

PRESS RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE USE

ON WORLD CITIES DAY CMM REFLECTS ON WHAT KIND OF FUTURE CITY CAPE TOWN IS BUILDING TODAY?

CAPE TOWN Thursday, 31 October is UN World Cities Day. The numbers tell us that by 2050 more than 68% of the world's population will be urbanites. Cities will be the 'natural habitat' for most of humanity in future, so how we build sustainable, inclusive and thriving places is an important question.

This day gives us pause to reflect on what kind of future city Cape Town is building through its actions today. A quick scan of recent headlines¹ is testament to a highly contested, exclusionary city that, instead of reversing the persistent Apartheid legacy of segregation and inequality, seems to be re-inscribing it into the very urban fabric.

Currently the Philippi Horticultural Area Food and Farming Campaign is contesting the City of Cape Town's plans to rezone this productive agricultural land, which contributes up to 30% of Capetonians' fresh vegetables and fruit as well as livelihoods for many, for mixed-use development.

And just this past week the City of Cape Town's Municipal Planning Tribunal approved a R14-billion development in the inner city without making provision for any inclusionary housing.

When we put profit before public good and people, it is as the prophets of old would say: "They say that what is right is wrong and what is wrong is right; that black is white and white is black; bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter." Isaiah 5:20.

How can we plan innovatively for a better life for future generations of city-dwellers when we consistently fail to redress the historic socio-spatial inequality which affects the quality of life for many of our fellow citizens right now?

Affordable, inclusionary housing in well-located areas is widely regarded as one of the keys to undoing this seemingly intractable problem. Not only because people deserve to live in dignified dwellings, but also because well-located housing means residents can benefit from living closer

¹ [City approves R14-billion Foreshore development despite objections](#)
[City of Cape Town lawyers tell activist organisation to stop helping 80-year-old man facing eviction](#)

[Outcry as City of Cape Town hikes Salt River rentals from R240 to R5500](#)

[Poverty by design: Is this the plan for Cape Town?](#)

[City of Cape Town urged to renovate unused buildings for social housing](#)

[City of Cape Town to evict more than 900 Woodstock Hospital occupants](#)

[Philippi farmers challenge City on rezoning of agricultural land](#)

[Is South Africa's most fertile farmland under threat from developers?](#)

[City of Cape Town facing lawsuit for fining homeless people](#)

to work, saving both time and transport money. They might also have greater access to services and amenities previously reserved for a few.

However, cries for affordable housing close to the city are often met with the excuse that “there is no available land”. Yet on little reflection it is easy to see that this is not true... just think back to the controversial sale of the Tafelberg School site in Sea Point in 2017; just look around you. A report from the civil society organisation Ndifuna Ukwazi entitled “City Leases” shows the lack of change is not for a lack of available land, but rather that there is no political will to allocate public land for public good.

In the report they write: “We see golf courses on some of the best public land serving a few residents; parking lots that sit empty for sixteen hours of the day; bowling greens used once a week; and empty uncared for sports fields.

The City of Cape Town continues to lease well-located public land for next to nothing to private companies and associations. How is this use of land more important than a home? How is it prioritised over the rights of thousands of residents living in backyards and informal settlements? How can it stand in the way of bringing working-class people back into the areas from which they were violently evicted?

And yet, hundreds of leases of public land are renewed every year. These skewed priorities are being implemented, without thought, by city administrators and politicians. Although these bad leases are inefficient, exclusive, and unjust, when it comes to land, it is “business as usual.”

Think of golf courses: This must be the worst utilisation of well-located land. Expansive unproductive spaces reserved, and used, by a privileged few for a fraction of the time. Add to the fact that golf courses are water guzzlers and simply don’t make environmental sense in a water-scarce region which will only get drier as a result of climate breakdown. From both a socio-spatial and ecological justice perspective it surely makes more sense to have thousands of people living close to work where well-located golf courses are situated, and the tiny handful of golfers travelling farther to hit a few balls.

Similarly, inner city parking not only prioritises space for cars over people, but future generations will be aghast that we persisted for so long to let a major contributor to emissions dictate the shape of our city.

Faced with the choice between recreation for a few vs. water and housing; carbon-dioxide-spewing cars vs. space for people; “development” vs. food security and jobs, what would Jesus want?

On World Cities Day Central Methodist Mission calls for radical change. To highlight the continued struggle for housing, land and environmental justice in our city, we will be hoisting another Yellow Banner on the Central Methodist Mission steeple on Greenmarket Square on Thursday at 13h00. The banner, which reads “Golf courses or social housing? What would Jesus want?”, reminds us that Jesus had nowhere to lay his head and so had intimate experience of being without a home.

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

ABOUT THE YELLOW BANNER CAMPAIGN

In the steeple of the Central Methodist Mission (CMM) in Cape Town there is a massive bell weighing three and a half tons. For safety reasons, it has not pealed since the Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887. It was silenced because, when it rang, it shook the foundation stones of the church and surrounding buildings and consequently threatened their structural integrity. It is now known as the “Silent Bell”.

The Silent Bell is a parable of the church over the centuries. As the church, we are a massive bell that is able to sound across this nation and world like no other.

Truly, there is not a single organisation or institution in the world that exists as we do – everywhere. We have branches in the poorest informal settlements, the most remote rural areas, the biggest cities and wealthiest suburbs. Yet, over the past 2 000 years, we have been largely silent on many issues of social and economic justice.

At CMM we decided to use the towering gothic steeple, situated in the heart of Cape Town, as a billboard for the gospel. With bright [yellow banners](#) we engage the public on relevant current issues from a gospel perspective. We aim to provoke questions and reflection both inside and outside the church.

ABOUT WORLD CITIES DAY

The United Nations General Assembly has designated the 31st of October as [World Cities Day](#), by its resolution 68/239. The Day is expected to greatly promote the international community’s interest in global urbanisation, push forward cooperation among countries in meeting opportunities and addressing challenges of urbanisation, and contributing to sustainable urban development around the world. The general theme of World Cities Day is “Better City, Better Life”. This year, the United Nations has selected the subtheme “Changing the world: innovations and better life for future generations” to discuss how urbanisation can be used to achieve sustainable development.

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES

Rev Alan Storey is available for interviews or comment. Please contact him directly at aslowwalk@gmail.com