

**A Vision  
and  
Mission  
for our Church**

**A Bible Study series  
for the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA)**

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the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity, Pietermaritzburg**

## **Introduction**

In 2009 the Provincial Standing Committee (PSC) of the Southern African Anglican Church approved the following draft Vision and Mission Statement and the associated priorities for action, at Provincial level. The PSC makes it clear that “It is important to stress that the Vision, Mission Statement, and Priorities are to be placed alongside those of dioceses and parishes. They are not intended to displace them, nor to impose any framework ‘from above’ on the grass-roots life of our Church”.

Here is the key section of the documentation:

### **Vision**

The Anglican community in Southern Africa seeks to be

- ◆ Anchored – in the love of Christ
- ◆ Committed – to God’s mission
- ◆ Transformed – by the Holy Spirit

### **Mission statement**

Across the diverse countries and cultures of our region, we seek:

- ◆ To honour God in worship that feeds and empowers us for faithful witness and service
- ◆ To embody and proclaim the message of God’s redemptive hope and healing for people and creation
- ◆ To grow communities of faith that form, inform, and transform those who follow Christ

### **Priorities**

To make this vision a reality, and to help us to form a comprehensive response to the many inter-relating socio-economic challenges we face in our region, we commit ourselves at Provincial level to these priorities for the years 2011 to 2020:

- ◆ Liturgical renewal for transformative worship
- ◆ Theological education
- ◆ Leadership formation
- ◆ Health: HIV and AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis
- ◆ The environment
- ◆ Women and gender
- ◆ Protection and nurture of children and young people
- ◆ Public advocacy

Two other themes – transformation, and holistic mission that is rooted in a full commitment to evangelism – were also noted; but these were seen as running through and undergirding all eight priorities, rather than as matters to be addressed separately.

During Lent 2013 and in the months following Lent, a Bible study group within the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity (Pietermaritzburg) ‘did’ these Bible studies on aspects of the Vision, the Mission Statement, and the associated Priorities of ACSA.

Each of these Bible studies has therefore been ‘tried and tested’ by actual Anglican believers, meeting in a group for about seventy five minutes on Wednesday evenings. The group is diverse in every respect, representing a broad cross-section of Anglicans.

We offer them to the Province as a resource with which to engage in a participatory manner with the core commitments of the ACSA. They can be done by individuals on their own, but have been designed to be done in small groups. Though they require some facilitation, they do not require ‘experts’ to lead them. We recommend that some preparation is done prior to each Bible study so that the facilitator can plan how best to structure the time. Some of the Bible studies, depending on the group engagement, may extend beyond a single meeting of the group, and so some planning is required in order to prepare for this.

One of “Priorities” of the Province’s “Vision” and “Mission” is “Theological Education”. This series of Bible studies is a good example of the contribution theological education can make to the life of our Church. Each of the Bible studies incorporate some of the fruits of biblical scholarship, but in a way that respects and acknowledges the resources ordinary church members bring with them to Bible study. Biblical scholarship, one of the fruits of theological education, provides access to the detail of biblical texts, drawing our attention to dimensions of scripture that we may overlook. What each of these Bible studies demonstrates is the potential importance of the details of scripture. These Bible studies encourage a ‘slow’ and ‘careful’ reading of scripture.

# Bible Study 1

Having read through the Vision, Mission Statement, and Priorities of the Province, break up into small groups and identify at least one biblical text that you think has the potential to enable us to explore more fully each of the three components of the Vision:

The Anglican community in Southern Africa seeks to be

- ◆ Anchored – in the love of Christ
- ◆ Committed – to God’s mission
- ◆ Transformed – by the Holy Spirit

Identify the biblical text/s and state briefly why you have chosen this or these texts. Be specific. We will devote a Bible Study to each of these three component in the coming weeks.

## *Anchored in the love of Christ*

[Group notes]

## *Committed to God’s mission*

[Group notes]

## *Transformed by the Holy Spirit*

[Group notes]

Allow time for each group to report back to the larger group.

When there has been report-back, close the meeting in prayer together.

## **Prayer**

Gracious God, we give thanks that we can draw aside, together, for this time each week during Lent. May this become a precious, safe, and sacred place for us to engage with you, your scripture, and each other. Transform us and equip us to serve those around us. We ask this in the name of the One who walked among us and who now watches over us.

## Bible Study 2: Anchored in the love of Christ

1. What does it mean to be “anchored in the love of Christ”? We begin our Bible study series by considering how Paul [or the author of Ephesians] answers this question. But before we turn to Ephesians let's reflect, briefly, first on our own and then with our neighbour, on what it means to us to be “in Christ”.

2. Paul offers an extended argument on what it means to be “in Christ” in his letter to the church in Ephesus. We will focus on ‘the shape’ of Paul’s argument in the opening chapter of Ephesians. Listen now to Ephesians 1:1-14 (in the New Revised Standard Version), noting how often the phrase “in Christ” is used and how this refrain shapes the whole section. The text has been divided into paragraphs to aid discussion and reflection. (You can compare these divisions with those in your favourite translations at home.)

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

<sup>4</sup> just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

<sup>5</sup> He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,

<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace

<sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight

<sup>9</sup> he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,

<sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him [in Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.

<sup>11</sup> In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will,

<sup>12</sup> so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ [in Christ], might live for the praise of his glory.

<sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;

<sup>14</sup> this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. (NRSV)

3. In his opening greeting (1:1-2) Paul uses the phrase “in Christ”. What is Paul saying to the Ephesians by using this phrase at the very beginning of his letter?

4. Having affirmed and confirmed their identity as already “in Christ”, Paul then goes on to deepen their understanding of this identity. Re-read the next paragraph (1:3-6). The phrase “in Christ” occurs frequently here. There seem to be two key elements to Paul’s argument here: first, the reality of what already exists for Christians “in Christ”; and second, the responsibility of Christians to live out what they already have “in Christ”. Can you identify each of these elements in each of the sentences (verses 3&4 and in verse 5&6)?

5. Re-read the next three paragraphs (1:7-14). Paul does not use many full-stops, so it difficult to know how to divide his argument into its component paragraphs. However, what links these three paragraphs is that they each begins with phrase “in Christ”. Identify at least one key reality, in each of the three paragraphs, that Christians already have “in Christ” (7-10; 11-12; 13-14). Circle the key words or phrases in each paragraph.

6. Among the many things we have “in Christ”, Paul emphasises “love”. In chapter 3 Paul prays that the Christians in Ephesus may “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (3:19). Then in chapter 4 Paul follows ‘the shape’ we have already noticed, arguing that the love we have “in Christ” must be lived out in our love for others. First, he begs them “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:1-3). Second, he argues that they “must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love” (4:14-16). What does love ‘do’ in each of these examples? What role does love play?

7. In chapter 5 Paul restates his argument, again: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (5:1-2). Write a prayer that captures what you have learned from Ephesians about being “in Christ”, “grounded in love” (3:17). Try to incorporate the various elements of Paul’s argument in the sections we have studied. Remember, one of the “Priorities” for the Anglican Church (see above) is “liturgical renewal”. So the prayers we write should form part of the liturgical renewal of our church.

## Bible Study 3: Committed to God's mission

1. In this Bible study we explore the connection between being “in Christ” and the call to God’s mission. In 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 Paul makes a clear connection between us being “a new creation” “in Christ” and mission. Listen to this portion of scripture:

<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.

<sup>15</sup> And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

<sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.

<sup>17</sup> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;

<sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

<sup>20</sup> So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (NRSV)

2. Each of the paragraphs in this section of the letter conveys a profound ‘theological’ proposition. In other words, Paul is formulating an emerging ‘Christian’ faith perspective, drawing on Jewish and Hellenistic traditions, as well as forging fresh theological perspectives. Try to follow the flow of Paul’s argument by underlining the key words/phrases in each of these three paragraphs. Then try and find the theological thread that links these paragraphs. What are the key elements of Paul’s argument here?

3. For Paul, the central dimension of mission is the ministry of reconciliation. This has two components. The first is to call others to be reconciled to God, which then leads to the second. The second is to be reconciled to one another. Being “in Christ” means that we are reconciled to God. Being “in Christ” means that we are members of one body, including both the local church and the ‘universal’ church.

In 1 Corinthians Paul focuses on reconciliation within the local church. The focus of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians) is the unity of the body of Christ. Corinth was a rapidly changing city in the time of Paul. A new Roman colony was founded by Julius Caesar in Corinth in 44 BCE, and was inhabited primarily by former Roman soldiers and former slaves. The house-churches in Corinth were composed mainly of women and slaves, with little formal education (1 Cor 1:26). But gradually more prosperous groups of Gentiles and Jews began to join the church in Corinth. The resulting diversity and economic inequalities

led to divisions and the formation of factions within the house-churches (1 Cor 1:11-12). Consequently, Paul's message in 1 Corinthians is a call to unity in Christ (1:9-10). For the first time in his teaching Paul develops the theological notion of "the body of Christ" (6:15-20; 10:16-17; 11:29; 12:4-27). "Has Christ been divided?", Paul asks in horror in 1:13. And his answer is a clear 'No' in the eucharistic formula of 10:17, "we who are many are one body". Paul would go on to use this same image of the church as the body of Christ in his letter to the Romans (12:3-8).

The focus of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians) is different, though his starting point is the same. Here too Paul is concerned with how those who have abundant resources should share with those who have little. But now the focus shifts from unity within the local church to unity across the churches, particularly the most vulnerable. In 1 Corinthians Paul is concerned about the internal unity of the local church. In 2 Corinthians Paul is concerned about this internal unity then finds expression beyond the borders of the local church.

In 1 Corinthians Paul is appalled by the idea that the eucharistic meal has become divisive, with some eating their fill and others going hungry (1 Cor 11:17-34). In 2 Corinthians Paul returns to the theme of those who have plenty and those who live in poverty. In 1 Corinthians he had mentioned, briefly, a project he had initiated, in which funds were collected from participating churches for Christians in need (16:1). In 2 Corinthians Paul devotes two whole chapters to this topic (2 Cor 8-9). Read these chapters in your own translation. As you read these chapters identify the following (jotting down your reflections in the space provided):

3.1 What is the nature of Paul's "collection" project? (See also Romans 15:25-28; Acts 11:29-30; 24:17; Galatians 2:10; and 1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

...

3.2 What theological arguments does Paul use to motivate this mission project? In other words, in what ways does Paul draw from the Christian faith to motivate this mission project?

...

3.3 What practical measures does Paul implement to make sure that this mission project is above reproach?

...

4. Paul includes "giving" as one of the spiritual gifts in Romans 12:8, and goes on a few verses later to reiterate the importance of this gift, exhorting Christians, "Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers" (12:13). In what ways can churches within our Diocese and Province participate in this form of mission, serving the poor among us with our resources? And in what ways can we "extend hospitality to strangers"? Who are the "strangers" in our churches?

5. Again, write a prayer that encapsulates some of Paul's 'theology'.

## Bible Study 4: Transformed by the Holy Spirit

1. In John 14:15-17 Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit to his disciples. He elaborates on this introduction in the remaining chapters. See 14:25-26, 15:26, and 16:7-15. Read these verses in as many translations as you can. The NRSV translates the Greek word (*parakletos*) used to describe the Holy Spirit as “Advocate”. How do other translations translate this word? What aspects of the Holy Spirit does each word try to portray?

2. John introduces the Holy Spirit within the context of the Passover festival. Jesus knew, John proclaims, “that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father” (13:1a). He then adds, somewhat strangely, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (13:1b). This sentence could be read as a sub-heading to the section that runs from 13:1 to the end of the gospel, because from this moment on John demonstrates the numerous ways in which Jesus loves his disciples and how he provides for them after his departure/death. Jesus’ love for his disciples and the promised presence of the Holy Spirit are the resources that the disciples will be able to draw on “to the end”.

This phrase, “to the end”, has two primary meanings. It means “the end” in terms of time, and it means “the end” in terms of completion. John devotes the final chapters of his gospel to assuring the disciples that they will be provided for fully and forever.

But why is John so determined to make this point? What has prompted this dual emphasis? The ‘last supper’ seems to be the catalyst. Two key moments characterise the ‘last supper’. Just before John describes the ‘last supper’, he gives us a clue to what is to come. First, he reminds us that Jesus loved his disciples to the end (13:1). Second, he prepares us for betrayal, saying, “The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him” (13:2). These two statements prepare us for what is to come.

John’s description of the ‘last supper’ begins with an act of service, as Jesus takes on the task of a servant in washing the feet of his disciples. This simple act of hospitality takes on theological significance as Jesus goes on to say in this chapter, “Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (13:12-15). This act of love is to be an enduring example of what love means in action. Indeed, Jesus goes on to emphasise the active dimension of love throughout these chapters. Love is doing!

Before John comes to the second part of the ‘last supper’, the actual meal, he shifts his focus from love to betrayal. Jesus “was troubled in spirit”, we are told (13:21). What troubles Jesus is the knowledge that “one of you will betray me” (13:21). Jesus seems distraught at the knowledge that his love has not been enough to prevent betrayal. And yet, such is the love of Jesus that he washes the feet of and shares bread with the one who will betray him.

Love and betrayal reside together as we read on. During the ‘last supper’ Jesus again prepares his disciples for his departure/death, but assures them that love will endure: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one

another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (13:34-35). The reality that will endure beyond his death is love, both his love for them and their love for one another. But no sooner has Jesus said this than he goes on to tell Peter he will deny him! Love and betrayal are linked.

Now it is the disciples’ turn to be “troubled” (14:1). But Jesus reassures them, asking them to trust in his love: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (14:15). And then he offers them something more. “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever” (14:16).

Re-read the verses (see below) which describe the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What do each of these tell us about the contribution of the Holy Spirit’s contribution to our life of faith? Underline the key words and phrases:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

<sup>17</sup> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you” (14:16-17).

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14:26).

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

<sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:

<sup>9</sup> about sin, because they do not believe in me;

<sup>10</sup> about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer;

<sup>11</sup> about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

<sup>12</sup> “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

<sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

<sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

<sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (16:7-15).

3. The disciples are fearful, troubled by Jesus’s talk of departure/death and betrayal. But Jesus reassures them, again and again, “I will not leave you orphaned” (14:18). His presence remains with his disciples, both past and present (17:20), through his love for us and the promised Holy Spirit. Jesus assures the other Judas (not Iscariot) that, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (14:23). It is love that binds us to God the Father and God the Son. And it

is the Spirit, who abides both with and within us, that reminds us of this reality. Betrayal will not have the last word, John assures us. Indeed, John goes to great lengths in the second part of the passion narrative (chapters 18-21) to demonstrate that Jesus is determined to nurture the troubled community of his disciples. While chapters 18-19 bring betrayal and death, chapters 20-21 bring confirmation of love and life. Jesus comforts the weeping Mary (and through her the other disciples) (20:15-18); he provides peace to the disciples who hide behind closed doors full of fear (20:19-20); having reassured them with his presence, he then breathes on them, and in this intimate personal way gives them the promised Holy Spirit (20:22); he reappears a week later in the same house to encourage the faith of Thomas (20:26-29); at another meal (breakfast!), he again feeds his disciples, with real food and the food of his presence (21:12-14); and, finally, after breakfast, he takes Simon Peter aside and reminds him that love has the final word, not denial, not betrayal (21:15-19).

The giving of the Holy Spirit lies at the heart of John's passion. Significantly, the actual giving of the Holy Spirit is located at the centre of the post-death appearances. John locates the giving of the Holy Spirit in the middle of this narrative. The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus both lead up to and flow from the giving of the Holy Spirit. What does this 'structure' tell us about being transformed by the Holy Spirit? In other words, how does the way in which John describes these final actions of Jesus tell us about what it means to be transformed by the Holy Spirit?

4. Holy Week is an appropriate time to reflect on these chapters from John's gospel. What have you learned from John about being "transformed by the Holy Spirit"? Can you think of someone with whom you can share your insights?

5. Write a prayer that incorporates what you have learned from this Bible study.

## Bible Study 5: True worship

1. Listen to a reading of Mark 11:15-19. Re-read this portion of scripture in at least one other translation. In buzz-groups of two or three, share your initial understandings of this text.

2. Jesus visits the temple on three occasions in Mark's gospel, in 11:11, in 11:15, and then in 11:27. Each visit is for a longer duration, and with each visit the tension and contestation between Jesus and the temple leadership increases. Jesus is deeply indignant about how the Jerusalem temple, like so many other temples in other parts of the ancient world, has corrupted the true worship of God and exploited the ordinary people who come to worship God.

On his second visit to the temple, Mark 11:15-19, Jesus refers to a cluster of texts from the Old Testament, the scriptures of the temple leadership. There are references to Isaiah 56:6-8, Malachi 3:1-12, and Jeremiah 7:1-11. The focus of Isaiah is on the inclusive nature of God's temple, including especially foreigners and the outcasts of Israel. The focus of Malachi is on economic corruption within the temple. And the focus of Jeremiah is injustice in general. (Read these Old Testament texts at home.)

While economic activity was a normal part of the temple's role in the ancient world, the temple's economic 'system' easily became corrupt, with religion being used to justify the exploitation of ordinary people who came to make offerings to God.

What particular economic activities does Jesus target in Mark 11:15-19?

3. "The money-changers" were those who changed the Greek or Roman money of the ordinary people, many of whom came from afar to worship in the temple, into temple coinage/money. This Jewish (or Tyrian) coinage was the only currency that the temple would accept, and so 'ordinary/unclean' money had to be changed into 'temple/clean' money. And, of course, every transaction cost the ordinary person something. Like money-changers today, "money-changers" then charged to change currency.

Once changed, temple money was used to buy animals for sacrifice. And doves were the staple commodity of the temple system, as doves were the only animals that most ordinary worshippers could afford. Yet the cost of doves was fixed at a very high mark-up price, ensuring that "those who sold doves" made a substantial profit.

Some scholars have argued that while the prophets Isaiah, Malachi, and Jeremiah were arguing for a *reformation* of the temple, the language of Mark 11:15-19 and Mark 13:1-2 indicate that Jesus has a harsher message for the temple. Re-read these texts. What message do you think they convey?

4. The climax of the third and final visit to the temple is Mark 12:41-44. Listen to this well-known scripture. How is this text usually 'preached'?

<sup>41</sup> He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.

<sup>42</sup> A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

<sup>43</sup> Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.

<sup>44</sup> For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” (NRSV)

5. Now read the paragraph that immediately precedes this paragraph, Mark 12:38-40. Listen to this less well-known scripture. What are the connections between these two paragraphs? (Use a pen or pencil to draw lines of connection between these two paragraphs.)

<sup>38</sup> As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,

<sup>39</sup> and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!

<sup>40</sup> They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” (NRSV)

6. There is a direct link between the scribes “who devour widows houses” and the “poor widow”. Jesus is still in the temple when he sits to watch the widow. He has been in conflict with various sectors of the temple leadership ever since he entered (11:27): first, the chief priests, scribes, and elders; then the Pharisees and Herodians; then the Sadducees; and finally a single scribe. Having silenced the leadership (12:34), he then turns to teach the crowd who have been “listening to him with delight” (12:37). He teaches against what the scribes ‘say’ (12:35-37), and against what they ‘do’ (12:38-40). He then sits down and watches one of the results of what they say and do (12:41-44), namely, the exploitation of ordinary worshippers like the widow. She is a faithful worshipper who has been exploited by the very institution that she supports with her giving. While it is not clear exactly how the temple leadership “devoured widows houses”, scholars refer to the tradition of ‘Corban’ (see Mark 7:9-13), where pious Jews bequeathed their property to the temple, declaring it ‘Corban’, an offering to God. The effect of this, Jesus argues, is that the temple leadership then decides how this property is used, and in many cases this resulted in the impoverishment of the elderly. Instead of using family resources to care for the elderly, these resources went to the temple.

Who does this poor widow remind you of in your context? Are there similar economic practices in your community?

7. Having watched the widow, Jesus leaves the temple, uttering his final verdict (13:1-2). Jesus commends the poor widow for her faithful and sacrificial giving. But he condemns the system that exploits her. The religious system that should be offering her support is robbing her! She is an example of faithful worship; the temple system is an example of unfaithful worship. It does not feed and empower the poor widow.

What can we do to make sure our church is a place where there is a form of “worship that feeds and empowers us for faithful witness and service”?

8. The strong economic emphasis of Jesus seems strange to us, but read Isaiah 58 for 'homework', where you will see that Jesus stands in a long prophetic tradition in which economic care is a central component of faithful worship. Write a prayer that reflects God's call to 'true worship'.

## Bible Study 6: Redemptive hope and holistic healing

1. Listen to Genesis 4:1-16 read dramatically. How would you characterise “Cain” and how would you characterise “Abel”? What do we know about each of them and what do you think they represent, both in terms of the work they do and their personalities?

2. This text was an important resource in South Africa in the 1980s. Allan Boesak used this text to deal with issues of our racialised relationships and what it meant for black and white South Africans to be ‘brothers’. Itumeleng Mosala and Gunter Wittenberg drew attention to the social ‘classes’ or groups represented by Cain and Abel. For example, Wittenberg suggested that Cain represent the city-based elite and their systems of economic exploitation and Abel the economically marginalised nomadic or village-based herder. While Boesak focused on how this story addressed racial conflict in South Africa, Mosala and Wittenberg focused on how this story addressed class conflict in South Africa.

Others have used this text to identify the key relationships that make us human. Re-read Cain’s cry to God in verses 13-14.

<sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear!

<sup>14</sup> Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.” (NRSV)

Cain identifies at least four relationships that constitute his humanity, each of which has now been fractured or damaged. By killing his brother he has damaged a whole set of relationships. What are each of these relationships? For example, Cain’s first response is to cry out, “My punishment is greater than I can bear!” (verse 13). This points, perhaps, to his relationship with himself. Cain’s lament demonstrates his sense of alienation from himself, and the depression associated with this. What other relationships can you discern in Cain’s lament? Draw a picture or create a drama that illustrates these relationships.

3. Using the typology of relationships in this story, but drawing on your own experience, reflect on the damage that has been done to each of these four relational areas that make us human. Can you identify an example of the kind of damage that characterises each of the following four areas?

3.1 Our relationship with ourselves (the psychological dimension of our humanity): Cain said, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” Example: ...

3.2 Our relationship with the earth (the ecological and economic dimensions of our humanity): Cain said, “Today you have driven me away from the soil.” Example: ...

3.3 Our relationship with God (the theological dimension of our humanity): Cain said, “I shall

be hidden from your face.” Example: ...

3.4 Our relationship with others (the sociological dimension of our humanity): Cain said, “I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth ...” Example: ...

4. But Cain does not have the last word. God offers a sign of hope, a promise: “Not so!”, God says in response to Cain’s lament. Re-read verse 15. Identify at least one biblical text that offers a fulfillment of God’s redemptive promise to each of these areas of relational damage, and explain how it offers redemption or healing to this relationship. For example, John 10:10 says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”. This scripture promises holistic healing ‘in Christ’, healing in each of the relationships that make us human.

5. Though this text is about two individuals, Boesak, Mosala, and Wittenberg agree that this text is also about social groups and social relations. In what ways do ‘social systems’ damage and destroy our human integrity (wholeness) and dignity? Identify one social system that you think needs to be addressed that is doing damage to our humanness.

6. But this text is also about a damaged individual. Identify one of the four ‘relational’ dimensions that needs healing in your life, and a course of action that will bring substantial healing to this relational aspect of your life. In a time of silent prayer let us bring the relationship/s that need healing to God.

7. Write a poem/song that captures the elements of Cain’s lament and your own individual or social context.

## **Bible Study 7: Communities of faith that form, inform, and transform**

1. Listen to these two texts of scripture, Romans 12:1-13 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-7. Summarise in one sentence what Paul is trying to communicate to these two churches. Share this with your neighbour.

2. Let's focus more carefully on Romans 12:1-13. What do you think Paul means by when he says to each of the Christians in Rome "not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned" (verse 3)? Re-read this verse in a different translation.

3. Paul then goes on to shift his focus from the individual Christian (verse 3 is in the singular) to the church as a community of believers (verse 4 is in the plural). Why do you think Paul begin with the individual and then shift to the community?

4. Paul seems to be making a number of related points in verses 4-8. Underline the text below to show each of the elements of Paul's argument.

<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,

<sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

<sup>6</sup> We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith;

<sup>7</sup> ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;

<sup>8</sup> the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (NRSV)

5. Paul continues to address the internal dimensions of the church in verses 9-13 (before addressing the church's relationships with those outside the church in verse 14-21). We will focus in this Bible study on the internal dimensions of the church.

In verses 4-8 Paul was dealing with "gifts". In verses 9-13 Paul is dealing with other 'qualities', such as love, honour, zeal, service, hope, suffering, prayer, giving, and hospitality. In terms of his argument, these are not "gifts". What are they, and why does Paul deal with them as a distinct grouping? In what ways do they differ from "gifts"?

6. We find a similar pattern in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. In chapter 12 Paul deals with "gifts" and in chapter 13 he deals with "love". While "love" is a 'distinctive feature' of each and every Christian, we are different with respect to our "gifts". Paul seems to be making a similar argument here to the Corinthian church as he was to the Roman church.

What are the key points of his argument in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7? Underline the key points in these verses:

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;  
<sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;  
<sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.  
<sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.  
(NRSV)

7. Now read 1 Corinthians 12:11-26. Paul goes to great lengths here to make a few crucially important points about “the body of Christ”. Underline the key points:

<sup>11</sup> All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.  
<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.  
<sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.  
<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.  
<sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.  
<sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.  
<sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?  
<sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.  
<sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be?  
<sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body.  
<sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”  
<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,  
<sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect;  
<sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,  
<sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.  
<sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (NRSV)

8. Paul’s teaching covers each of the three areas identified in the Mission Statement: “To grow communities of faith that form, inform, and transform those who follow Christ”. Let us affirm the attributes we all have in Christ and pray that God will enable us to recognise what gifts the Spirit has given to us and to have the wisdom to know how to use these gifts “for the common good”. Let us confess and pray ....

9. Read, for homework, the larger portion of Paul's letters from which these two extracts come, Romans 12:1-15:13 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40. Commit yourself to encouraging at least one person in your church community concerning their 'gifts'. Share with them the gifts you see in them and encourage them to use these gifts to serve God, the church, and the world.

## Bible Study 8: Liturgical renewal for transformative worship

1. One of the “Priorities” the document identifies to make the Vision and Mission Statement a reality is “Liturgical renewal for transformative worship”. This is the focus for this Bible study.

Let’s go around the Bible study group and each share one thing we like about our Anglican liturgy and one thing we do not like about our Anglican liturgy.

2. Liturgy is the faith the we breath as Anglicans. It is a constituent element of our faith. However, our liturgy tends to be slow to respond to changes in our context. For example, there is no reference at all to HIV and AIDS or unemployment or gender violence in our ‘mainstream’ Eucharistic liturgy, despite the fundamental way in which these epidemic have configured our African landscape and faith. (We do have some incorporation of these contextual issues into the liturgical resources offered in the ACSA’s *Worship Resource Manual*. However this more contextual set of liturgical resource is not widely used.) One can understand the need for the liturgy to remain faithful to the received tradition, to the past; but how long must we wait for the liturgy to engage with our immediate contexts?

This Bible study considers a much older contextual reality, the effect of colonialism, apartheid, and patriarchy on our self-image.

3. In our liturgy for “The Holy Eucharist” (1989) we have the option, at the point of “The Communion”, to say what is generally known as the “Prayer of humble access”. This prayer was apparently written by Archbishop Cranmer for the 1548 *Order of the Communion*. The prayer is commonly used in ACSA, and goes as follows (in the 1989 version):

We do not presume  
to come to this your table, merciful Lord  
trusting in our own righteousness  
but in your manifold and great mercies.  
We are not worthy so much as to gather up  
the crumbs under your table  
but you are the same Lord  
whose nature is always to have mercy.  
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord  
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ  
and to drink his blood  
that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us.

This prayer is based, in part on Mark 7:24-30. Let’s reflect on this scripture and then come back to reflect on the “Prayer of humble access”.

4. Listen to a reading of Mark 7:24-30. Share with your neighbour your initial impression of

this text from scripture.

<sup>24</sup> From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,

<sup>25</sup> but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

<sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

<sup>27</sup> He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

<sup>28</sup> But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

<sup>29</sup> Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go— the demon has left your daughter."

<sup>30</sup> So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.  
(NRSV)

5. This story can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, we can read the story as Jesus 'testing' the faith of the gentile (Syrophenician) woman. He probes her faith by declaring, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (verse 27). How will she respond to this derogatory comment? Will she persist in her faith, refusing to be put off by an apparently dismissive and xenophobic comment?

Second, we can read the story as the woman 'testing' the ministry of Jesus. She probes the limits of his self-understanding of his ministry, declaring, "Sir/lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (verse 28). Will Jesus come to recognise that he has more than enough "food" for everyone, including the Gentiles? Will he acknowledge the dignity of all God's people?

Which of these 'readings' do you identify with? Why?

6. It is not clear which of these 'readings' Mark intends. Given his generally negative representation of the Jewish disciples of Jesus in his gospel (who regularly fail to understand Jesus), this may an example of how Mark thinks a 'true' disciple should respond, refusing to be side-tracked in their quest for redemption, even if this means challenging the Teacher. If this is Mark's point, then either of our readings would work. The more difficult question is whether Mark wants to show that even Jesus 'fails' to fully understand God's mission, and that the true disciple is one who participates in and makes a contribution to Jesus's self-understanding understanding of his mission.

Whatever we think about Mark's motives, is it possible to find in this text the interpretation that the "Prayer of humble access" appropriates? Does this woman think she is "unworthy"? Does Jesus feed her with "crumbs" or with 'real food'?

7. How would you edit the "Prayer of humble access". What would you retain and what

would you delete? Return to (3) above and 'edit' the prayer.

8. Let us each prayer our 'revised' version of the "Prayer of humble access".

9. For homework, read through the liturgy for "The Holy Eucharist". What other 'revisions' do you think our context requires of our liturgy? Make sure you get a copy of ACSA's *Worship Resource Manual* and encourage your local parish to use these resources more often.

## **Bible Study 9: Violence against women and children; searching for redemptive masculinities**

In this Bible Study we reflect on a cluster of concerns in the “Priorities” of the Mission and Vision Statement. We have included two Bible studies here. The first, the “Tamar” Bible Study should not be used unless a great deal of preparation has been done; you will need to plan carefully and make sure you have counsellors available. The second, the “Redemptive Masculinities” Bible Study, will be the focus for this week.

These two Contextual Bible Studies offer resources for exploring a range of issues related to gender. These two ‘companion’ Contextual Bible Studies have been developed by the Ujamaa Centre over many years. They require careful facilitation. The small groups that are the basis of this form of Bible study should be divided along gender and age lines. Women will not speak openly among men; men will not speak openly among women; and young people will not speak openly among their elders. During the report-back sessions, the whole group has the opportunity to hear from each small group, so there are opportunities for engagement.

If your Bible study group is a well established group and relatively small, you may risk doing the “Redemptive Masculinities” Bible Study without dividing into small groups. The key question is how ‘safe’ the group is to discuss such sensitive matters. The “Redemptive Masculinities” Bible study is less sensitive than the “Tamar” Bible Study, which is why we will focus on the “Redemptive Masculinities” Bible Study.

### **“Tamar” Bible Study**

2 Samuel 13:1-22 is read aloud, preferably dramatically. After the text has been read a series of questions follow.

The first question is done in ‘plenary’ (with all participants presents); the rest of the questions are done in small groups. All responses are written up publically on newsprint.

1. Share with each other what you think the text is about.

[Each and every response to question one is summarized on newsprint. After the report-back, the participants are divided into their small groups to discuss the following questions.]

2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?

3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?

4. What does Tamar say and what does Tamar do? Focus carefully on each element of what Tamar says and does. Note: she says at least eight different things!

[When the small groups have finished their discussion, each group is invited to present a summary of their discussion. After this report-back the smaller groups reconvene and discuss

the following questions.]

5. Are there women like Tamar in your church and/or community? Tell their story.

6. What resources are there in your area for survivors of rape?

[Once again, the small groups present their report-back to the plenary group. Creativity is particularly vital here, as often women find it difficult or are unable to articulate their responses. A drama or a drawing may be the only way in which some groups can report. Finally, each small group comes together to formulate an action plan.]

7. What will you now do in response to this Bible study?

[The action plan is reported to the plenary on newsprint for other participants to study after the Bible study.]

### **“Redemptive Masculinities” Bible Study**

2 Samuel 13:1-22 is read aloud, preferably dramatically. After the text has been read a series of questions follow.

The first question is done in ‘plenary’ (with all participants presents); the rest of the questions are done in small groups. All responses are written up publically on newsprint.

1. Have you heard this text (2 Samuel 13:1-22) read publically ... on a Sunday? Share with each other if and when and where you have heard this text read.

[Each and every response to question one is summarized on newsprint. After the report-back, the participants are divided into their small groups to discuss the following questions.]

2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?

3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?

[When the small groups have finished their discussion, each group is invited to present a summary of their discussion. After this report-back the smaller groups reconvene and discuss the following question.]

4. How would you characterize Amnon’s masculinity in this text? Consider:

What prevents Amnon initially from acting on his love/lust for Tamar (v2)?

What is it that changes Amnon’s love (v1) to lust (v2), and then enables him to act on his desire/lust (v4-6)?

What is it then that enables him to act on his love/desire/lust (v4-6)?

How does he react to Tamar’s arguments (v14)?

How does he behave after he has raped Tamar (v15-17)?

[When the small groups have finished their discussion, each group is invited to present a

summary of their discussion. After this report-back the smaller groups reconvene and discuss the following question.]

5. What kind of man does Tamar expect or hope Amnon to be? What kind of man could Amnon be according to Tamar? Consider:

What does she say (v12-13,16), and what do each of the things she says tell us about her understanding of the man she hopes Amnon might be?

Verses 12-13:

She says: “No”; she hopes for a man who ...?

She says: “My brother”; she hopes for a man who ...?

She says: “Do not force me”; she hopes for a man who ...?

She says: “For such a thing is not done in Israel”; she hopes for a man who ...?

She says: “Do not do anything so vile”; she hopes for a man who ...?

She says: “As for me, where would I carry my shame”; she hopes for a man who ...?

She says: “As for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel”; she hopes for a man who ...?

She says: “Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you”; she hopes for a man who ...?

Note: this final plea she is probably a strategy to play for time and to enable her to return to public space where she is safe, for she knows that the king would not allow this incestuous marriage; it is against the law of Israel. See Leviticus 18:9.

Verse 16:

She says: “No”; she hopes for a man who ...?

She says: “My brother”; she hopes for a man who ...?

She says: “For this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me”; she hopes for a man who ...?

What does she do (v19), and what do each of things she does tell us about her understanding of what it means to be ‘a man’?

[When the small groups have finished their discussion, each group is invited to present a summary of their discussion. After this report-back the smaller groups reconvene and discuss the following questions.]

6. What are the dominant forms of masculinity in our contexts (in various age groups), and what alternative forms of masculinity can we draw on from our cultural and religious traditions?

7. How can we raise the issue of masculinity in our various gender and age-groups?

The action plan is either reported to the plenary or presented on newsprint for other participants to study after the Bible study.

[The contextual analysis and the action plan are reported to the plenary on newsprint for other participants to study after the Bible study.]

For further information on how to facilitate a Contextual Bible Study see *Doing Contextual*

*Bible Study: A Resource Manual*, freely available on the Ujamaa website:  
<http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Practical.aspx>

## Bible Study 10: The environment

Engaging biblically and theologically with ecological issues is another of the “Priorities” for our Province. Genesis 1 is among the most well known biblical texts in general, and is often used in reflections on the environment.

1. Listen to Genesis 1:25-31 being read aloud. What is your first impression of this text in terms of its message about the relationship between humanity and the environment? Share this with your neighbour.
2. What words are used in verses 26 and 28 to describe the relationship between humans and the environment, and what kind of relationship do they seem to imply? Compare how different translations translate these verses.
3. In the Hebrew language the word usually translated as ‘to rule’ (‘radah’ in Hebrew) and the word usually translated as ‘to subdue’ or ‘to have dominion over’ (‘kabash’ in Hebrew) can have a very harsh meaning. Biblical scholars have reflected on these words (‘radah’ and ‘kabash’), wondering whether they can be understood in a different way. Some biblical scholars have argued that the words need not be understood here in their normal harsh sense. They suggest that because these words are associated with creatures (humans) who are made in the image of God, who is revealed here as creating and caring, these words might be understood to convey the notion of ‘to shepherd’ (‘radah’) and ‘to take possession of/to stand within’ (‘kabash’). The basic idea of this interpretation is that human beings are God’s representatives on earth, being located within the environment (‘standing within it’) and caring for it (‘sheperding it’).

Other biblical scholars point to a similar word in verse 16, ‘mashal’ (‘to rule’). Here it is clear that the idea of ‘ruling’ or ‘governing’, repeated three times, is not meant in a harsh way. The sun and the moon are created “to give light on the earth”. They are made to do good to the earth and not damage (see verses 14-18). The basic idea of this interpretation is that humans beings are ‘to rule’ in the same way as the sun and the moon ‘rule’.

Other scholars place this narrative in its ancient historical setting. They argue that the ancient Hebrews who wrote Genesis 1 were responding to ancient Babylonian creation stories. In the Babylonian stories of creation ‘the sun’ (‘shamash’) and ‘the moon’ (‘yareah’) were gods! So these biblical scholars suggest that Genesis 1 might be responding to and critiquing the Babylonian understanding. In Genesis 1 “the greater light” (‘the sun’) and “the lesser light” (‘the moon’) (verse 15) are clearly “made” (verse 16) by God, and they are certainly not gods. The main point of verses 26 and 28 according to these scholars is that it is humans who are ‘in control’ of the earth, under God, and not the Babylonian gods! The basic idea of this interpretation is that humans are the primary agents on earth (under God).

Another dimension of the ancient context of this text is the harshness of the life for the majority, most of whom were subsistence farmers struggling to survive in the dry and rocky hill country of Israel-Palestine. Most had little access to even the limited technology of the plough, so life had to be ‘struggled for’ amidst the harsh landscape. From this perspective the

text is a call to persist in this struggle and to make a place for humankind.

How does this kind of information help you to understand the relationship between humans and the environment in Genesis 1:24-31? Which of the information do you find most helpful and why?

4. What are the most common understandings of the relationship between humans and the environment in your local parish and community? In what ways are these common understandings helpful or harmful?

5. How do we balance theologically the needs of our people in the South African 'developmental state' with our responsibilities to and our stewardship of our endangered ecosystems?

6. Write a prayer (on your own or with a partner) that expresses what this Bible study has 'said' to you about how God has sent us to engage with the environment. Share these prayers in a time of prayer together.

7. What other practical things could we do to respond to this Bible study so that we are commissioned by God to engage responsibly with our environment? What other biblical texts are important for our understanding of how God has commissioned us to engage with creation?

## Bible Study 11: Stigma and HIV

Health issues in general and HIV in particular are among the “Priorities” for our Church. The book of Job is neglected biblical book that has ‘returned’ to the Church in these times. This Bible Study engages with much of this important book. Excellent preparation for this Bible study would be to read through the entire book!

1. In the final chapter of the book of Job (chapter 42) we hear God speaking, first to Job and then to his friends. Listen to what God says to Job’s friends:

<sup>7</sup> After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has”. (NRSV)

What do you think God is saying here? In what ways has Job spoken ‘rightly’ of God? In what ways have Job’s friends not spoken ‘rightly’ of God? Share with your neighbour, and compare translations of this verse.

2. This is a remarkable judgement! God affirms the resisting lament of Job and rejects the orthodox theology of his friends. Job’s friends have each argued, with small variations, that Job is suffering because God is punishing him for some form of iniquity. As Eliphaz puts it: “As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same” (Job 4:8 NRSV). “What you sow you reap” was the traditional wisdom, but this quickly became distorted and inverted, ending up as “What you have reaped is a sign of what you have sowed”. This is what Job’s friends are arguing. Because they see Job suffering their theology asserts that he must have sinned in some way to deserve this suffering.

But we as readers know that Job is righteous. The narrator says it, at the very beginning of the book: “There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1 NRSV). And God says it: “The LORD said to [the] Satan [or messenger], ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil’” (Job 1:8 NRSV). So there is no ambiguity; Job is righteous. His suffering is not the result of sin. In the theological ‘world’ of this biblical book, Job has not done anything to deserve this suffering. There are other perspectives on sin in other parts of the Bible that offer a different view, but for us to understand the contribution of this biblical book to the life of the Church we must try to remain within its theological world.

Having initially accepted his suffering without complaint (1:21), after seven days and seven nights of silent reflection (2:13), he “opens his mouth” (3:1) in poetic lament, protesting and lamenting his suffering. He rejects the pious traditional theology of his friends and summons God to dialogue with him directly. He has harsh things to say about both his friends and God!

Even when God finally speaks (38-41), Job is not fully convinced (42:1-6). And yet God goes on to affirm that Job has spoken ‘rightly’ to and about God!

But God does not stop here. God continues:

<sup>7</sup> After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

<sup>8</sup> Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done” (Job 42:7-8 NRSV).

Why do you think that God deals with the friends publically, both speaking to them publically and requiring them to perform public and communal acts?

3. Because the theology of the friends is also the dominant theology of Job’s wider community, Job is stigmatised by those who once honoured him. They too believe that God is punishing Job for some kind of sin, so they avoid him. As Job says, “Surely now God has worn me out; he has made desolate all my company” (Job 16:7 NRSV). Later he laments the change in how people relate to him:

Job again took up his discourse and said:

<sup>2</sup> “Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me;

<sup>3</sup> when his lamp shone over my head, and by his light I walked through darkness;

<sup>4</sup> when I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent;

<sup>5</sup> when the Almighty was still with me, when my children were around me;

<sup>6</sup> when my steps were washed with milk, and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!

<sup>7</sup> When I went out to the gate of the city, when I took my seat in the square,

<sup>8</sup> the young men saw me and withdrew, and the aged rose up and stood;

<sup>9</sup> the nobles refrained from talking, and laid their hands on their mouths;

<sup>10</sup> the voices of princes were hushed, and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths.

<sup>11</sup> When the ear heard, it commended me, and when the eye saw, it approved;

<sup>12</sup> because I delivered the poor who cried, and the orphan who had no helper” (Job 29:1-12 NRSV).

Why do people withdraw from those they believe God is punishing? More specifically, why does the family, the church, and society withdraw from those that are HIV-positive (or those with a disability or those who are unemployed)?

4. When it becomes public knowledge that God is on Job’s side, and that God does not approve of the dominant theology of his friends, things change. We read:

<sup>9</sup> So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

<sup>11</sup> Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring (Job 42:9-11 NRSV).

How and in what ways is Job “restored”? Who restores Job and how?

5. What theological resources does this chapter of Job (chapter 42) offer us in trying to make the church a more redemptive and accepting place for people living with HIV?

6. What will you now do in appropriating these theological resources for your local church? Propose a specific plan of action.