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**CREATING A STRATEGIC JUSTICE MINISTRY IN
THE LOCAL CHURCH THAT WILL ENABLE THE
CHURCH TO CARE FOR ORPHANS IN (BENONI),
SOUTH AFRICA.**

By

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INTRODUCTION:

Burning and pressing issues are plaguing South Africa. The great need for love and care towards the orphan crisis grows daily. The author is a senior minister of a predominantly white congregation with campuses in Witbank and Benoni, South Africa. Witbank is a mining city in the Mpumalanga province. Benoni is part of the greater Johannesburg city situated in the Gauteng province.

In both cities the author is involved with ministries to HIV(AIDS) affected and infected people, more particularly orphans. This ministry is managed by an NGO called Hands of Hope, providing personal from Victory church, who provide assistance to Norah's Day Care Centre in Barcelona, Daveyton.

Out of my failure and pain, came the desire and compassion to reach suffering communities. This process of self discovery as God's shepherd started whilst walking amongst the dying in Emalaheni informal settlement, birthed the initiative of ministry called Emalaheni Aids Initiative (EHI). The growing number of orphans as a direct result of HIV(AIDS) compounds and creates an enormous justice issue. Poverty drives people to adopt practices that they themselves don't want to do. Survival drives many to become prostitutes and participate in many dangerous and at times unlawful practices.

The church has always been the moral fibre that holds and binds morality within a nation. Can a local church become effective in embracing justice issues where it has been positioned to a prophetic ministry?

The author assumes that the church is an existent and potentially effective institution with infrastructure that stretches from the smallest community to the large cosmopolitan city. In the midst of Africa's social, political and economic turmoil there lie both causes and consequences that are a result of injustices.

This brokenness which is both individual and collective, needs to be made whole, or the next generations are likely to continue in the downward spiral of injustice that harms humankind. The biblical concept of justice will be the vision toward which interventions must attempt to move. The qualitative methodology and process of this work seeks to look at two primary issues why the orphan crisis as a result of poverty and social injustice continue to increase in South Africa. South Africa has the highest infection rate of HIV in the world.

This research will endeavour to examine the main causes that have caused this pandemic. Through interviews the research desires to ascertain why some churches provide pastoral care and some do not.

It is the author's opinion that the answer is not a political one, but rather the answer lies with the national church and its theology of caring for the broken people of God especially orphans.

In the late twentieth century, the moral debate caused great controversy and schism within and without the church. The churches interpretation of what is just or unjust has often been blurred, thereby loosing it's credibility as the just voice and conscious of society.

Confused and broken people sit in our pews Sunday after Sunday. They never really understand the clear and defined boundaries that God has given through the Bible. A tide of unjust deviation covers our wonderful world, the person in the street is confused, not knowing what is normal or abnormal, only to feel the scars that deviation leaves in its wake.

In all of this, the question is asked, 'Who has the answer and who can we trust?'

People look to the church for divine guidance and caring ministry.

Psychological insight will assist care givers to have greater compassion with people involved in issues of injustice. The churches conscience has evaporated over the last twenty years, leaving it wanting in its mandate to address issues of morality and justice.

The author is a minister of a local church. The local church possesses the greatest potential to impact the world. It is the only organisation on the face of the earth that can change the human heart with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The local church in its' position of giving pastoral care has the most power to bring light to justice issues which are so prevalent in our country.

*Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him (sic):
the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night
until the morning. Thou shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling
block before the blind, but shall fear the Lord: I am the Lord.*

(Leviticus 19:13, KJV)

The normative biblical model for justice is clearly displayed through the holy scripture.

God has always highlighted the cause of the poor, widow and the orphan in scripture. The author pastors a wealthy congregation in an upper class area of Johannesburg. Not five kilometres away in the inner city of Benoni, East-Rand of Johannesburg where young girls prostitute themselves, young men hijack and commit crime because of their anger against a society they believe disenfranchised them.

The wake of apartheid is everywhere. One of the great tragedies of apartheid was the anger cemented into the hearts of young people who were denied proper education and live in poverty. Feelings of justification fuel their anger in order to steal from advantaged people. South African people are not equal. The poor are getting poorer, whereas the richer get richer.

Orphans stand on the street corner begging for the crumbs that fall from the rich person's table. The inner city is over crowded with people of poverty, unable to pay rent and know where their next meal will come from. As a church, God asks those of us who are care givers, to be the salt and light of the world. A church that can truly become redemptive in it's language, action and love to all people. (Pieterse, 2001: 82) This 'redemptive community needs to ask itself what it means to be Christ's man or Christ's women in the world today. The answer to that question defines the quality of our discipleship and when church members take it seriously, the church will truly become a servant church.

The biblical image that unquestionably portrays the mission of the church as the redemptive community is encapsulated in the context of servant hood. The servant image is expressed in the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah:

“You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified”. (Isaiah 49:3)

Armstrong speaks of the church as an extension of Jesus Christ. He states that the people of Israel anxiously awaited a political hero, a strong armed prince, yet to their dismay God sent a ‘suffering servant’:

When at last the Messiah, the Christ, did come, he appeared as a suffering servant. As Paul says, he “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil.2:7). In order that his disciples might grasp the significance of this, Jesus humbled himself before them by washing their feet. “You call me Teacher and Lord,” he said; “and you are right, for so am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:13-15) The church exists to glorify God and it glorifies God by being his witness, a light to world. .(Armstrong, 1979: 38)

The author’s opinion is that the church exercising its ministry can be the hope of the world. How the church is viewed by the people within, will determine it’s mission and effectiveness as an instrument of mercy. It is this mission that will determine its effectiveness in justice issues.

The church that reveals the true nature of Jesus Christ and begins to accept all people, rich and poor, of all racial groups will be the church that has positive and far reaching influences in South Africa.

The majority of people in South Africa are blacks. Blacks suffered greatly at the hands of the whites during apartheid. The following proposal was forwarded at the Episcopal Synod in November 1948 when they strongly condemned newly proposed apartheid legislation, they stated:

The only hope in our judgement for the future of the men, the women and the children of Southern Africa lies in the creation of harmonious relationships between our various racial groups. Harmony can only be achieved if the Europeans, who at present wield power, engender a spirit of confidence amongst the non-Europeans. But if, on the other hand, Europeans seek to preserve to themselves the exclusive benefits of western civilisation, and to allow the non-Europeans merely its burdens, South Africans will inexorably draw apart into mutually antagonistic racial groups. (de Gruchy, 1979: 55)

Socio-economic and demographic studies reveal that the wealth of this nation lies in the hands of the minority white community. The majority of black people struggle with poverty in one form or the other. If there is to be a praxis of harmony and care in this nation then many white people need to be enlightened as to the cause and effect of poverty and how it fuels anger and resentment from the less privileged. As a white African, the author enters through research into the mind of a black African in order to understand their oppression. If there is no desire to do this, this nation will never be at peace with itself. Can a middle class church minister understand the plight and trauma of an orphan child.

The only way to expose and understand their plight is to hear their stories.

An understanding of the churches struggle for equality in the past will help our understanding of the future. Reading the manuscripts of the Rosettenville Conference in 1949, a number of prominent church leaders gathered to discuss various acts of injustice. J.W. de Gruchy states the following from this watershed conference:

We affirm that the fundamental truths we shall neglect at our peril include:



1. *God has created all men (sic) in His image. Consequently, beyond all differences remains the essential unity.*
2. *Individuals who have progressed from a primitive social structure to one more advanced should share in the responsibilities and rights of their new status.*
3. *The real need of South Africa is not 'Apartheid' but 'Eendrag' (i.e. unity through teamwork)*
- 4 *Citizenship involves participation in responsible government. The franchise should be accorded to all capable of exercising it.*
- 5 *Every child should have the opportunity of receiving the best education the community can give, and for which the child has the capacity.*
- 6 *Every man has the right to work in that sphere in which he can make the best use of his abilities for the common good.*

(de Gruchy, 1979: 56)

Another heart searching response came from Chief Albert Lutuli, this is also endorsed in J.W. de Gruchy writings on the struggle prior to the implementation of apartheid. Lutuli stated the following at the same conference at Rosettenville in 1949:

The spirit of selfish exclusiveness shows itself (again) in a tendency to regard civilization as the sole possession and production of White people. Hence the plea that Africans must develop along their own lines. This claim ignores the fact that in its historical development western civilization has been indebted to many sources, ancient and modern. The tragedy of the attitude behind the claim is that white South Africa tends to forget its God given mission to spread civilization and not to hoard it, and thus to ensure its survival and growth.

(de Gruchy, 1979: 56)

It is noteworthy to mention that from early church history in South Africa there has existed a disparity between the predominantly white churches in its praxis towards people of colour and their diakonia. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) have been strongly criticised for not condemning apartheid, yet many within the organisation took a firm stand against racial discrimination such as Keet, a Professor of the Dutch Reformed seminary in Stellenbosch. He went on to say:

My Bible teaches me that God is no respecter of persons and that compassion is for the miserable, the underprivileged, the neglected children of the human race.

Surely, the Gospel, though far more than mere humanism, as founded on the compassion of Him who gave His life for all people and nations, cannot be inhuman. To love God above all, and your neighbour as yourself – on these two commandments hang all the Law and Prophets. Of a truth there is no way to God that bypasses my neighbour.

(de Gruchy, 1979: 58)

Many English speaking churches spoke out strongly against apartheid during the first decade of National party rule. Church – state relations grew tense as Church leaders took a strong stand together.

One of the main critics of the National Party’s policies was the Anglican missionary working in Sophiatown, outside Johannesburg. His name was Trevor Huddleston. I include the following extract, again from de Gruchy’s book:

In opposing the policies of the present Government, therefore, I am not prepared to concede that any momentary good which might conceivably emerge from them is good.



Nor am I prepared to concede that the motives which inspire such policies have any quality of goodness about them. For both the acts and the motives are inspired by a desire which is itself fundamentally evil and basically un-Christian; the desire to dominate in order to preserve a position of racial superiority, and in that process of domination to destroy personal relationships, the foundation of love itself. That is anti-Christ. (de Gruchy, 1979: 60)