who just happened to have their buildings in the centre of the city. But most of their members were commuting from wealthier suburbs to worship on Sundays. These were not inner city churches in the real sense of the word, since they have not accommodated the people of the inner city – the inner city was not on their agenda. With the changes of the past five years inner cities have become multi-racial and multi-economic communities. For many of the churches it meant serious financial constraints and even resulted in some churches closing their doors in inner city areas. At the same time *many* new churches have started since 1994, but often they serve an exclusive target group of young professional black people, and a large percentage of inner city people are still on the outside of the church, looking in. The huge challenge for inner city churches is to become inner city communities, small enough to care, close enough to people to understand, open enough to facilitate diversity, reconciliation and healing at the grass-root level.

## **Analysis: The development of the South African city from 1948 to 2000 and the church's response**

The second phase is that of analysis. It tells the bigger story of what happened to our cities.

### *Development of the South African Urban Structure*

Cities were structured in the past to keep different racial groups separate.

#### *1910 - 1948: The Segregation City*

Already in this time and especially in the 1920's laws have been introduced that had separate areas for separate racial groups in mind. This era was also marked by

the influx of black workers into the city, influx control measures and the development of slum communities and squatter settlements in and around urban areas.

*1948 - 1990: The Apartheid City and The Separate City*

When the National Party came to power in 1948 the apartheid policy was implemented with great force which also led to the formation of apartheid cities. Urban slums were cleared, but in South Africa slum clearance programmes were nothing but the removal of certain racial groups to separate racial areas. Black people were seen as temporary sojourners in the city, who actually belonged to the rural “reserves”.

This process of separate cities was intensified in the 1950’s when the so-called homelands were introduced. These were separate areas with superficial independence and the previous government envisaged that black people would now concentrate in their own cities in the “homelands”, away from white areas, with their own industries and infra-structure. However, these industries were never developed and people were basically dumped. This could be seen as the full implementation of the apartheid ideal.

The irony is that all of these sophisticated and often dehumanising measures have not altogether succeeded in keeping black people out of so-called “white” cities. Millions of black people lived as “sojourners” in white areas, sleeping in back yards and working as domestic servants, gardeners, and cleaners in buildings. The need of black people for jobs and of white people for cheap labour, contributed to the reality of black people living in what some call the “sub-city”, the hidden city.

*1990 - 1999: The quasi-integrated city*

Since 1990, even before all the legislation has been changed, shifts have taken place, especially in inner city areas. Not only have inner city areas become more multi-racial, but urban informal settlements (squatter areas) are now not restricted to the urban periphery any longer, but have moved in and around the Central Business Districts of most of our large cities. Suburbanisation or urban sprawl is another characteristic of our time as middle-class people, especially white people, but also black, rush away from the city. Security villages are also mushrooming in suburban areas, almost exclusively accommodating white people. A last characteristic is the growing number of legal and illegal immigrants who make the city their home.

*Cities, urbanisation and the poor*

Between 1970 and 1980 Durban has had the fastest growing population in the world at a 100% growth rate. The Johannesburg Soweto-Midrand-Pretoria urban complex could be amongst the twenty largest urban complexes in the world in the early 21st century. Our cities grow and they often grow with poor people coming from rural or peri-urban areas. In 1990 the city engineer of Cape Town has said that 5000 families were moving into Cape Town monthly from the rural and poverty-stricken Eastern Cape. Inner city housing was attractive to these rural migrants with an obvious effect on infra-structure and services.

Pretoria had a population of 1,584,098 in 1993. By the year 2000 our population will be 2,368,230. And by the year 2005 it would have doubled to over 3,000,000. More than 2000 people are currently living on the streets of Pretoria’s inner city.

The poor on our streets are increasingly women and children, which happens to be a global phenomenon as the face of poverty has changed over the past few decades.

Where and how do we position ourselves as churches in growing urban areas, where rootless and powerless people move in daily from impoverished rural parts of the country ? Where and how do we position ourselves in European cities where refugees and immigrants move in daily, as rootless and as powerless? How do we offer community, how do we become inclusive communities as churches?

### *Cultural Shifts and Lack of Community*

When we moved into our apartment in 1996 there was only one black family on our floor. Today we are the only white family. In the three buildings that we manage, 75% of the residents are black and 25% are white. About 15% are people from Francophone or North African countries. We recently made an inventory of small businesses and shops in our neighbourhood and realised that 20% of the shop owners were people from the Far East (Korea, China and Japan). In Marabastad we minister with homeless people, predominantly black and some coloured, in a community where the formal business sector is dominated by Indian people who belong to Islam. The huge cultural and religious shifts in our communities require careful analysis and rigorous reflection. How do we help build bridges of understanding and mutuality between people who have been divided for the past 300 years or more?

How do we build bridges within our churches, but also in the public arena where different cultures meet and decisions are made for the good, or the bad, of our shared communities?

### *Cities and governance*

The process of democratisation has been quite intense and intentional over the past 5 years. Local community forums have emerged all over the country and all over our city. These forums are recognised in terms of a certain act (the Development facilitation Act of 1995). It is supposed to have certain powers in terms of local government and local development. The church has a definite role to play in these Forums. These Forums set the frameworks for future developments. These Forums make decisions on matters of policing and crime prevention. They also have an impact on public policy and local government budgets.

Those people most affected by lack of community in society, are often the poor and the vulnerable. And they are often most ignored in processes of democratisation, public decision-making, and so forth. They are often not organised, nor articulating their issues well, and not invited to make inputs to important processes. In the multitude of community forums these groups are often not represented. Yet, the table has been set for democratic processes and inclusive decision-making. What is the role of the church in impacting upon the governance and public policy of our cities ? How can the church ensure that the voice of the poor is heard ? In what way can the church's involvement in the public arena contribute to the nurturing of new communities in a country that has been so divided and still bears the scars?

### *The church's response*

Whilst some of the traditional mainline churches have closed their doors and left the inner city, or combined with other churches, many new churches have developed in the past few years. In 1993 there were only 11 churches in our community, whilst today there are 26 churches, 6 years later. Most of these are independent Pentecostal or charismatic churches led by black leadership. There seems to be a hunger to belong to God and to the church, and this is reflected in the spontaneous growth of churches. The on-going diversification of churches, however, and the lack of cooperation or dialogue amongst some of these churches, are still reasons for concern. I believe that the prayer of Jesus in John 17 is unnegotiable as an imperative for our day. We need to find ways of bringing greater unity and co-operation amongst believers, because unless we can facilitate closer communion amongst ourselves, how can we – with integrity – facilitate healing and community in the sphere of the secular city or humanity at-large.

The churches have responded to the increasing cultural diversity and social dynamics in varying ways. Some churches made radical changes, the change in other churches only touched the surface, while still others have hardly seen change at all. A group of churches from different denominations have responded to the social challenges in 1992 and started a journey to work in partnership, through establishing the organisation in which we work, Pretoria Community Ministries. We formed an ecumenical community development trust in 1993, facilitating various community development and urban ministry projects.

### **Theological reflection: community and pastoral care in urban South Africa**

I would like to summarise some of the key challenges that our inner cities present in terms of our theme of community and pastoral care. How do we interpret the specific challenge to the church coming from the multitude of challenges outlined above?

*Firstly*, there is the challenge to the church as “community of disciples” to rediscover its role in changing inner city communities:

- we are called to move away from rigid institutions to becoming small communities – diverse, responsive and accessible, demonstrating sharing and caring;
- we are called to create a visible presence as communities of Christians within some of the most desperate human communities, incarnating ourselves in appropriate ways.

*Secondly*, there is the challenge to be a healing community shaping the community of humanity. There is the challenge of healing and reconciliation, crossing the boundaries of race, language, class and religion:

- we are called to discover each other anew within the body of Christ, and when we do so we are charged with the task of serving the community of humanity, helping individuals to discover themselves as created in God's image, restoring people to communion with God, working against prejudice and violence, enacting neighbourly love practically in the lonely and fragmented communities of our cities and towns;

- we are called to build a new and inclusive community, within our church and outside, re-creating a broken nation and a broken people, and humanising dehumanised people and places.

*Thirdly*, we have to move beyond our sacred spaces to affect the “community of citizens” (Barth), and “communities as places”. This is the challenge of urban development and public policy. How to build an inner city that will accommodate all its diverse people, including the poor, yet be viable and healthy as a community, as community of citizens who can work towards the restoration of communities and cities? How can we become the salt- and yeast-like presence of the community of disciples who could be the trigger in this process?

- we are called to participate in the transformation of the city, making informed and constructive suggestions with regard to social, political and economic processes and policies, being in solidarity with inner city communities and the urban poor, searching for viability and wholeness;
- we are called to seek the well-being of all inner city people, being pastors not only of our own parish but making the city our parish, encouraging people to take responsibility and ownership of their communities, and helping communities to act collectively towards their common good, and to participate in the shaping and recreation of their neighbourhoods;
- we are called to be servants of fragmented cities, helping people to understand their need for each other, for collective planning and actions, and for a shared journey towards wholeness.

In Genesis already we are called into communion with God, each other and creation. As body of Christ we are mandated with the restoration of such communion. In Romans 8 we hear the current cry of humankind and the whole of creation for redemption and liberation. In the Gospel story we witness the trinitarian response of God the Creator, Jesus the Redeemer, and the Spirit, the Builder of Community. And in John 17, just before Jesus departed, He left a community of disciples to incarnate his presence on earth, and He left them with the prayer for unity in their communion.

There is a clear Biblical imperative to nurture the Christian community, but also to respond to the cries of humankind and creation by building the community of humanity, communities of citizens, and the different geographical communities which we represent here today.

### **Towards a pastoral praxis envisioning a new community**

*The Potter’s House* is a small community of women in crisis. Women in *The Potter’s House* come from a diversity of backgrounds and they have experienced different forms of crisis - rejection by their family, divorce, abuse, addiction, and so on. Some women have intense emotional problems, but for many the main problem is that of unemployment. Often they lack proper education or skills to secure a proper job. At *The Potter’s House* women are supported in a holistic way. There is a real attempt to assist women in all the crucial areas of their lives, helping them to a point where they can stand on their own feet again. Training needs, family relationships, employment support, spiritual development, counselling, and other aspects of their lives, are enhanced. The staff of *The Potter’s House* want to model in practical ways basic principles such as respect, acceptance, forgiveness, and encouragement. For many women this is the first time that they are really val-

ued, and the message of God's love and respect is often experienced very strongly and very practically.

*Lerato House* is a transitional facility for young girls in crisis and on the streets of Pretoria. "Lerato" is a Sesotho word which means "love". A Street Outreach Team is on the streets three nights a week, and their purpose is to build relationships of trust with young girls in prostitution. They speak to them of alternatives and support them where necessary. A drop-in centre serves the girls with medical services, such as HIV-tests, the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, and so on. The residential facility is a community such as The Potter's House offering basic care and love, but also opportunities for schooling and the possibility of re-integration with their families. In working with children the principles of community building are even more important. These girls are extremely vulnerable, but they have not yet erected walls around themselves the way adult women do when they are hurt by life. The need for love and attention are much more intense, as is the possibilities for disappointment. At the Lerato House discipline plays a central role. The children need boundaries and feel secure when they know what the consequences of certain behaviours are. Values and norms are taught in many practical ways and the focus is on character building.

Before 1994 *homelessness* was not on the agenda of the city and local government in the past. There was no policy on homelessness in South Africa - in national, provincial or local government structures. There was no budget for homelessness. Through sustained lobbying, good research and proper proposals, homelessness was adopted as one of the strategic issues to be dealt with in the inner city of Pretoria in 1999. A budget of R 900,000 and then R 700,000 was awarded over the past two years, while in 1997 only R 48,000 was approved but never given. A policy for homelessness was written and adopted by the City Council of Pretoria, which is now the first local government with a policy on homelessness. Homelessness has become central on the agenda of many inner city and even suburban churches. Homelessness and advocacy with homeless people has become an important pastoral issue.

The *community of Maeabastad* was affected by forced removals in the 60's and 70's when people of colour were moved to their own areas outside of. Churches were also affected and demolished and the mosque and the Hindu temple remained. In the past 10 years people started to move into Marabastad and here are currently a squatter community of 2000 people and it is ever increasing. There is no physical presence of the church except for the homeless help centre that opened in June of 1999; but there is no established church. Addiction, child prostitution and unemployment are some of the real problems of the area. This community has been forgotten for forty years, forgotten and ignored by local government, the citizens of Pretoria and the churches of Pretoria. In the past 6 years churches were made aware of the problems of Marabastad. How and why is this community a pastoral challenge? Ministry in this area requires solidarity with the poor, lobbying for their inclusion in urban plans and policies, in future development plans and projects.

*Salvokop* is an old railway community with 400 houses. The previous church left the area because of changes. There was not much of a relationship between the church and the community. In 1998 our six partner churches brought the church

building and adjacent house together. We decided to call it the Salvokop Community Centre. Eventually there will be a community church at the heart of the centre. The centre will facilitate various community projects, such as child care, study space, hobby centres, skills training, and so on, at the point of the community's need.

*Yeast City Housing* is a church-based housing company that we launched in 1997 to ensure affordable and decent inner city housing, that will also include the poor and at-risk people of the city. This company takes on bad buildings, working closely with the residents to restore them to safe and healthy places for people to live in.

*Community Business* is a special task for care. The inner city is characterised by disinvestment from the business community, a growing number of informal traders and unemployed people, vacant shops, and so forth. Some of our churches have opened their doors for the community by transforming certain spaces into small community businesses.

Our ministry is heavily involved serving *the civil society* and co-operating with *governance* for the vulnerable groups of the city, i.e. women and young girls in crisis, homeless people, inner city residents at risk, and so forth. In terms of governance these people are often side-lined from democratic processes. It has been vital for us to stimulate the development of civic movements to include grass-root people in inner city development and decision-making processes.

## Summary

1. The church needs to rediscover itself as a servant community of disciples, that will establish an incarnational, serving presence, being visible and available to people and communities in crisis.
2. The church as a servant community also needs to work for greater inclusivity within the body, allowing people like Zacchaeus, the rich exploiter, and Mary Magdalene, the marginal woman, to enter into fellowship with one another, united because they were set free by Christ and healed in their communion with each other.
3. The church as a servant community can and should play a vital role in the public arena, contributing to the common good, and having a salt and yeast effect where it is required. Orlando Costas spoke about the church outside the gate. We have to move from our small liturgy on Sunday to the larger liturgy of the week, where we work with the people of our communities towards their shalom. It implies moving from a private theology to a public ministry, helping our members to be good neighbours and good citizens.
4. Community is not only the goal of our ministry but also the means. We need to discover community as means of evangelism, community as place of healing and reconciliation, community as place of affirmation and empowerment, community as reconciliation, community as demonstration of social and economic justice, community as place of advocacy, and community as a celebration of the redemptive work of Christ.
5. Lastly, a reminder that this is a life-long process of working with Christ in building a new city and a common humanity; it is a life-long process to advocate

for just economics and politics; our role will be to advocate and conscientise and serve continuously, being present and available in the communities of this world.

But within these life-long processes we have opportunities to erect small signs of hope – tokens or promises of what is still to come...; signs of God's new city!