

Church's role in creating an SA which has place for everyone at the table

Danie Mouton

The Herald, 2 February 2026

Church's role in creating an SA which has place for everyone at the table

Entering into the second month of 2026, the Church in Nelson Mandela Bay must ask: what is our calling in a city facing deep social, economic and moral strain?

At the outset, the Church must remember who we are, and who we belong to. We belong through Jesus Christ to God. We are called to live by his teachings and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so.

We are also South Africans, shaped by a painful past and a demanding present. We are part of a deeply traumatised society.

Its effects are visible everywhere: in fear, anger, resentment and uncertainty. SA often feels like a family that has never fully learnt how

to live together. We argue about land, race, poverty, who belongs and who does not. These are signs of a deeper struggle over belonging, recognition and dignity.

Our faith and God-given identity need to take root in our concrete societal realities.

During the church leaders' wide community engagements in 2025, people spoke about unemployment, broken infrastructure and the daily effort to survive while feeling unseen by their leaders.

Many described their lives as being ignored, overlooked or treated as expendable.

Business owners and workers told similar stories from a different angle. They spoke of job insecurity, failing services, and the difficulty of keeping



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businesses afloat in an environment of unreliable electricity, unsafe streets and failing roads. Across communities, a deep

anger about corruption emerged. These concerns should trouble all of us.

What unites many of these experiences is a powerful feeling of displacement, the sense of not having a secure place where one belongs, contributes and prospers. This feeling runs deep in our history.

Under apartheid, black South Africans experienced exile within their own country, cut off from land, opportunity and dignity.

Today, many white South Africans live with a fear of exclusion, insecurity and loss of belonging.

In the northern areas many speak of a painful sense of double displacement — previously not white enough to enjoy full protection and today not black

enough to benefit from redress. This leaves us looking like a quarrelsome family, searching for someone to blame.

It is into this reality that the Church must speak and act this year. The Bible offers a powerful word to people living through displacement.

When the prophet Jeremiah addressed a nation in exile, he did not tell them to withdraw or wait for rescue.

He told them to seek the wellbeing of the city they found themselves in, because their own future was tied to the future of others.

In Nelson Mandela Bay, our freedom is connected. Our wellbeing is shared.

There is no healing in creating new outsiders. The work before us is to

help build a city and society where no-one needs to fear exclusion.

Jesus himself modelled this way of life. Jesus announced a kingdom shaped by compassion, justice and mercy, a new way of being human together.

The apostle Paul described this work as breaking down walls of hostility that people assume are permanent, but which God does not recognise.

So what does this mean for the Church in Nelson Mandela Bay in 2026?

First, the Church must continue to be a place where people rediscover belonging, not based on race, class or political identity, but on shared humanity and shared responsibility.

This means actively seeking connection with other communities — listening, visiting and working alongside them.

Second, the Church must speak honestly and courageously to those in power, calling for integrity, accountable leadership and economic policies that include the many, not just the connected few.

This includes challenging systems that concentrate wealth while leaving millions behind and advocating for institutions that serve all people and create conditions for investment, jobs and dignity.

We are called not only to criticise, but to model something better, where reconciliation becomes real.

We need to cross boundaries and seek connection with others. Our task is to help people imagine possibilities they

cannot yet see. We should advocate a society where justice and peace walk hand in hand, reconciliation works, and where everyone has a place at the table.

As we move into 2026 with the annual disruptions of January behind us, the road ahead will not be easy.

Storms will come. But God is present even in the storm. God calls us to courage, to faith, and to step forward rather than withdraw.

If the Church can live out this calling, we may yet help build a city where people feel at home again. And that would be a future worth working for.

● *Dr Danie Mouton is the executive director of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Eastern Cape*

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