

“Lewe vir die stad” – Life/Live for the city

A case study of reimagining congregational culture and its relationship with the city as a first step towards establishing a new social contract

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Abstract

In this paper, the researcher aims to reflect on the role of the church and local congregations in changing the congregational culture to contribute towards a missional ecclesiology focussed on the public space with the aim to establish a social contract between congregation and context (in the City of Tshwane in this case). The paper utilises a case study of the Valleysig congregation in Tshwane to reimagine its relationship with the city as the first step towards establishing a new social contract between the congregation and the city.

The paper will attend to: 1) the importance of reimagining congregational culture with a focus on being faithfully present in its context and a faithful presence in the commons; 2) a brief overview of the Valleysig congregation and the challenge to change the congregational culture from inward and attractional to outward and missional; and 3) action in hope – the dream of a congregation that contributes towards a new social contract for a new Tshwane.

Key words: Faithful Presence, Congregational Culture, Missional Church, Tshwane, Action in Hope

1. Reimagining congregational culture to be faithfully present

The church should play a central role in whatever tensions arise in society. The church is not a Sunday service or a private institution; it is a community sent to the world². *Missio* (being sent) is not an activity of a certain group or ministry within a congregation; it describes the congregation as a religious community and includes all ministries (Cordier, 2014:44-45). “Missionary activity is not so much the work of the church as simply the Church at work” (Bosch, 1991:372). The church at work is a community participating in the *missio Dei* – God’s mission to restore a broken world and to let His kingdom come. This is the essence of a missional ecclesiology.

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² *Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?* 1 Corinthians 3:16, NIV.

Various theologians have determined that the church is inherently missional and that our understanding of a missional ecclesiology is dependent on our understanding of God (see Newbigin, 1987; Bosch, 1991; Guder, 1998; Gibbs, 2000; Hirsch, 2006; Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006; Van Gelder, 2007; Wright, 2010; Bevans et al., 2015). We understand God as a God that loves the world and wants to restore it; thus, God, the Father, sent his Son to the world. Then, God, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to the world. This sending love is called the *missio Dei*. Karl Hartenstein coined this term in 1934 while explaining Mission as belonging to the essence of the church (Flett, 2010:131). Hartenstein was greatly influenced by Karl Barth and his understanding of missional ecclesiology. Barth gave a lecture at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932 entitled, *Die Theologie and die Mission in der Gegenwart*, where he stressed the important connection between Mission and the Trinity (Guder, 2015:8). At the 1952 Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) it was also affirmed that the missionary obligation of the church is grounded in the outgoing activity of God (Flett, 2010:137-138). The development of a missional ecclesiology thus relied on the understanding of Mission as primarily the work of the Trinity for the sake of the world (see Bosch, 1991:392; Hooker, 2008:2; Van Gelder, 2007:18).

Being a missional church is not an abstract concept; it means discerning what God is up to in the world and society, and joining in. Missional ecclesiology determines a congregation's identity and calling. Guder (2015:73) states that the basic question is, “Who is the church of Jesus Christ, and what is it for?” Within this process of discernment, a congregational culture can be established. “The church that Jesus intended is a community that lives its message publicly, transparently, vulnerably — that is why it is called *ecclesia*, an assembly set apart to do public business in view of the watching world” (Guder, 2015:75). Joining in the *missio Dei* implies that the church embraces a certain way of life that can be described as being faithfully present. Faithful presence as a way of life is shaped by the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. A faithfully present congregation exhibits the ‘doing hands’ and ‘going feet’ of Jesus – focused on an embodied faith. This should give shape to congregational culture. If the Mission is God's Mission, this has important implications for our congregational culture.

“... then a Euro-centered theology and practice of Mission, as developed in Western Christendom, must necessarily be reductionistic. In its tendency to reduce the gospel to individual salvation, it fails to confess the fullness of the message of the inbreaking reign of God in Jesus Christ” (Guder, 2015:23-24).

Congregational culture as a faithful presence thus differs from our traditional understanding and should take on a new form.

“That means taking your bodies, your location and your community very seriously, as seriously as God in Christ took them. Faithful presence invites you to act on the belief that God is giving you what you need to be formed as disciples within your location” (Sparks et al., 2014:46).

Being faithfully present requires congregants to climb out of their homes, work and social bubbles, and engage with society at large. Participation cannot take place from a distance. Thus, faithful presence implies a deep awareness of and immersion in your context. Niemandt (2019b:1) indicates that a healthy congregational culture must be grounded in the congregation’s surrounding context.

The surrounding context can be seen as the ‘mission field’. If tensions arise and change is needed, congregations should play a central role. Mashau (2014:2) urges the church to reclaim the public square, “In re-imagining mission in the public square, becoming a voice for the voiceless is not optional for Christian churches in a time such as this.” Fitch (2016:10) describes faithful presence as the way that God intervenes in and changes the world, “Faithful presence names the reality that God is present in the world and that he uses a people faithful to his presence to make himself concrete and real amid the world’s struggles and pain.” Niemandt (2019a:50) affirms that God transforms life where his people are faithfully present.

Reimagining congregational culture to be faithfully present enables congregations to play a role in their society and establish a new social contract.

Reimagining congregational culture and developing a missional culture is a comprehensive process. It is an ongoing discernment process that affects a congregation’s self-understanding, theological praxis, theological training, and faith formation (Niemandt et al., 2021:284). Marais (2021:403) notes that congregations should not be discouraged by the complexity; even though cultural change won’t occur by introducing only one or two new programmes, it is also not possible for transformation to occur without these innovative programmes. Burger (2021:398) states that developing a missional culture is more than formulating principles; it is building “a real-life church according to those principles.” Embodiment and structuring are complex and should take three important issues into account (Burger, 2021:398-399):

1. Mission and ministry always lead to structuring; however, Mission comes first.
2. Good structure is important for intentional embodiment.
3. In the process of embodiment, it is important to differentiate between different levels in the life of the church: the identity of the organisation (who are we?); the Mission or calling of the organisation (why are we here and what are we supposed to do?); and the practices and values of the organisation (how will we do it?).

The next section will be described with this in mind. Reimagining congregational culture and developing a missional culture starts with Mission, but needs structure, practices and innovative programmes.

Faithful presence permeates all aspects of life and is the foundation for a new social contract. That said, the congregational culture of most traditional churches is focused inward and needs to change. What follows is a brief overview of the Valleysig congregation and the challenge to change the congregational culture to be faithfully present as a first step towards establishing a new social contract between the congregation and the city.

2. Valleysig congregation and ‘life/live for the city’

The Valleysig congregation will be considered a case study and analysed using Hendriks’ contextual analysis (ecology) and identity analysis (theological model). “In order to understand a congregation, its environment should be analysed” (Hendriks, 2004:76). The environment of a congregation has an open-ended scope; it reaches from the local environment to the global community, stretching from the past to the present, and into the future. From any of these angles, influences may affect a local congregation. Denominational affiliation, size, location and context are one way to describe a congregation; however, there are also other important aspects, i.e. identity and spirituality. Hendriks (2004:44-45) uses Avery Dulles’s model to explain the denominational diversity and traditions found in Africa. A short contextual analysis (ecology) of the Valleysig and a few remarks on Valleysig identity and spirituality follows.

The Valleysig congregation is a Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) situated in the suburb of Faerie Glen in Pretoria East, South Africa. The congregation is a programme-sized church with three full-time pastors. The DRC’s traditional ministry shaped the congregational culture – a strong emphasis on pastoral care and a strong orientation towards the family metaphor. However, the Valleysig intends to become a missional church and to challenge and change the current congregational culture from inward and attractional to outward and missional.

The Valleysig congregation started this transformation process in 2014. The church council conceptualised the congregation’s calling to the ‘Valleysig represents the Kingdom of God’ (*Valleysig Verteenwoordig die Koninkryk van God*) with three grounding pillars, i.e. Discipleship, Relationships and Celebration. The church council also included five habits to cultivate amongst congregants to support their understanding of the Valleysig calling. These habits, called *L2EDS* (Afrikaans) or *BELLS*, were to be practical ways in which congregants could live out the Valleysig’s calling: (B)less others; (E)at together; (L)isten to the Spirit; (L)earn Christ, and (S)ent by God (Frost, 2016). With the understanding that cultivating

culture is a long-term process, the congregation tried to incorporate these habits into the different church activities.

In 2018, the church council sharpened the focus on two areas, namely the Val-leisig as a faith family and the Valleisig as a missional congregation. The three pil-lars mentioned above were also translated into slogans that were more accessible and understandable to people, not part of or familiar with a traditional church. The pillars were now expressed as ‘We love you’ (*Ons is lief vir jou*) to explain Disci-pleanship, ‘Welcome home’ (*Welkom tuis*) to explain Relationships, and ‘Food’s on the table’ (*Kos is op die tafel*) to explain Celebration.

During a church council retreat in 2019, the understanding of the Valleisig call-ing was re-examined to ascertain the transformation progress and, in light thereof, to reevaluate the core function of the church’s ministry. The church council took part in a formative discerning exercise and determined that the missional trans-formation of the congregation should be the main focus. To emphasise this focus, another slogan was added, ‘Life/Live for the city’ (*Lewe vir die stad*).³ This slogan embraces the church’s locale as the field of Mission. As the Valleisig is located on the outskirts of the city of Pretoria, this slogan helps to create an awareness of both the spatial missional imagination of the congregation’s location and the missional vocation and focus on being a part of the larger Mission. The church council also realised that simplicity is important and decided to suffice with only these four slogans.

After six years and numerous meetings and discussions, consulting with Pat-rick Keifert⁴ and other theologians, the leadership succeeded in conceptualising a simple missional approach (with the four slogans and their meaning), in closing down many of its mission activities focused on exporting Mission and sustaining an attractional model, and attempted to develop practices of being faithfully present. However, even though the leadership was convinced of the congregation’s missional calling, and much effort had been put into conveying this missional calling, there was little change in the congregation’s culture. As Peter Drucker notably states, ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast’. The church council realised that significant cultural change is a complex issue that will take time to manifest in the congrega-tion’s culture. Subsequently, the church council decided to use a more structured approach by drawing up another strategic action plan for cultural change. However, even with a painstakingly detailed plan, implementation proved difficult. The big-gest challenge was the church council’s struggle to move beyond strategic meet-

³ In Afrikaans *Lewe vir die stad* can mean both to ‘live’ your life for the city and to bring ‘life’ to the city. Both these meanings are intended as part of the Valleisig missional transformation process.

⁴ Keifert is currently President and Director of Research of Church Innovations Institute, a church related non-profit seeking to innovate churches capacities to be missional.

ings and planning. The traditional ministry and culture were proving to be highly resilient and resisted change; even though the leadership had the will, had gained the knowledge and understood the need to implement it, the discomfort caused by any change proved to be a mitigating factor to all plans and impetus garnered at the church’s strategic meetings.

At the end of March 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. South Africans were to stay at home and were not allowed to gather in groups for any reason. Suddenly, the Valleisig doors were closed for the first time in 30 years. The various lockdown levels and gathering restrictions over the last two years forced the Valleisig to change and to start doing things differently. While COVID-19 is a terrible disaster, it can “be a moment of amazing creativity, though it also is going to be a time of unavoidable pain and loss” (Crouch et al., 2020). In the Valleisig process of missional transformation, one of the biggest obstacles was enabling congregants to take responsibility and be the church, faithfully present. Suddenly, everything changed when congregants couldn’t attend church on a Sunday morning or during the week for ‘church activities’. The Valleisig strived to make it clear – the church is not closed; the church building just won’t be used now. The last two years had an important influence on the Valleisig congregational culture and process of missional transformation.

Although Valleisig is still in the transformation process, two important shifts have occurred. First, church council meetings shifted from over-planning and strategising to planning on the go and being more aware and responsive to what is going on in the world. The Valleisig reaction to the lockdown shifted the congregation’s conception of the church as a place to being the church in all places. The Valleisig was now determined to take the next step and to ‘bring life to the city’. The next step involved missional practices integrated with congregants’ everyday life, away from the Sunday service, to build new habits and change the congregational culture. Fitch (2016:24) indicates that forming these Christian communities that are faithfully present relies on a set of disciplines or habits.

The Valleisig utilised a model with four missional practices designed by Kreminski (2014). Congregants were encouraged to partake in these missional practices as a way to establish new habits. The intention was to transform participants and to help them become more missional. “The emphasis is on the formation of a congregation into a people who are on God’s mission in a particular context” (Kreminski, 2014:143). These four missional practices include (Kreminski, 2014:138):

1. Reading Scripture reflectively in a public place in a *lectio Divina* format.
2. Praying with eyes open every day, if possible, in the participant’s local context.
3. Engaging in radical acts of hospitality at least once a week.

4. Meeting as a group once a week for spiritual discernment and spiritual formation to occur.

The Valleysig utilised this model as a practical way to learn how to 'live for the city' and to be faithfully present. Daily reminders and examples of how and where to participate were sent to congregants. The notion was that congregants were already participating in these activities in some way or another and were only challenged to approach them differently. The practices were to be done 'on the go' and encouraged engagement with their communities (Kreminski, 2014:148). The four practices and how Valleysig utilised them are discussed briefly.

2.1 Practice #1 – Reading your Bible outside

Kreminski's (2014:145) first missional practice is focused on reading Scripture reflectively in a public place using a *lectio Divina* format, "Therefore a slow reading of the passage was encouraged along with waiting to hear what God was saying to them through the passage and then relating that passage to the world they could see before their eyes at that moment." This practice, focused outward, can also be referred to as *missio Divina*. Helland and Hjalmarson (2011:loc. 1150-1152) describe this *missio* reading of Scripture as the way "the Spirit convicts, corrects or enlivens growth and opportunities in our relationships with people in our families, workplaces, neighbourhoods and communities."

The Valleysig encouraged congregants to participate in this practice and to read from their Bible away from the safety and comfort of their bedroom or study. The idea was to read Scripture in another area they frequent daily, e.g., the park, coffee shop, petrol station, post office, school drop off, shopping mall parking lot, etc. Reading Scripture in these settings helped congregants, when listening to God through Scripture (dwelling in the Word), to also be aware of what God is doing in the world (dwelling in the world). Reading your Bible outside encourages an embodied faith and makes it easier to connect what God is saying through Scripture to what God is inviting you to do and to be. This missional practice cultivates faithful presence as it is focused on what is going on outside one's personal bubble.

2.2 Practice #2 – Praying with your eyes wide open

Kreminski's (2014:145) second missional practice is focused on prayer, but instead of the traditional closed eyes behind closed doors, with eyes open and in the participant's local context, "Instead of praying with eyes closed in order to internalise any encounters with God, praying with eyes open could help to make the participants aware of what was happening around them and what the Spirit of God was doing in their midst." This is closely related to McNeal's (2009:loc. 1250) notion to go out into your surrounding area and pray a simple prayer, "Lord, let me

see what you see.” Praying with eyes wide open and asking God to open the eyes of your heart. This also meant waiting on God, looking around and being open to seeing the world anew. This missional practice of praying with eyes open could also be in the form of a prayer walk around the neighbourhood or workplace (Kreminski, 2014:146).

The Valleisig encouraged congregants to pray with their eyes wide open and ‘on the go’ – while going for a walk or run, stuck in traffic, waiting in the Pick ‘n Pay queue, etc. Prayer can easily be reduced to a habit of presenting all your wishes and grievances before God. Praying with open eyes and in the different settings where you find yourself each day shifts the focus from your personal life and problems to what God is doing in the world around you. In addition, using the simple prayer, ‘Lord, let me see what you see’, helps guide your thoughts and tune in with the Spirit. This habit is a way to live a life of prayer and to be faithfully present. Praying with eyes wide open does not mean praying on street corners with your mouth wide open, but rather being on the street corner, aware of the life around you.

2.3 Practice #3 – Share a meal with somebody

Kreminski’s (2014:147) third missional practice is focused on radical acts of hospitality, “This practice required the participants to step out of their comfort zones in order to engage with people with whom they might not normally associate.” Hospitality plays a central role in the missional church – reaching out and welcoming the stranger, the marginalised, and the other. However, being missional is more than extending hospitality and implies an openness to receiving hospitality. “It is part and parcel of the missional posture to be dependent on the hospitality of strangers . . . to be open to receive from the ‘other’ and to be served by the ‘other’” (Niemandt, 2019a:107). This missional practice was to be engaged in at least once a week.

The Valleisig encouraged congregants to share a meal with somebody at least once a week – somebody you would not usually talk to or share a meal with. Hospitality is about welcoming and being a safe space for someone else and can thus take on many forms. However, sharing a meal was a straightforward way to challenge congregants to participate in this missional practice and form a new habit. The Valleisig shared ideas with congregants about how or where they can get out of their comfort zone and make a new connection with someone over a meal, e.g., share your lunch with a co-worker, invite their neighbour out for coffee and a croissant, have a ‘straatbraai’, buy a *KFC Streetwise Two* and share it with your car guard, or prepare breakfast for yourself and your domestic worker. When sharing these meals, congregants were encouraged to share stories and be open to receiving hospitality from their guests. The habit of welcoming others and being a safe space for others is a way to be faithfully present.

2.4 Practice #4 – Reflection in a small group

Kreminski's (2014:147) fourth missional practice is focused on spiritual discernment and formation, meeting weekly to discern what God had been saying to them as they participated in these missional practices and how they changed them.

The Valleysig encouraged congregants to come together in their small groups once a week and to reflect on their engagement with these missional practices and the new habits they formed. A few simple questions guided the reflection process. The church council also participated in these reflection sessions.

The Valleysig considered that while congregants took part in these practices as individuals, they were still part of the congregation's Mission to be more faithfully present and to 'live for the city'. Kreminski (2014:152) described participating in these missional practices as the church scattered rather than simply as individuals taking part in various missional activities. The Valleysig reinforced this by inviting congregants to participate in a 'life for the city' outreach after the Sunday service once a month. Together congregants would go out as a sent community and be faithfully present in their city, e.g., cleaning one of Tshwane's nature reserves. This was a way to live out an embodied faith.

These practices were determined to engage with the world rather than retreat from it (Kreminski, 2014:148). Moreover, it can be stated that these missional practices were Valleysig's most successful effort at forming new habits and changing the congregational culture thus far. However, taking into account that cultural change takes place over long periods of time, it is only possible to make preliminary observations:

1. Valleysig congregants became aware of a church outside the walls of the congregation's building;
2. Valleysig congregants actively and intentionally participated in habits to discern where God is at work; and,
3. Valleysig congregants stepped out of their comfort zones and were open to engaging with strangers and being led by the Spirit.

These observations show an openness to change, participate in God's Mission, and live for the city. As congregants continue participating in these practices and practising an embodied faith, more observations will be made.

“Paying attention to bodies—our own and others’—can be revelatory. Being physically present, talking to people, and gathering visual images can give researchers closer access to the embodied dimensions of what people are doing when they do religion. Seeing, feeling, and sensing are integral to the practices we observe. Because societies shape and regulate those bodies, we must always place what we see in the context of the norms and divisions present in those societies. But because

bodies can also be sites of innovation and resistance, it is worth paying attention to how people enact religious lives that redefine what and who they are presumed to be. Studying embodied religious practice means paying attention to how people are formed but also to how they are transformed and how they transform the way their world works” (Ammerman, 2021:95-96).

What follows is a description of action in hope. The dream of a faithfully present congregation that lives for the city contributes to a new social contract for a new Tshwane.

3. Action in hope – the dream of a congregation that contributes toward a new social contract for a new Tshwane

David Bosch, the distinguished South African theologian, has written extensively on the missional nature of the church in *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991). In this monumental work, he discusses the various elements of an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm and deliberates on ‘mission as action in hope’.

Hope is linked to eschatology. Bosch (1991:510) refers to Mission as action in hope in the context of our eschatological expectation. Creative tension between Mission and eschatology, now and in the future, drives congregations to be faithfully present. Bosch (1991:508) states:

“The reign of God has already come, is coming, and will come in fullness. It is because God already rules and because we await the public manifestation of his rule that we may, in the here and now, be ambassadors of his kingdom. Christians can never be people of the status quo” (Bosch, 1991).

Thus, congregations should not withdraw from public life, but participate with action in hope in the coming of a new world. Niemandt and Pillay (2019:45-46) note that the congregation should be the essential community, “The church and the Christian community need to be encouraged to view, believe and start working towards becoming the essential community... these communities must lead the South African Christian and churches, as people and institutions of change, to facilitate the missional paradigm of reconciliation.” Reconciliation is an important theme in the South African context and an important part of action in hope. “Christian hope draws the promised future of God into the present day, and prepares the present day for this future” (Moltmann, 2019:viii). Mashau (2012:60) also states that through the church’s mission “something of the future coming of the kingdom of God is realised.” When it is not realised, it is because of the absence

of a “deliberate theological praxis focusing on, or immersed in, contexts of urban vulnerability...” (De Beer, 2021:1).

This understanding of Mission as action in hope grounds congregations in the here and now, immersed in their contexts of urban vulnerability, faithfully present, and lays the foundation for a congregation that contributes toward a new social contract – a new Tshwane. A congregation focused on: 1) the formation of congregants who embrace the city; 2) empowering congregants to take part in the social contract discourse; and 3) to activate congregants to take ownership of a new social contract.

3.1 The formation of congregants who embrace the city

Embracing the City of Tshwane is not a matter of course for its residents. Moltmann (2019:90) notes how urbanisation has changed people and their religion, and churches now have to organise ‘meet your neighbour’ drives. Life in the city is disengaged and knowing your neighbours or welcoming new neighbours to the area is not something that can be presumed. Moltmann (2019:90) emphasised that a good neighbourhood is essential for a good life; unfortunately, not knowing your neighbour means not caring for one another or helping in the case of an emergency. Being disengaged to the point that you are unaware of the people in your closest proximity suggests indifference to the broader city and its challenges. Mashau (2014:4) asserts that a congregation that takes its missional calling seriously engages in urban authorities, powers that harm or destroy people’s lives, and transforms the communities it serves. De Beer (2021:9) also notes that the transformation of communities calls on congregations to embrace the city, “Transforming urban vulnerability requires more radical forms of solidarity, subversive action to outwit bad power, dismantling of unjust structures, erection of bold alternatives to the status quo, and, at times, hopeful-humble revolt.”

The dream of a congregation that contributes toward a new social contract for a new Tshwane can be achieved by forming congregants who embrace the city. The Vallesig attempted this formation by encouraging participation in daily missional practices focused on engaging with the surrounding community and neighbourhood. However, many congregants withdrew even further during the COVID-19 pandemic and were now challenged to forgo their comfort zones and find new ways to live for Tshwane. This is part of the first steps towards establishing a new social contract between the congregation and the city.

3.2 Empowering congregants to take part in the social contract discourse

Empowering congregants and for the church to be understood as a sent community, there cannot be a separation between the secular and sacred; the public square is the church square. Moltmann (2019:90) notes that many city churches participate

in initiatives to improve social conditions and participate in the politics of the city and the nation, “We have not only church theology but also public theology, and both are parts of the kingdom-of-God theology on earth.” Mashau (2014:1) also emphasises the importance of Mission in the public square with a specific focus on the City of Tshwane and bridging the gap between those on the “hills” and those in the “valleys”, and bringing shalom and justice to the marginalised.⁵ The church should intervene, and congregations have to bridge the gap.

An open Christian congregation is also the place where “before God” all people are equal. Wealth and poverty are not the essential point here. Men and women, black and white, those with disabilities and those without are accepted in the same human dignity before God. Modern competitive society isolates people, but the Christian community unites them. Coming into a Christian church, one must feel, “With you it is not so . . .” The alternative to poverty is not wealth; rather, the alternative to both wealth and poverty is – community (Motlmann, 2019:90).

Within this community, God often uses the marginalised – and not institutions – for his Mission. The World Council of Churches (WCC) affirms in ‘Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes’ that the marginalised are disempowered and their God-given gifts are not put to use, but it is precisely the marginalised that are “reservoirs of active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance” needed for the establishment of the kingdom of God (WCC, 2013:58-59):

Jesus Christ relates to and embraces those who are most marginalized in society, in order to confront and transform all that denies life. This includes cultures and systems which generate and sustain massive poverty, discrimination and dehumanization, and that exploit or destroy people and the earth. Mission from the margins calls for an understanding of the complexities of power dynamics, global systems and structures, and local contextual realities. Christian Mission has at times been understood and practised in ways which failed to recognize God’s alignment with those consistently pushed to the margins. Therefore, Mission from the margins invites the church to re-imagine Mission as a vocation from God’s Spirit who works for a world where the fullness of life is available for all (WCC, 2013:58-59).

The dream of a congregation that contributes toward a new social contract for a new Tshwane can be achieved by empowering congregants to participate in the social contract discourse. This empowerment should not be mistaken for dominance

⁵ Mashau considers the “hills” of Tshwane to be the areas of power and wealth and the “valleys” the areas of poverty.

or authority, but rather be understood as empowered to be open towards God's Spirit and an openness towards the 'other'. Taking the stance of vulnerability and receiving from the 'other' – those on the margins.

The Valleysig attempted to empower congregants by helping them bridge the gap between people from different areas, backgrounds and socio-economic statuses, and to form new communities organically while sharing a meal. Sharing a meal meant sharing stories and finding common ground. Taking the stance of vulnerability to also receive hospitality. This is part of the first steps towards establishing a new social contract between the congregation and the city.

3.3 Activating congregants to take ownership of a new social contract

Activating congregants is about cultivating a commitment towards the city. City life is fraught with options and possibilities and doesn't require loyalty or commitment. "(C)ity dwellers hop from one church to another – shopping around for what is best for them; as such they often prefer to be free riders in any institutional church, rather than disciples" (Mashau, 2014:4). Moltmann (2019:89) also notes that the city offers freedom of choice and the implications it has for congregations:

"The voluntary congregation replaced the old town church. In the big cities, the individual freedom of choice is growing, and traditions are fading away. People become mobile, changing their living quarters frequently. The Christian churches ought to take the crisis of traditions as a chance for new missionary communities that extend an invitation to others" (Moltmann, 2019:89).

The dream of a congregation that contributes toward a new social contract for a new Tshwane can be achieved by activating congregants to take ownership of a new social contract. The Valleysig attempted to activate congregants by emphasising the congregations' missional calling and translated it as 'Life/Live for the city'. The slogan was used as a hashtag⁶ in all the congregations' correspondence, social media platforms, and sermons. The Valleysig also changed signage on the congregation's premises to read, "This is where Valleysig gathers" (*Valleysig kom hier bymekaar*) to shape congregants' missional imagination." They are the church; this is just a place to gather once a week. These were attempts to create an awareness of the missional calling, cultivate commitment towards Tshwane, and take ownership of a new social contract. This is part of the first steps towards establishing a new social contract between the congregation and the city.

⁶ #lewevirdiestad

4. Conclusion

Mashau (2012:61) states that a theology of hope is grounded in the resurrection power of Jesus, and Christians now live in anticipation of a new and better future. Hope is the driving force of faithful presence. Moltmann (2019:91-92) considers the city a place of hope, but we need “the audacity of hope to decide for life.” Mission as action in hope means to ‘live for the city’ in a way that lets God’s kingdom breakthrough in the here and now. The church and the local congregation have a significant role in this endeavour. This means changing congregational culture and shaping missional congregations. Reimagining congregational culture to be faithfully present and to contribute towards a new social contract for a new Tshwane.

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