

Time Travel, NGZ, Dutch Reformed and Mission Church in Montagu 1968

Goal

- To use the Time-travel project as a mean to make peace with the past and reconcile differences between previously divided communities; narrow the gap between the White and Coloured communities separated by the enforcement of the Groups Act. Reconciliation, getting together, cohesion, as an example for the community and church
- The time-travel project would also instill a sense of belonging in the hearts and minds of people from the Coloured population. The unique history of the Old Church will restore the pride of this community as the Time-travel project highlights the families that were part of establishing Montagu.
- The Time-travel project become a catalyst for the rest of the local community of Montagu to share and reminisce about their individual and collective memories and experiences.
- An intergenerational interaction
- With proper marketing it could become an event that attracts people that will spend money on the products sold and even become an annual fundraising event.

Facts

The picturesque town of Montagu was founded on the farm "Uitvlucht" in 1851. First known as Agter Cogman's Kloof it was later named after the former Colonial Secretary, John Montagu. A mere two hour's drive east from Cape Town Montagu is known for its hot springs, orchards, vineyards, herbs and scenic mountains.

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in neo-Gothic style was completed in 1862. In 1907 the Mission Church, daughter church of the DRC, was built in Long Street and served the section of the community which, during Apartheid, were labelled as "coloureds". The congregation grew rapidly and was very lively: services, prayer weeks, bazaars, social activities. The church took lots of social responsibilities, promoted literacy for farm workers, prevented idleness and alcohol abuse. Due to the racist policies of the government, the part of town where the Mission Church stood was declared a "white" area in terms of the Group Areas Act, and the congregation were pressurized to move to their designated group area. The non-official reason given was that the Mission Church was way too far from the "coloured" cemetery! After great agony and long deliberations the Church Council agreed to sell the church at Long Street in 1969. The new church in Buitekant Street was consecrated in 1970 and subsequently broke away from the "white" mother church, the Dutch Reformed Church.

Relations between the "coloured" and "white" churches remained strained during the apartheid years. With the advent of a new democratic dispensation in South Africa moves were made to unite the former racially divided church. This was in line with the spirit of the new South Africa as well as the country's non-racial constitution. Such measures naturally also promoted the need for reconciliation, redress and restitution.

Today the Old Mission Church now house the Montague Museum (established in 1975). Whilst the wound of the former congregation has been replaced by a scar, the feelings of being unjustly treated have been lingering over the years. The Time Travel at Montagu Museum / Mission Church will a public act of reconciliation.

Scenario, A church bazaar in the Mission Church in Montagu, harvest time 1968

It is harvest time in Montagu! This also signals the time for the annual bazaar of the Mission Church in Long Street. The congregation at the Mission Church has invited all the church members and even those from other churches and community members of Montagu and surrounds. A lot of people are expected and the farm workers from the outlying villages have already arrived. The income from the bazaar goes to the needy in the community, those who are struggling to make ends meet. There are still too many of those in Montagu

Preparations for the bazaar started several weeks ago. And this morning only the last details need to be settled: some nice decorations and flower arrangements have to be put in place, the last baking and making of sweets has to be done, and of course the traditional soup will be served. The income from the bazaar will be used to serve the needy in the community, those who are struggling to make ends meet. There are still too many of those in Montagu.

A bazaar is a time for happiness, meeting friends and acquaintances and lots of laughter. The children, and even the adults, will be playing games. As always there will be a lot of singing and the local brass band will make some lively music. Maybe even some dancing?

But the times in the community are not the best. The apartheid laws are coming into action; people are becoming more and more separated. The government says that the town is only for the white people, all those classified as “coloured” and “black” have to move to their own separate areas. Several people have already being forced to move to a new place outside the town centre. And the rest are waiting for the order. There are rumours that even the Mission Church, the pride of so many, has to be moved. The whole congregation move to a new church? Is that even possible? The authorities blame the long walk from the church to the cemetery, but of course it’s only an excuse.

There will be lots of discussions at the bazaar. Can we do something about the current situation in Montagu? Is there another way, to be together instead of separated? Isn’t that what the Lord Jesus preached? Will some people from other churches and the community show up today, so we can talk together?

Key Questions

- Divided or together? In the community, in the churches?
How to promote cohesion?

Roles

Elderly and staff from Uitvlucht and Spring Roses

Reverend

Church Council Members

Sunday school teacher

Choir(s)

Brass Band

30 learners

Activities, outside (identify leaders and stands)

- Bazaar in the church yard with raffles etc
- Decorate the tables, last arrangements
- Games such as kennetjie, skululu, blikaspaai, ringboard, darts, kerim, dominoes, cake walk, ballon darts, bottle toss, fishing, wheel games, bowls or throwing games
- Sales: food, crafts, clothes
- Auction
- Needle and crochet
- Prepare food, (cakes, bread, milk tart, sweets, toffee apples, soup, jelly and custard, ice cream, lamingtons, vetkoek, curry tripe, ginger beer?)
- Make flower arrangements in the church
- Speeches
- Brass band/ musicians

Activities in the church

- Introduction, speech
- Official opening of the bazaar (reverend)
- Singing (choir/s)
- Brass band/ musicians
- Ending ceremony

Time Plan

08.00 Set up, prepare
09.00 Arrivals, costumes
09.30 Welcome and opening – Mayor of CWDM
Speech on reconciliation
10.00 Background, facts, scenario
10.20 Initiation
Official opening of bazaar, choir
10.40 Last preparations and activities outside the church
12.00 Auction, Meal, Speeches
12.40 Procession into the church, thanksgiving and songs
13.00 End