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UPDATE

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November 2024

Wishing Advent blessings to our Christian readers

National Homeless Conversation at the DHC Embassy Reception in London Annual Justice & Peace Lecture Rest in Peace: Priscilla McKay (1940-2024)



SA diplomat in an Irish embassy?



Celebrating Sydney Duval in CPT



Mass at the DHC for our dear departed

HOMELESS PEOPLE TAKE CENTRE STAGE AT 8th NATIONAL CONVERSATION IN DURBAN

The DHC helped create the National Homeless Network; a key part of its calendar is an annual 'Conversation about Homelessness'. This year it was the turn of the Durban Homeless Forum to host – the first time we were doing so in person, since the conference we organised in 2020, was on-line.

We were delighted that over 200 people registered, with representatives attending from six other metro areas in addition to Durban. Just as important, over half the participants were people who either still are, or recently have been, homeless. That meant we were able to live up to the standard of inclusion set by the best activists: “Nothing about us, without us.”

It was fitting that the opening keynote was not given by a politician or a bishop or even an activist but by a group of homeless people. 12 of the Street Lit booksellers talked about the way that their lives had been transformed through “books and care”; and Eric Badise, one of their number, gave an impassioned testimony of his own journey. He was then joined by Bongani Madida, formerly the homeless rep in the eThekweni Task Team on Homelessness, to lead a “sharing circle”. The floor was given over exclusively to homeless men and women and everyone else had to sit outside the circle and listen.

Having heard from the people who are expert about life in the streets, other sessions were run by technical experts. A team from Bellhaven and the Napier Centre 4 Healing led a frank conversation about addiction and harm reduction. Cassandra Abboy from City People encouraged small groups to imagine their vision of a shelter, with some very inspiring ideas from other countries. A team from UCEC and the DHC tackled the problem of accessing government services. Participants responded with some creative ‘role play’ which really helped to see the problem from different angles.

Sarah Altman shared the ups and downs of the urban gardening project that emerged at one of the tented sites since COVID. This inspiring project had been visited before the conference by some of the attendees, as part of a drive round to different projects including the Payless Shelter and the iCare project for street kids. iCare also organised a fascinating ‘after dark’ drive to various spots in central Durban which are known only to homeless people. This was an eye-opener not just for visitors from out-of-town but for some of the Durbanites as well.

One of the values of this meeting is for various organisations to connect and learn from each other. One lesson the DHC really wanted to share was our unparalleled experience of bringing faith groups together to help the homeless. A panel of five faith leaders shared their experiences of working with the DHC and working with each other. Their key lesson was the importance of openness and respect and always staying focused on the needs of the homeless themselves: the true face of God in our midst.

A highlight of the two and half days was the presentation by the team that have been working with HSRC to draft a Green Paper on Homelessness for the Department of Social Development. Prof Stephan de Beer talked about the consultative process and Jon Hopkins from U-turn showed some of the discrepancies between cities and between provinces that had been found. (The third member of the expert team was our own director.) It was only possible to give a general overview but what was reassuring was the recognition of the need to involve multiple departments all pulling in the same direction.

The National Homeless Conversation and the work on the Green Paper were in stark contrast to an eThekweni Municipality meeting that, by coincidence, happened the week before: that 2-day event excluded homeless people completely, marginalised the NGOs who are closest to the issues, and took an approach completely focused on by-laws and punishments. We know that such measures do not work and just end up costing money.

A full report of the 8th National Conversation is being prepared. Email us if you would like to receive a copy.

Photo: Homeless people are in the inner circle sharing about their experiences and non-homeless in the outer circle – listening in silence. For more photos and media coverage see our Facebook page.



JOINT SOUTH AFRICAN-IRISH CELEBRATION IN LONDON

Earlier this month our UK sister organisation, the Denis Hurley Association, whose purpose is to raise funds for the DHC, enjoyed a splendid evening at the Irish Embassy in London. About 40 people were hosted jointly by the deputy Irish Ambassador, Orla McBreen and the South African High Commissioner, His Excellency Jeremiah Nyamane Mamabolo (*pictured at the top*).

With so many anniversaries taking place this year, a conversation with the Irish Ambassador, Martin Fraser, had raised the possibility of the two missions joining together to mark 10 years of the DHC, 20 years since the death of Archbishop Hurley and 30 years of Liberation.

The High Commissioner was especially keen after attending a Service of Thanksgiving for 30 years of SA democracy at Westminster Abbey in July. At that event, he had heard Lord Boateng speak passionately about Archbishop Hurley's courage in fighting Apartheid. Paul Boateng was the first black Cabinet Minister in the UK and also the first black UK Ambassador when he was High Commissioner in Pretoria from 2005 to 2009. He is also a lay minister in the Methodist Church and knew at first hand the key role that faith leaders played in the Struggle.

Ms McBreen talked about Hurley's Irish heritage and the huge pride Ireland takes in his lifetime's work and dedication to the poor and the marginalised, coupled with the fact that he had been the world's youngest bishop. High Commissioner Mamabolo delighted the guests by announcing that he would first deliver the official speech and then say what he personally felt – again wonderful words of admiration for the Centre and the work that is carried out in Durban, but also remembering Denis Hurley as one of the first church leaders to denounce Apartheid, condemning it as an affront to human dignity.

Mick Perrier, Chairman of the DHA, gave an eloquent and inspiring delivery completely ad lib. Under his chairmanship the association has grown and thrived in supporting the DHC's work in Durban. There were people present who had known Denis Hurley personally, others who had visited the Centre or volunteered there, and many of our UK supporters. One trustee, Dr Liz Reynolds, was absent because she was actually in Durban at that time as part of a visit by the Two Weeks international volunteering charity that she helps run.

Trustee Sheila Bailey writes: “We are incredibly grateful to all the staff at the Irish Embassy who were so welcoming and gracious. The food and wine were heartily enjoyed by all and we departed into the night feeling that we were all blessed to be able to share in the legacy of Denis Hurley. A mark of the success of the evening is that Lord Boateng was there and agreed to join the board of Patrons which is yet a further tribute to those who work in the name of Denis Hurley.”

We hope that our UK supporters will take up the challenge this week of the ‘Big Give’. This is an opportunity for us to double the money we raise up to R200,000. Donations must be made using this link and only between 12 noon on Tues 3 Dec and 12 noon on Tues 10 December. And if the donor is a UK tax payer, with Gift Aid added, their donation of £40 will become £90! That is enough for us to help 20 patients in our clinic. Please encourage your friends and relatives in the UK to donate to this campaign – it would be terrible if we left some of this ‘free money’ on the table.

Photo (L to R): Current and former DHA Trustees Robina Rafferty, Sr Marie-Henry Keane OP, Mick Perrier, Janice Burns and Sheila Bailey; and UK Patrons, Sir Iqbal Sacranie and Lord Brian Gill.



A CHALLENGE TO BUILD PEACE STARTING WITH OUR OWN COMMUNITIES

Fr Mike Deeb, a Dominican priest with an international experience of working for Justice and Peace gave this year’s Hurley-Gabuza lecture organised by the J&P department of the Archdiocese of Durban.

He started by remembering his personal links: “I was privileged to know and work with both men – Archbishop Hurley since I was a Catholic student leader in 1975 and Archbishop Gabuza since we were on the SA Council of Priests together in 1992. I was particularly close to Archbishop Gabuza when he was Chairperson of the SACBC Justice and Peace Department while I was the Coordinator in 2013. Of all those who died during the Covid epidemic, his premature death hit me the most!”

Mike chose as his theme ‘Mitigating Conflict Through Peace-building’ and he began by

acknowledging all the ways in which our world is in conflict today. He not only recalled the various wars that fill our news channels, but also remembered the many ways in which people are experiencing injustice both in South Africa and around the world. He was inspired by Pope St Paul VI's words "If you want Peace, work for Justice" and stressed that we should not think of peace as simply the absence of conflict.

After listing some of the root causes of conflict and injustice – economic, political, ideological and historical – he offered a theological reflection. To do this, he looked at the person of Jesus Christ and how he responded to the conflicts and injustices that he encountered when on earth.

People came from different parishes around Durban and Pietermaritzburg to attend the lecture, many of them Congolese Refugees and Migrants. Beforehand, they had a tour of the DHC so they could learn something about Archbishop Hurley. After his lecture the group interacted vibrantly with Mike in a question-and-answer session.

He ended with this challenge: "Remember: Peace is not just the destination; it's the path we walk together. The skills of peace-building – listening, understanding, collaborating – these are muscles we must exercise daily. As you leave today, I challenge each of you to identify one conflict in your life where you can apply these principles. Start small, but start today. Because peace-building isn't just about ending wars; it's about creating the world we want to live in, one relationship at a time."

The full text of Fr Mike's speech is attached.

Meanwhile, in Cape Town, another great activist was being celebrated. Sydney Duval (*pictured at the top*) was a dear friend of both Paddy and the late Mgr Paul Nadal. He became a powerful Catholic voice in journalism and even in his 80s still serves on the Board of the *Southern Cross*. At a celebratory tea party, he was joined by others who had been interviewed by Raymond for his book and PhD about Paddy: Di Oliver from the Black Sash movement, Tim Smith who had been the Jesuit Provincial, Dominee Deon Snyman the first NGK member of the Diakonia team, and Gunther Simmermacher the editor of the *Southern Cross*.

Gunther recalled: "What Paddy and Sydney – and I – have had in common was the curse of perfectionism. Paddy had little tolerance for incompetence, and found joy in things being well done. That was one reason he and I got on so well: we both knew what was needed in order to do something well, and did just that to help each other. Paddy saw the big picture but he also paid attention to the minutest detail. Sydney took this to even greater lengths. He once delayed an article by three weeks just to check on the obscure middle name of a nun!"

Raymond's book is available to buy in South Africa, the UK and further afield. Email for more information.

Photo: some of the wide range of people who attended the Annual Justice and Peace lecture. Fr Mike is 7th from the left in the white cassock of the Dominicans.



REMEMBERING THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US

Catholics during November have a particular focus of prayers to remember those who have died. For us at the DHC there are two extra reasons for this since 9 November marks the anniversary of +Hurley's birth (109 years ago!) and 29 November marks the death anniversary of Paddy Kearney (6 years ago).

As is our tradition, a Mass was held in the DHC and it was celebrated by the recently ordained Fr Nkazimulo Shange who is on the team at Emmanuel Cathedral (he is pictured at the top with one of our clinic team Marie-Goreth Nduwimana). At the Mass, we specifically remembered a range of people who have gone before us: Patrons and Trustees; staff members and volunteers; supporters, partners and donors, especially those who have left us a legacy; and, importantly, service users who have died. We are especially conscious that sometimes when a homeless person dies there might not be anyone to remember them.

So on the *In Memoriam* page on our website, we list not only 'the great and the good' but also – when we know them – the names of homeless people and refugees who have passed through our doors and, we hope, have now passed through the heavenly gates.

We pray that they will be joined by Priscilla McKay who died on 9 Nov aged 84.

Priscilla was a close friend of Paddy and was an advisor to the DHC on social work issues in our early years. As well as being a leading social worker, she was also a Municipal councillor and a member of the KZN Legislature. Her father, a Supreme Court judge, had fought for the rights of the church to maintain non-racial schools under Apartheid. Priscilla recalled as a teenager overhearing his conversations with human rights lawyers who were involved in the Rivonia Trial and this started her on the path to being a fighter for justice, in particular children's rights.

As part of the Catholic Student movement at Wits University in the early 60's, she went to Roma University in Lesotho and met black academics, shattering the racist ideas of the education system from which she had emerged. When the Apartheid régime removed black students from 'white' universities, she joined in the protests and was arrested for throwing teargas grenades back at the police (to her father's horror).

Her commitment to human rights continued as a social worker when she uncovered an institutional child sex abuse ring which involved senior public figures; she brought this to court, despite intimidation and death threats. She was Director of Pinetown Child Welfare for 20 years and was well known for her work on children's rights, not being afraid to link the issue of child abuse to the state abuse of children eg detention without trial, children awaiting trial for years on end, and the state neglect of children made homeless by poverty, domestic violence and political violence. The traditional social work establishment found this hard to bear, but Priscilla joined black social workers in fighting for the rights of ALL children to be taken into account.

She was later involved in the new government on social and health issues and served as an ANC member of the KZN Provincial Legislature from 2004 to 2014 as well as advising the St Clement's Home-based Care in Clermont. A mark of her enduring influence was that one of our Street Lit booksellers who had been helped by her, Thami Shangu, hitchhiked to Wakkerstroom to attend her funeral!

Until illness made this impossible, Priscilla was a regular figure at DHC events always accompanied by her devoted husband Peter and even more devoted youngest son Matthew. We give thanks to God for all that she was and pray for the repose of her soul and comfort for her family. A Memorial Mass is planned for her at Mariannhill Monastery in the New Year – email if you would like to be informed of the details.

Photo: Priscilla was renowned for giving her opinions in a forthright manner - to the Cardinal, to Paddy and here to then KZN Premier Zweli Mkhize at the DHC.



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