



## *Initiatives of Change*

### *Breaking the mould in a town that grieves*

**Jan Bosman of Kempton Park is a son of Africa who believes intensely in the role of God in the destiny of nations.** Reflecting one day some while back on the tragic events in Ventersdorp, a small town about 150kms from Johannesburg, where two young black men were on trial for murdering an extreme right-wing white politician in the town, Eugene Terreblanche, he got the thought: what if Ventersdorp, tarred with the image of extremism, fear and racial hatred, became the role model for reconciliation and racial co-operation?

That would be something, Jan thought. Why not?

He broached the idea with some Initiatives of Change (IofC) folk and the outcome was a visit to Ventersdorp and Tshing, a neighbouring black people's township, by a small group that included Jan and a University of Johannesburg student, Leon Marincowitz. Leon connected with IofC at the talk given by Prof. Rajmohan Gandhi at the University in March. Leon is busy with his Philosophy masters degree on forgiveness.

A meeting with some black and white churchmen led to a bigger meeting that included a farmer and some business people, and suddenly things were on the go!

On 19 September, a rally was held in Tshing, organized by the Ventersdorp Faith-Based Organisation (a forum of black and white church ministers drawn together to promote inter-racial reconciliation).

About 200 people - many from Tshing, but including a significant group of white townsfolk from Ventersdorp - were encouraged in their first steps towards breaking down the barriers by the town's Mayor, Councillor Cecilia Mponyane, and several black and white churchmen who addressed the gathering.



*Councillor Cecilia Mponyane with Rev Johan Scheepers, one of the organisers of the event.*

"We want reconciliation in Ventersdorp, so let us show people what we can do," the Mayor said. "I hate hearing that Ventersdorp is a racist town. But we who live here know what we have to do. I see people, black and white, sitting together and I believe we are going to move on from here."

But it was the church ministers who struck the most vital notes.



*Some of those responsible for the event including Jan Bosman (centre)*

In his address, Rev Letsumo Seleke of the Living Jesus Ministries in Ventersdorp, told the gathering: the enemy was not “my brother, not the white man, nor the Indian (South Africans of Indian origin), but what the devil brings into my mind”.

Rev Enslin van Velden of the Dutch Reformed Church in Ventersdorp, said that Jesus looked at people as people. “It’s we that make them black and white,” he said. “Jesus loves people, it doesn’t matter what culture a person is or where the person lives. We need to learn to say to each other: I need you. But the problem is, we don’t know each other. How can we work together if we don’t know each other?”

Learning to love each other is hard and is built on respect, he added. “How many black people have been to my church in the town?” he asked. “But then, I haven’t been to your church in Tshing.” People needed to get to know one another, to find out about the other, to visit each other in their homes. “Perhaps in this way we can help each other to cross the boundaries that divide us,” he added.

The IofC group has been asked to continue its involvement and, indeed, to take the initiative in building the reconciliation momentum. At the next planning meeting in Ventersdorp, *Peace Circles* will be put forward as the tool to begin building the bridges between small groups in the two communities. The intention is to follow this up with *Connecting Communities* Workshops and, in February/March, possibly shorter Harambee Leadership courses for final year high school scholars in Tshing and Ventersdorp.

An inspiring outcome to one person’s willingness to follow the inner voice of guidance.

by Anthony Duigan

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## ***Decisions, Discoveries and Friendships***

During this past month, overseas friends, John Bond and his wife, Mary Lean visited South Africa and Zimbabwe. Both have worked with Initiatives of Change for many years. John was the Secretary of Australia’s National Sorry Day Committee, which enlisted nearly a million Australians in an apology to Aboriginal Australians for cruel and misguided past policies, and in initiatives to overcome the harm caused. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the Australian community through the National Sorry Day Committee. He has worked with IofC for many years, including eight years in Zimbabwe and three years in Ethiopia. He is now based in Oxford, England, from where he

**coordinates the Caux Forum for Human Security, which brings together several hundred people active in human security at all levels from diplomats to grass activists at the Initiatives of Change conference centre in Switzerland.**

**Both he and Mary are authors of several books. For 20 years Mary edited *For a Change*, an international**



*John and Mary*

**magazine devoted to conflict resolution and community building. Mary has also made a number of visits to South and southern Africa over the years.**

### **Mary writes:**

“It’s been wonderful to be back in South Africa, with my husband, John Bond, for the last two weeks. The decisions, discoveries and friendships which I made here in my twenties helped to shape my life. At one particularly stressful moment, I wrote a poem:

*If my life was neatly packaged, with a label for each day,  
I'd know each parcel's contents, and I couldn't lose my way.  
No more waking in the morning, with a pressure to decide,  
If my life was neatly packaged, and each item strongly tied.*

*And the fears that often flood me, of a life that's lived alone,  
With no certain path before me, and no one to call my own;  
They'd not be in the parcels, that I'd prepared with care,  
And I'd know what I was doing, and the future would be fair.*

*If my life was neatly packaged, with no room for doubt or fear,  
Would I know what I was missing, as I went from year to year?  
The unexpected wonder, God's moment taking wing,  
Would I see the golden thread, in the midst of all that string?*

*I threw away the wrappings, and I let the future free.  
I thought I'd lose the treasures that were hoarded there for me;  
But his sun lit up my darkness and it showed me through my tears,  
That my treasure was but ashes, but his gold will last my years.*



In the past ten years the last verse has moved from being an aspiration to being a reality.

I have worked with IofC since I left university. And for much of that time I have felt a spiritual thirst, which I have not known how to address. I've always known that God loves me, but I've not always been convinced that my happiness matters to him. And I've had a niggling fear that if I can't work out what he wants, he'll abandon me.

Some years ago, through an event organised by the churches in my town, I began to see a spiritual director. I've found it a huge help to meet regularly with someone who helps me to step back onto the rock of God's love when the tides of life sweep me onto shifting sands.

My director introduced me to the approach of St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. She accompanied me through his *Spiritual Exercises*, a programme of prayer and meditation which took about a year to complete. The experience changed me so much that people asked me what had happened to me. I decided to train to become a spiritual director myself, and that was transformational too.

The *Exercises* helped me to connect with Jesus in a new way, based on love. I began to realise that the censorious, judgemental, 'there you go again' voice in my head does not come from God. When I really feel that God is speaking to me, I recognise a completely different tone – loving, gentle, even humorous.

### ***A gentle voice***

Ignatius said that to those who seek to serve God, God's voice is gentle, like water dripping on a sponge. The noisy voice, like the splatter of water on a stone, comes from the internal forces which want to undermine our trust in God and in ourselves.

I also began to accept that God's love doesn't depend on my getting it right. Prayer is not something I have to do to earn God's love, but a way of heightening my perception of that love. God loves me as I am, with all my weaknesses as well as my strengths. This leaves me free to choose, without feeling that there is only one right way to go.

Ignatius believed that to make truly free choices, we have to let go of the non-negotiables we put between ourselves and God. The first step is to be real: to admit to God that there are limits to what I am prepared to do, however much I would like this to be different. It's not about pretending I am free when I am not – it's about praying to desire what God wants.

When, after 17 years, I began to face up to the possible closure of *For A Change*, the IofC magazine which I edited, I didn't feel at all unattached. But I did honestly want to be open to what God wanted.

On a retreat in July 2005, I prayed with the story of Jesus's call to Peter – imagining the fruitless night fishing and the nets full to bursting after Jesus's intervention. When Jesus asked me to follow him, I felt, 'How can I possibly not go with you?'

However, later in the day I found myself asking Jesus, 'But what if I just *can't* go with you? What if I just can't leave all these fish flapping around on the beach?' And I felt he was saying, 'Then that's OK: I'll ask you another time.'

A few months later, I suddenly knew, with a deep peace and certainty, that the time had come to close *For A Change*. It meant so much to me that God did not force me to go against the grain, but waited for me.

We sent our last issue to press at the end of October 2006, spent November clearing the office, and on December 1, out of the blue, I received a letter from John, who lived in Australia, asking if I would consider marrying him. I felt as if God had taken the pack of cards which was my life and thrown them up into the air – and they are still fluttering down. I'm not sure that I would have had the courage to set out on this wonderful adventure, so late in life, if it hadn't been for the spiritual journey of the years before. And I have never needed the lessons I have learnt so much as I do now.

So this is not the end of the story!"

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## ***Other Southern African Visits***

### **Zimbabwe**

While John Bond and his wife Mary were in South African, John, together with retired African Languages Professor, Cornelius Marivate, and full-time IofC worker, Pieter Horn made a visit to Zimbabwe. Among those they met were Cleophas Lungu, Anglican Bishop of Matabeleland, based in Bulawayo.

In the Midlands town of Gweru they spoke to the Rotary Club and the Anglican Men's Fellowship.



***Cornelius Marivate with Anglican Men's Fellowship participant***

In Harare, among other occasions, was a lively afternoon of discussion with 14 students from the University of Zimbabwe at the home of their professor, Ian Robertson and his wife Valerie.



*University of Zimbabwe students*

This visit was also a chance to meet up with some of the IofC team in Zimbabwe including two of the Harambee Leadership Training Programme alumni.

### **Uganda**

John and Mary went on from South Africa to Uganda, at the invitation of the Omukama (King) of Bunyoro-Kitara in Western Uganda. The Omukama has attended three Caux conferences in the past four years. 'Bunyoro-Kitara suffered immensely through colonial conquest and harsh colonial policies,' he said at this year's Caux Forum for Human Security. 'We also inflicted wounds on others. Since attending the Caux Forum, we have created a Forum of Kings and Cultural Leaders, which elected me Chair. Through this Forum we advocate healing wounds our tribes inflicted on one another. We have in draft a book that highlights historical errors made by Bunyoro-Kitara, that we are asking our neighbours to forgive. We need a healing process to enable us to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty.'

Large deposits of oil have been discovered in Bunyoro by a British/Irish oil company, and John is working with others on initiatives aimed at ensuring that the oil resources prove a benefit to the people of Uganda, rather than a curse as has often happened in Africa.

John and Mary also visited Kampala, where the IofC team had arranged meetings and talks. In all they spoke to nearly 1,000 students.

## **Forthcoming Events**

### **Kenya.**

Feb 8-13, 2011 - Eastern Africa Youth Conference (EAYC), will take place at St Mary's Pastoral Centre, Nakuru, Kenya with the theme '*BEYOND ME...It is time to act!*' This will be a youth conference aiming at young people between the ages of 18-35 years. It is designed to guide young people towards ethical living and leadership. It is a programme of Initiatives of Change (IofC), a network of people committed to the transformation of society based on change in individuals starting with themselves. During the conference, participants will be challenged to examine their relationships and role in society. This will be done through workshops, times of reflection, plenary sessions and community work. The conference will cost US\$150, (approx. R1,000.00)

Eighty candidates will be selected from seven Eastern African countries (Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi and Kenya). Prospective candidates will need to have support and recommendation from their local IofC team.

### **Harambee.**

The next Harambee Leadership Training Programme will take place in Nigeria in October/ November 2011. The Nigerian team, along with others including alumni from previous Harambee programmes, are hard at work preparing for this event - raising money, finalising venue for the training and areas for the field work. Some of the co-ordinators will meet in February, 2011 with hosts in Nigeria, to make detailed further planning. More information will be made available as soon as the programme is finalised.

Anyone who would like to contribute towards the costs of this programme can contact Pieter Horn at the address and telephone number below.