

# STANDING FOR THE TRUTH

## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH



The Churches in South Africa have declared apartheid - the policy, ideology and its practice - a sin and irreconcilable with the Gospel. The Churches have consistently called upon the government to abandon apartheid and to negotiate a free, democratic and non-racial society in which all will be equal before the law, irrespective of race, colour or creed. The Churches have stated time and again that this is the only peaceful way in which the problems of South Africa can be resolved. But the apartheid government consistently responds to these calls with further violence against the community at large. When the Church calls for peace and the need for negotiations with the legitimate leaders of the oppressed black community, it is accused of promoting violence and supporting terrorism. But the Church must make its own, the words Christ used to describe His mission:

*"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me for he has annointed me. He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour". (Luke 4:18-19)*

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It was with wish to realise these Scriptural words that the Churches resolved at the convocation of Churches held in May 1988, to launch the "Standing for the Truth Campaign". The aim of this campaign was

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to use non-violent effective actions to pressurize the government to abandon apartheid and to participate in a negotiated settlement.

Through this campaign the Churches stand in compassionate solidarity with those who are oppressed, and suffering under the heresy of apartheid. While pinpointing the sin of the government which allows injustice to continue under the banner of Christianity, the Church's campaign is one of peace, justice and reconciliation.

The Church calls on all Christians to support these initiatives because we cannot claim to be committed to love, yet support the merciless repression of people. We cannot speak about reconciliation and peace, yet participate in the violence of the system and condemn the struggle of the people as rebellious and violent. We need to make our stand; a stand that will reflect the truth because it was Christ who said in John 8:31: "*You will know the truth and the truth shall set you free*".

### CHRISTIANS AND THE DEFIANCE CAMPAIGN

No doubt you have heard and read much about the defiance campaign currently being organised by the mass democratic movement and perhaps you are asking what our response as Christians should be. As Christians some of us might believe that we are to give unquestioning obedience to the authorities and especially the state. In fact Romans 13 tells us "Everyone must submit to the authorities for they are God's agents working for your good". What happens when the government is no longer working for our good? What happens when the authorities persist in doing deeds that are

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in complete contradiction to the message of love and peace that we read about in the Bible?

Detaining people without trial, restricting people in their own homes, silencing all forms of opposition, whipping people for stepping on a "whites only" beach are not the actions of a government working for our good.

South Africa is a land where oppression and injustice are the order of the day and we as Christians are constantly being called upon to obey the unjust laws of the state.

There are numerous passages in the Bible where we are told to work for the liberation of the oppressed and to oppose injustice. In Acts 4:19-20 and 5:29, we read of Jesus' disciples deliberately disobeying the laws of the land because they conflicted with God's commands. The famous words they utter are "*We must obey God rather than men*".

It is with this conviction that the Churches in the Western Cape have embarked upon a campaign of defiance in its mission of Standing for the Truth. This campaign is peaceful and non-violent and is effected in compassionate solidarity with the mass democratic movement.

**S**urely the time has come for us as Christians to say that we will no longer bow down to unjust laws, that we will no longer be part of oppression, that we will no longer be part of apartheid structures. But rather that like Peter and John we will obey God before the South African government, that we will work for justice by defying all unjust laws no matter what the consequences. For ultimately our allegiance is to God who is actively on the side of the poor and the oppressed through us His servants on earth.

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### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO GET INVOLVED!

1. Keep yourself and the members of your church informed about what is really happening in South Africa. Don't rely simply on television and the newspapers.
2. Organise for your church to defy all laws that enforce petty apartheid eg. white only churches.
3. Fast once a week in solidarity with those in detention. Do this individually or organise it as a joint action in your local church.
4. Support those who have defied unjust laws eg. people who have broken their restrictions and organisations that have unbanned themselves. Show your support through prayer and attending services organised for them.
5. Participate in actions organised by the mass democratic movement. Watch the press and street posters for details.
6. Join the Standing for the Truth Campaign. You can phone the Western Province Council of Churches for more details at 47 5086.

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