



#100 TOWNS DIALOGUE

What is it about? What is the purpose of these conversations?

South Africa underwent a new birth in 1994. A new state was born. However, many agree that we have not yet built a new nation. We see the result of this playing out in many towns and cities. People still live in different worlds, and it seems we still don't trust each other. Suspicion reigns! This has a direct impact on our local governments. In many places we are confronted with poor service delivery and corruption. The problem, however, is that because we are so divided as a town, we are not addressing this challenge.

The Center for Public Witness started a project a few years ago to bring communities, and especially civil society, together to build social cohesion and relationships in towns. We need to restore the network of relationships. In the process, more than 70 towns have already been visited. Many lessons were learned. Sad stories of division were heard, but beautiful stories of hope were also heard.

We understand that diversity and different cultures are a reality in South Africa. We must respect it, celebrate it but also learn to understand each other better.

At the same time, we don't just want to stop at talking. While we have to listen to each other, we also want to make simple plans to take our towns to a better place. Our aim is not to come in and save a town. It is not necessary either, because there are already beautiful stories being written about so many towns. However, we want to lay down one or two simple bricks with which to build a better future together.

What is the methodology?

We invite people from different backgrounds and sectors in the town out for dinner. Here we then have a conversation under facilitated guidance. We want to create a safe space where we can talk openly with each other, but hopefully also arrive at a constructive place. People who can attend: Church leaders, (even other faith leaders), Business leaders, Teachers, Police and security services, NGOs, Ward councilors, Local government, Agriculture and more.

We basically ask two questions in the conversation: What is currently happening in the town? What should happen going forward? (What can we do together to make a difference?)

The conversation lasts around two and a half hours.





What is the outcome?

- We hope to get people who don't normally engage with each other, to talk to each other about the town.
- We hope that greater understanding and trust is cultivated.
- We hope that greater mutual respect is cultivated.
- We hope that concrete plans will be made about possible project.
- In some cases, a small forum is even established to take the process forward.

Quotes from previous conversations:

“Dr, this conversation should have taken place in our town 40 years ago.”

“This is the first time in my life that I talk with white people about the future of our town.”

“We were taught how to hate the system, but we learned how to hate white people... This must change.”

“Everyone was hurt for various reasons. This helps us to heal.”

“We must join hands to give hope back to our children.”

