
A Pastoral Letter to the Congregations From the Leaders of SACC Member Churches Ascension – Eve of Pentecost 2017

Jesus said: “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world!”

- 1. Greeting:** We greet you in the precious name of the Risen Lord whose resurrection is our guarantee of hope - the hope that is in us, as Apostle Peter puts it (1 Peter 3:15) It is this hope that is in Christ that convinces us that every death experience can and must be overcome with new life as anchored in Him who said I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly.
- 2. Signs of the Times:** As leaders of the member churches of the South African Council of Churches we meet always in the first half of each year to review the state of the nation, so that we can "read the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:2-3), as our Lord expects of us. It is out of the commitment to read the signs of the times that we are able to be more focused and more deliberate with our prayers for the country, the people and the conditions of their living. Prayer is our primary and most important duty as church. For this reason we have committed ourselves, and request of you in your congregations, to continuously soak the country in prayer. In our prayers we mount the pains of the country on the cross of the crucified Christ, and with every sign of the victory of goodness we raise our voices of praise to the song of the angels: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace and goodwill in society." (Luke 2:3)
- 3. Ambassadors for Christ:** Along with prayer we have committed ourselves to work, and be the eyes and ears that see and hear what the Lord reveals to us; and be the feet that hasten to walk to where the Lord seeks to make a difference, and the hands that bring the healing touch of God. St Paul reminds us the "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20a). In this regard we have for ourselves, the platform that is the SACC, that exists to lead common Christian action that works for moral witness in South Africa, addressing issues of social and economic justice, national reconciliation, the integrity of creation, eradication of poverty, and contributing towards the empowerment of all those who are spiritually, socially and economically marginalized. In this spirit we minister to the nation through our service of watchful presence, as Prophet Isaiah proclaims:
“I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem;
They shall never hold their peace day or night.
You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent.” (Isaiah 62:6)
- 4. Unburdening Report – That we may “SEE”:** On Thursday May 18, 2017, the South African Council of Churches released the Unburdening Panel Report on what we have seen in goings on of corruption and the capture of State entities by a power elite that is associated with President Zuma. (Full report on SACC website www.sacc.org.za) This is the first and the “SEE” part of a SEE-JUDGE-ACT approach that the SACC uses in



considering matters that need serious attention in society. “SEE” is going deep into the situation and seeking to understand through research, what exactly is the reality of what is going on. “JUDGE” is applying the eyes of the Gospel to say what is the value judgment call on this matter now that we know what we know. And the “ACT” is when a resolution is taken to act in accordance with the application of the Gospel values. In the SEE part we have worked with research volunteers that work from different universities and coordinate their work and findings. This, together with what we already know from the initial Unburdening Process, becomes the SEE part of our work, which must be followed by a theological JUDGE process, leading to the SACC National Conference on June 6 – 8, where the resolutions of ACT will be made.

5. **Purpose of Report Release:** The SEE report paints a rather disturbing picture of the state of governance and public management to the extent that we conclude that the government has lost its moral standing; and that it may well even be bordering on constitutional illegitimacy – an area we choose not to go into at this point. The purpose of the release of this report is to inform the Church Public whose delegates will gather at the upcoming National Conference of the SACC on June 6 – 8, so that they can commit it to prayerful reflection.
6. **The South Africa We Pray For:** On December 16, 2015 – the Day of Reconciliation, the churches gathered at the historic Regina Mundi Catholic Church in Soweto, to commit to pray and work for:
 1. Healing and Reconciliation
 2. Fabric of family life
 3. Poverty and Inequality
 4. Economic Transformation, and
 5. Anchoring Democracy, which includes the concerns of corruption and maladministration, and the loss of public trust in public institutions
7. **The Promise of Post-Apartheid RSA:** We committed ourselves to pray and work for the promise of the post apartheid South Africa in sync with the values of the Kingdom of God (Isaiah 11: 1-9; Luke 4:18-19; John 10:10; Psalm 12:5; Amos 5:24), the promise of a just, reconciled, sustainable and equitable society; free of racial, tribal, ethnic, xenophobic and gender prejudices; free of corruption and deprivation; and with enough food and shelter for every citizen; and for each child born to grow to its God given potential. That is the South Africa We Pray For!
8. **Unburdening Panel Facility:** As part of Anchoring Democracy, in April 2016, the SACC created the Unburdening Panel as a safe space and a “facility” offered by the churches to any person in the Republic of South Africa who may wish to relieve herself or himself of the burden caused by an experience of someone – an individual, a representative of a business interest, of a political party or of a person of influence – your superior or someone you couldn’t say “No” to, suggesting that you do something inappropriate in return for a promotion, an attractive position or money or shares in a company, or any other favour or incentive whatsoever. This was essentially a pastoral process for the people to “unburden” themselves and tell what they wish to tell freely;



as Apostle Paul says: “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2).

The Panel is chaired by the SACC President, Bishop Siwa. Other members of the Panel are Madam Justice Yvonne Mokgoro, retired Justice of the Constitutional Court; Dr Brigalia Bam, a previous General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches and former Chair of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC); and Bishop Mosa Sono, Presiding Bishop of Grace Bible Church in the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa. Working with a team of voluntary lawyers and researchers, for the public good, the General Secretary of the SACC, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana has been coordinating the Secretariat of the Panel.

9. The Jonas-Mentor Revelations: The Unburdening Panel process was triggered by the revelations by former Deputy Minister Mcebisi Jonas and Ms. Vytjie Mentor in 2016. We looked to the governing party proved unable to deal meaningfully with these revelations, and instead seemed to live with the view that there would be no room for following up on these as “all hell would break lose” because the leadership all had their “smallanyana skeletons”, the SACC opted to create the listening facility. It was to hear from people who had either been pressured to participate in corrupt wrongdoing or had witnessed such. Some came forward only to share their experiences with no desire to be publicly revealed, but to clear their chests only. Others were ready to go public, and these we encouraged to go to the Public Protector and they did. Their stories are now before the nation in the State of Capture report that has yet to be acted upon by the government.

10. What We Now See: From what we are seeing, it appears that the problem is far greater than corruption, but organized chaos to create confusion while wrongdoing flourishes. What we find in this SEE part of our work is that there is a Power Elite that functions in the environment of the President Zuma’s circle, and which has gained the capacity to control things for their private benefit. They do this by:

1. Securing control over state wealth, through the capture of state-owned companies by chronically weakening their governance and operational structures.
2. Securing control over the public service by weeding our skilled professionals.
3. Securing access to opportunities for manipulating public policy, regulations or economic conditions to increase private economic benefit; adjusting and using rules and regulations to their advantage, and to the disadvantage of ordinary South Africans.
4. Securing control over the country’s fiscal sovereignty – the financial levers of the State, and undermining its long term integrity while they reap the benefits of their actions.
5. Securing control over strategic procurement opportunities by intentionally weakening key technical institutions and formal executive processes.
6. Securing a loyal intelligence and security apparatus.
7. Securing parallel governance and decision-making structures that undermine the executive.



What has happened in State companies like Transnet, Eskom and even the SABC, shows a deliberate campaign to take away the resources that should be available for the public good. We are not even talking here about the daily experiences of corruption in our municipalities and provincial governments, where many people feel pressured to participate in wrongdoing in order to keep their precious jobs. The situation that we see leads to endless service delivery protests and public dissatisfaction and loss of trust in government institutions.

It seems sufficiently clear to us that the government of the day has lost the moral radar that should inform the public service of *batho pele*, in a “people first” governmental culture. Its operations seem to be driven by an outside interest, strategically located at the top of the Executive, in order to periodically raid the various attractive units of the State, of which a legitimate government should be steward. This is an accountability as well as a moral matter of the integrity and legitimacy of government.

Section 41 of the Constitution in Chapter 3 on the “Principles of Co-operative government and Intergovernmental Relations”. Three subsections of Section 41 (1) says that all organs of State “must”:

- (b) Secure the well-being of the people of the Republic;
- (c) Provide effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government for the Republic as a whole;
- (d) Be loyal to the Constitution, the Republic and its people.

In addition, Chapter 10 of the Constitution is quite instructive of the values, principles and ethical standards of the public administration in our constitutional dispensation. Likewise there may be legal and constitutional questions about the manner that Parliament has conducted itself. All these revolve around the continued constitutional legitimacy of government, beyond the moral legitimacy that we are seriously questioning at this time.

As leaders of the churches, we seek to facilitate the availability of what we have seen. We invite all to see what we have seen, in the knowledge that it can never again be unseen – for indeed “you cannot ‘unsee’ what you have seen”.

11. The Common Body of Christ: We write to our churches as a collective body of the Christian Church for a United Christian Witness. We recognize that although each of our churches may have effective expressions of the mission of Christ, we better represent the values of the Kingdom of God, not as single denominations but as one body of believers. We are the body that Teresa of Avila must have meant when she wrote:

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours".



12. Prayer Network Power: We are grateful that Christians of all traditions, and indeed all people of faith from all religious backgrounds are praying hard for this nation. There is a powerful prayer network of Christians with a daily program linking prayerful people across the land in a steady campaign to soak the country in prayer. It began at Easter and will conclude the present phase at Pentecost. (See www.ifsaprayer.co.za)

13. Ascension & Pentecost Focus: We urge all our congregations to join in this prayer network, and add to the present campaign, intensity around the two upcoming holy days – Ascension on May 25, and Pentecost the last day of the present campaign. We appeal that people should plan to gather to pray in their local churches on Thursday May 25, between noon and 2pm (12h00 – 14h00), and ring bells where they have them. Ascension Day is also Africa Day, and we should add the Africa dimension to our prayers for our continent. In addition, we appeal for national interdenominational prayer gatherings from 14h00 on the afternoon of Pentecost Sunday June 4, so that we mark the end of the present phase of our national prayer campaign with a collective cry for the Holy Spirit to descend to convict us and heal our land.

14. Further Prayer Periods: We further appeal that the national prayer networks should only pause for a moment and not tarry long, but we request the organizers to set the next quarterly prayer target from end of June to the end of September, with the last prayer phase for 2017 going into December to possibly close with a major prayer Rally of Healing and Reconciliation on December 16, ahead of Christmas.

15. The Mystical Body of Christ – A Spirit of Penitence: This Pastoral Letter is not only to inform our congregations of these developments, but also to urge you to consider the report in a spirit of penitence rather than triumphalism. We should apply all three prophetic modes – truth to power in honesty; engender hope through positive action that builds; and in a spirit of penitence own the sinfulness that we see. For it is not in our individual sinful capacities that we may speak truth to power, but in the corporate capacity of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, that we can have the confidence to speak, as “God making his appeal through us.” We are charged to implore our government and our society on behalf of Christ, to be conformed to the righteousness of God in all matters of governance and life. (See 2 Corinthians 5:20). As the mystical body of Christ, the church is identified with the holiness it is called to live and of which it is to be witness. But the church is also a school for sinners, as St Augustine said, seeking in grace, to grow to higher degrees of holiness (2 Corinthians 3:18)

16. Humility and Contrition: This calls for much humility and we ask that you commit to a humble and contrite mindset that owns the problem we seek to address herein. The Church has a lot to be sorry about in its own inappropriate practices over time and in various areas of life. It was in that spirit of contriteness that the 1990 Rustenburg Conference of Churches Rustenburg observed:

“We recognise that there are many other sins in our society which call for



repentance. Once all vestiges of apartheid have been abolished, the Church will still be challenged by many other social evils which will threaten our society". (and)... "With a broken and contrite spirit we ask the forgiveness of God and of our fellow South Africans."

17. Kingdom Values: We recognize that the values of the Kingdom of God are not always the standard that people and their governmental institutions live by, and as such there will be times when the church has to extend a helping hand to shepherd society in the direction of the values that make for the common good. When we do that, we have to recognize that even though we are the everyday representatives of the Holy God, we are as sinful and full of faults as any other human beings.

18. Dual Identity of the Church: The church is populated by sinful people who are striving for eternal salvation in God's grace. It is populated by people who are part of the same social, cultural, economic and political milieu whose sinfulness needs the saving work of Christ. In one sense the Christian is called to be salt and light of the world, in another sense the Christian is an integral part of the world that very much needs the light and salt! This dual reality while in the struggles of living, instructs the church to humility and contrition in pronouncing, very much owning its part of the sinfulness of society.

19. Prophetic Responsibility of the Church: The prophetic duty of the church is at least threefold:

- a. First, to proclaim the truth of God's values Love, Justice and Truth, for society and its rulers, especially when society is drifting away from such values. This is after the manner of Elijah confronting King Ahab on the killing of Naboth for his vineyard; or Nathan confronting King David for his sin of killing Uriah for his beautiful wife Bathsheba whom he had taken.
- b. Second, in the example of Prophet Daniel, to absorb the sinfulness of society in penitential confession (Daniel 9:3 following); and intercede for society, as God expects of us, as Prophet Isaiah writes: "(God) wondered that there was no one to intercede." As the Tiyo Soga hymn of 1857 goes:

"Bona izwe lakowethu uxolel'izono zalo; ungathob'ingqumbo yakho luze luf'usapho lwalo"

(Look upon our country and forgive its sins; and do not bring down your wrath for its children to perish).

- c. Third, to act in society in ways that engender hope and reflect the conviction of an alternative to the prevailing unacceptable life experience; as Prophet Jeremiah did in the purchase of land as a futuristic investment against a collapsing economy, while he himself was in prison, and Jerusalem besieged by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. (Jeremiah 32: 9 - 15). Jeremiah said:



"For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land'."

20. We are urging the African National Congress as the governing party to examine itself in the hope that they can, as an old, popular organization that is historically trusted with social justice values, to dig into their well established value system, to mend the unacceptable ways of government, before we reach the point of no return – for this truly has implications for the ANC in government, for its leadership and members.

21. In addition we are appealing to the civil servants in government, to note and remember that whereas governments come and go with elections, they as civil servants are part of the permanent State system of the citizenry, and the instrumentation of the public good envisioned in our constitutional dispensation.

22. Prophet Amos is today addressing our nation:

How you hate honest judges!
How you despise people who tell the truth!
You trample the poor, stealing their grain through taxes and unfair rent.
Therefore, though you build beautiful stone houses, you will never live in them.
Though you plant lush vineyards, you will never drink wine from them.
For I know the vast number of your sins and the depth of your rebellions.
You oppress good people by taking bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. So those who are smart keep their mouths shut, for it is an evil time.
(Amos 5:10-13)

23. With this information we appeal yet again that we all remember that, while the observations of this report seem to call for a prophetic engagement after the manner of Elijah, a duty we shall fulfill obediently, we also are called to temper our approach with the penitential intercession of Daniel, and the practical solution-oriented proposals of Jeremiah, to, in the love Christ, envision bring hope to our country through positive building - the National Conference will address these matters. In Nehemiah's words: "Come, let us rebuild..., and we will no longer be in disgrace."
(Nehemiah 2:17)

24. Yes, evil abounds in our society, manifest in many ways - corruption, State Capture, gender based violence and the ruthless rape and killing of women and children; and as Prophet Amos suggests, smart people might shut their mouths "for it is an evil time". We pray and hope that no one must shut her mouth. The SACC's Unburdening Panel remains open for business. Tell about all the corruption and the stealing of public resources; yes, from the days of the 1994 transition. Let us know what is there so we can together create the environment to heal the nation.

25. We exhort you, faithful people of God in the words of the writer of Hebrews, on this occasion of celebrating the Ascension of our Lord and eagerly anticipating the



showering of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to remain steadfast in the values that build and restore our foundations, and be "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

And "now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to God our Savior:

Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever.
Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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- 33) Rev. L. Dlamini
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