



# St John's Parish in Cape Town and a history of the lived spatial justice acts: 1956–2020



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St John's is an Anglican parish in the city of Cape Town. Its six member churches are in the southern suburbs of the city. In its history as a parish, it has gained land space in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. In recent years, numerous congregants and involved leaders began to think on how to use that land space in a way that brings justice in this area of the city. This article seeks to look at the parish's historical spatial actions, in order to see what insights toward spatial justice may arise. This article provides detail information regarding the history of the Anglican Church and St John's Parish. It also explores in detail the spatial knowledge and perspectives of some leaders and members of the parish. Finally, it explores what these interviews suggest for a church in search of spatial justice.

**Contribution:** This article aligns with the scope of the journal as it created a conversation around church history, spatial history, and spatial justice within the South African context.

**Keywords:** Anglican Church; church history; space; justice; spatial justice.

## Introduction

In South Africa, spatial history is quite complex and has race, ethnic and class dynamics. The country was racially and ethnically demarcated by the Apartheid regime and the areas reserved for people of colour are still growing at a lesser rate and have less resources (Nobel & Wright 2013:197). Space in the city of Cape Town is not different, with low poverty gathered in the northern and southwestern neighbourhoods (including the southern suburbs) (Geyer Jr & Mohammed 2016:49), which were white areas during the Apartheid era. Moreover, townships still experience moderately to extreme poverty and have lower resources (Geyer Jr & Mohammed 2016:50). Thus, economic activity and low poverty has its dynamics according to Apartheid spatial planning. Spatial injustice is also known as spatial discrimination and as Edward Soja remarks, is the inequitable distribution of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use these (Van Wyk 2015:28).

St John's is an Anglican parish church in the city of Cape Town. In its history as a parish, it has gained land space in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. In recent years, numerous congregants and involved leaders are thinking on how to use that land space in such a way to bring justice in this area of the city. This article reports details on the history of the Anglican Church and St John's Parish. It also explores in detail the spatial knowledge and perspectives of some leaders and members of the parish. Finally, it explores the suggestions that these interviews have for a church in search of spatial justice.

## Anglican history in the Western Cape

In 1795, the British took over the land known as the Cape Colony (Hinchliff 1963:2). With this occupation, a new 'state' church needed to be established (Ive 1966:4). The first congregation of the Church of England in South Africa (Anglican Church) was opened in 1813 in Simonstown at the British Naval Base, and was led by George Hough, a civil chaplain (Hinchliff 1963:13).

In 1820, after the first substantial number of British settlers arrived at Algoa Bay in the Eastern Cape, the first set of ministers also arrived (Ive 1966:4). Reverend James Boardman became the first minister in the Eastern Cape (Ive 1966:4). Alongside the arrival of settlers, the growth of missionary efforts based in an evangelical paradigm also occurred (Scheepers 2020:34). Missionary efforts within evangelical circles, including early Anglicanism in South Africa, reflected pietism and paternalism (Scheepers 2020:35).

In 1821, Reverend Wright arrived in the Cape as the first missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in South Africa (Lewis & Edwards 1934:14). For many years,

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Cape Town did not have a building for the Church of England and their services were held at the Groote Kerk, the property of the Dutch Reformed Church (Hinchliff 1963:13). On St George's Day in 1830, construction started on the building of St George's church (Lewis & Edwards 1934:20). St George's church was completed in 1834 in the Cape Town city centre (Ive 1966:5). During these times, the congregations were largely dependent on bishops who would visit on their way to other parts of the world (Hinchliff 1963:24). Bishop James of Calcutta once visited and in 1827 confirmed 450 candidates in Cape Town (Ive 1966:5).

In the early 19th century, the Tractarian (Anglo-Catholic) views commenced to take root in the Church of England (Ive 1966:5). Those supporting these views, worked towards the introduction of some aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine (Ive 1966:5). In response to these views, those who opposed them made a call for a return to the foundations of the Reformation and Protestantism that the Church of England was known for (Ive 1966:5–6). These Tractarian views began to infiltrate into the Church of England in South Africa. The minister of St George's, Reverend George Hough, commenced preaching in support of Tractarianism (Ive 1966:6). The evangelical members of the church were greatly displeased, and many withdrew from St George's and supported the building of a second church in the city. This church eventually was completed in 1846 in Harrington Street and was called the Holy Trinity Church. The first minister of the Holy Trinity, Reverend TA Blair, was an evangelical clergyman (Ive 1966:6).

Over time, there were requests to England for a Bishop (Hinchliff 1963:25). Reverend Robert Gray was consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1847 (Lewis & Edwards 1934:31) and arrived in Cape Town in 1848 (Hinchliff 1963:31). It is said that he arrived with great energy and increased the 14 clergy he found to 49 within 2 years. He was a staunch Tractarian (Ive 1966:9). When he arrived in Cape Town, he found to his annoyance that the city had a majority of evangelical ministers (Ive 1966:9–10). In time, he manoeuvred many evangelical clergy out of key positions in St Georges and the Holy Trinity Churches (Ive 1966:10). At the same time, there was uncertainty on the position of the Church of England in the British colonies, which were self-governing colonies (Ive 1966:11). The Anglo-Catholic movement condemned the involvement of the state in ecclesiastical affairs (Ive 1966:12).

In 1856, Bishop Gray called a synod but three clergy and one parish in the diocese refused to attend on the grounds that it violated laws of the Church of England (Hinchliff 1963:51). The Privy Council<sup>1</sup> in England ruled that, although the church in South Africa could have its own synod, it could not alter its constitution (Ive 1966:14). This judgement made it clear that the Church of England in South Africa was a voluntary association and not like the church in England, which was established by law (Ive 1966:16).

1.The Privy Council is a final court of appeal for the United Kingdom's overseas territories (Judicial Committee of the Privy Council 2023).

The first bishop of Natal was Bishop John Colenso (Hinchliff 1963:51). There are accounts of him being called a 'religious schizophrenic', being loving to the Zulus but was also seen as a wilful heretic (Hinchliff 1963:52). However, it is said that Colenso was not extremely progressive through his theologies by any margin (compared to today's liberation theologies), but he rather abandoned fundamentalist beliefs (Hinchliff 1963:84). By 1858, Colenso engaged in theological controversies, such as preaching on the communion in a Zwinglian manner, labelling communion as not much more than something needed for devotion (Hinchliff 1963:82). He also wrote alleged heretical thoughts on the book of Romans and the Pentateuch (Lewis & Edwards 1934:83). In 1863, the dean of Cape Town raised a case of heresy against Colenso and Gray summoned him to an internal disciplinary hearing for heresy in the same year (Hinchliff 1963:91). Meanwhile, his case was read out in churches and the members of the Church in Durban, which was led by Colenso, walked out in protest (Lewis & Edwards 1934:83).

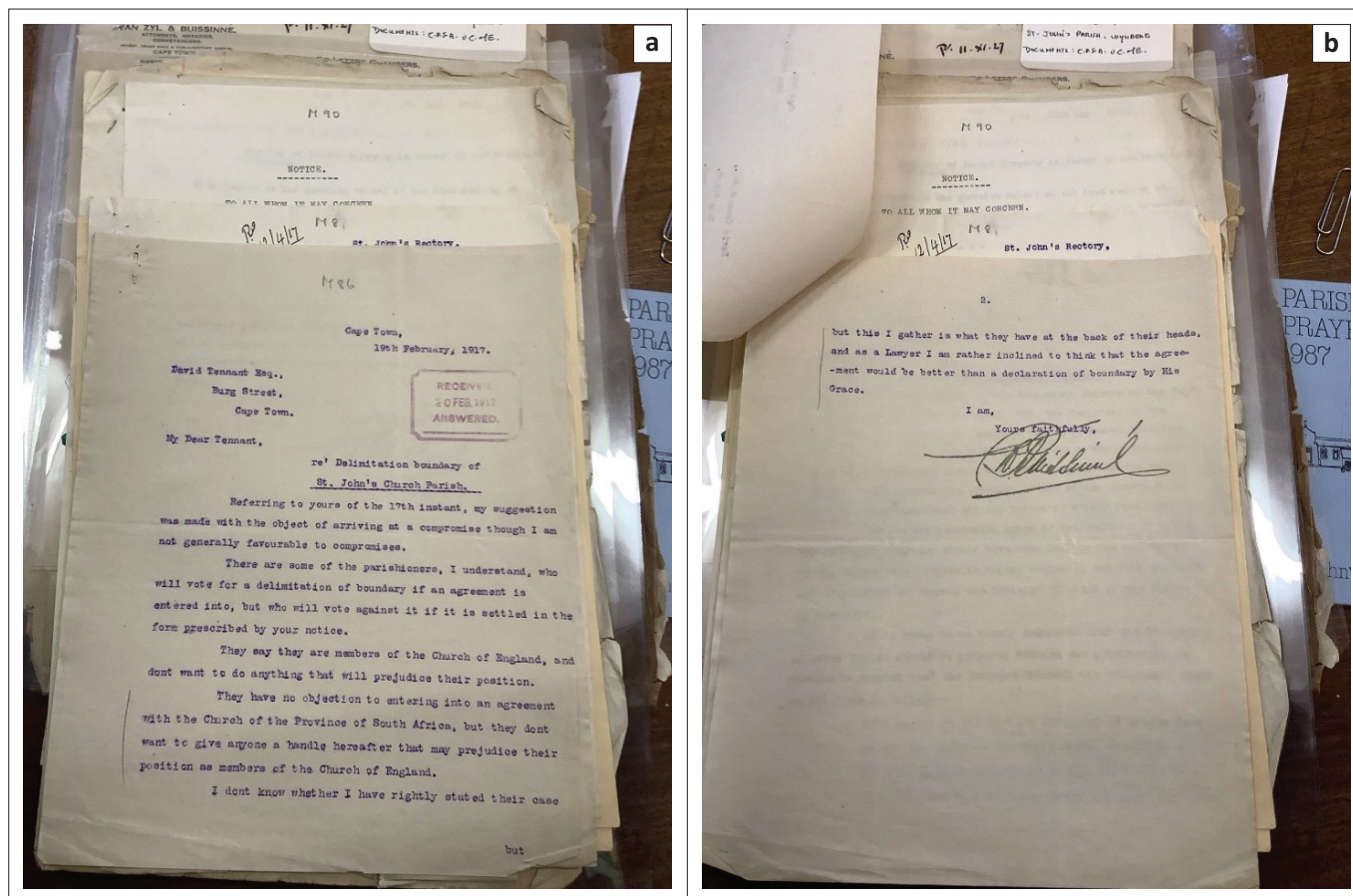
Colenso saw Gray as an accuser and a judge and took the case to the Privy Council. He petitioned the Crown to keep his job but received a sentence to be removed and Gray went to Natal to replace Colenso (Hinchliff 1963:96). The Privy Council voted that Gray did not have jurisdiction over Colenso unless by Colenso's own consent. However, Colenso was excommunicated on 05 January 1866 in a later decision (Hinchliff 1963:97).

The Colenso controversy formed divisions between those who wanted an independent church and those who wanted to stay associated with the Church of England (Hinchliff 1963:106–110). Ultimately, the schism created two parts of the Anglican church: the Church of the Province of South Africa (CPSA) and the Church of England in South Africa (CESA) (Ive 1966:30). The CPSA (now known as the Anglican Church of Southern Africa) has an Anglo-Catholic doctrinal learning with sacramental similarities with the Catholic Church. The CESA (now known as the Reformed Evangelical Anglican Church of South Africa) is an evangelical and reformed church, focusing on the protestant ideals of 'Scripture Alone, Justification by Faith Alone and the Universal Priesthood of all Believers' (REACH-SA 2023).

The following churches formed part of CESA in the Cape: Holy Trinity Cape Town, St John's Wynberg and St Peter's in Mowbray (Ive 1966:36). The split between the Anglican churches still exists to this day.

## St John's Parish history

St. John's church in Wynberg was formed in 1834 after the British occupation. It began with a group of evangelical congregants in a cottage in Wynberg. As part of the evangelical churches in the city of Cape Town, the congregants remained defiant against being fully controlled by the the Church of the Province of South Africa (St John's Church 2023). Letters written from the congregation (Figure 1) show a historical flow of letters from the church to



Source: St John's Rectory, 1917, Letter from St John's Rectory to David Tennant, Archives of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), AB160/M95-101, Historical Papers Research Archive & Wits Digitisation Centre, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

**FIGURE 1:** Letter from St John's Rectory to David Tennant regarding delimitation of boundary for St John's Church Parish.

the Church of the Province of South Africa to challenge the fact that the province held the title deeds of their church.

A governmental court order in September 1932 restored the Rector and wardens as the trustees of St John's Church's title deeds (Ive 1966:52). After the court order, there was an agreement to form a partnership between St John's Church and the Church of the Province of South Africa in 1939 (Ive 1966:65). St John's partner in Mowbray, the St Peter's Church, also formed a partnership with the Church of the Province of South Africa in this year (Ive 1966:65). These partnerships allowed the churches to keep their evangelical identity and have an evangelical clergy while they also stay partners with other Anglican churches in Cape Town and South Africa (St John's Church 2023). In 1956, a *Declaration of Association*, stipulated the parish to be formed in its current form and members. The Parish consists of six churches: St John's Church in Wynberg, the Emmanuel Church in Wynberg, St Luke's Church in Diep River, Christ Church in Kenilworth, St Philip's Church in Kenwyn, and the Church of the Holy Spirit in Kirstenhof (St John's Church 2023).

## Interviews and learnings

The article includes interviews. This methodology was chosen as the interviewees have particular knowledge of the history of the church space in the parish, which is not in the

public sphere. Secondly, it offers a nuanced view of the different church spaces and the experiences of the church leaders within these. The article aims to look at the history of the parish's church spaces and how this history supported learnings toward spatial justice. The interviews were conducted toward this aim.

In September 2021, six interviews were conducted with those congregants and leaders in St John's Parish. Four of the interviews were done with congregants or leaders in the Christ Church, St Philip's Church, and Church of the Holy Spirit. The other two were done with leaders who have retired from or are involved in St. John's NGO work and their evangelical partner church, namely the St Peter's Church in Mowbray.

## Church of the Holy Spirit, Kirstenhof

Kirstenhof is a suburb in the southern suburbs' region of Cape Town. It borders the area of Westlake and Retreat. One of the interviewees is a leader at the Church of the Holy Spirit in this area. Once I arrived, I noticed a building site near the church, and this phenomenon was included in the discussions around the church and its spatial history and dynamics. The interviewee grew up in Port Elizabeth (now known as Gqeberha) and later in life moved to Cape Town (Respondent 1, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). The leader worked in the

building environment sphere. Thus, the interviewee expresses concern for the spatial use and had suggestions on how to employ their past experience in this regard. They state that the area in which the church is situated, forms a microcosm of what one might see throughout South Africa (Respondent 1, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). These include golf estates, shacks with industrial people living in them and also the middle class – all in a 2.5 km radius. There is disparity in the living conditions, with dilapidated houses and large suburb homes in the same space. This can also be seen in other areas across South Africa.

The interviewee calls the area one that is encased in a 'white bubble', which exists in post-Apartheid South Africa but is manicured and works to keep non-residents out. The community has a closed space mindset, and this has been challenging during the time of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Respondent 1 discusses the space and the connections to it, explaining:

[S]o there are definite values I think, just like for the suburb [to] aspire to certain things[,] choose certain things and [do not] choose other things which I think as church we need to work to challenge and see where God is in that because sometimes God is in a slightly different space.' (Respondent 1, pers. comm., 27 September 2021)

In the interview, the interviewee communicates that the Christian God will dwell in a space depending on how well people live in that space. This quote reflects that the church needs to challenge spaces which do not reflect wellbeing for all, as these spaces do not communicate a God space.

During COVID-19 and South Africa's initial hard lockdown, the church could not use its building space. The church then decided to empty the church of its sound equipment, partnered with a local community action network, and used the space for street-based women during the lockdown (Respondent 1, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). Other churches in the parish did this as well to assist those who could not commit to social distance due to their circumstances. During this time, there were contestations from those who saw this as an invasion of the suburb. There have been also those who challenged the church on building an additional space after the last few years (Respondent 1, pers. comm., 27 September 2021).

These contestations are signs of continuous spatial forces closing and opening the suburb. However, the church's actions during the lockdown show a sign of opening and inclusivity among the 'white bubble'. The interviewee reveals that learning stories of those impacted by the living space provided during the lockdown, is imperative to the inspiring of justice in space (Respondent 1, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). These indicate different human spatial experiences, as well as how the inclusivity in space assisted these women. Moreover, when thinking about what justice in space looks like, the interviewee (Respondent 1, pers. comm., 27 September 2021) explains:

[T]he challenge I feel like for the local church and for believers is not say how can I fix the whole thing but what is the one thing God is asking me to do that might challenge or disrupt or be a seed of prophetic imagination of a different way of living.

### St John's non-governmental organisation work and the St Peter's Church

The second interviewee is a seasoned leader who attended both Christ Church and the parish's partner church, St Peter's Church. St Peter's Church was formed under a Trust Deed and was consecrated by Bishop Gray in 1854 (Aldous 2019:102). The church engaged in the parish's social action work. The history within the parish spanned decades and the leader has recognisable knowledge due to the time spent in the parish leadership. Originally from Gauteng, they were deeply involved in the anti-Apartheid measures as students in the 1980s and they seek to continually work for justice (Respondent 2, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). They had to cross Langa and Khayelitsha from the southern suburbs for that anti-Apartheid work and see the difference in resources when moving between areas in Cape Town (Respondent 2, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). Alongside their work in the parish, their spatial consciousness in their own history reflects a social justice paradigm through their parish and other work.

Christ Church was deeply involved in anti-Apartheid measures, however, the interviewee notes that the parish among churches across the country did not go too far in the radical search for justice like Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Respondent 2, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). The interviewee notes that the churches were not as radical in their anti-Apartheid actions as other Christians at the forefront of the struggle. In discussing the Apartheid regime, they bring up the deeds that the congregation they belonged to performed, even though they did not align with the radical love and action that Tutu stood for, e.g. (pers. comm., 27 September 2021):

I was like at Christ Church cause at the time [they] had [a] very high proportion of people who were refusing to [go to] military service, Christ Church had been very involved in establishment of what was known as the sector health clinics down in Crossroads so there were a number of people in the church who were involved in the whole house clinics down in [C]rossroads who were participating in the resistance stuff, who were refusing to do military service, so the[re] was a consciousness of it although we were still resistant to some of the deeper implications of Desmond Tutu's work within the Anglican church for example, history that is coming in you forget it sometimes, but it was a place for me that welcomed my questions and welcomed, the kind of wrestle I was doing ... [sic].

Overall, evangelical churches were known not to enter the political conversation as fiercely as those who claimed liberatory theologies (Scheepers 2020:40). With regard to St Peter's Church, there were dinners held between congregants and street-based people in the area since 2012 (Aldous 2019:103). The interviewee participated in the Thursday dinners with street-based people in order to create inclusive

living and a table to commune with people of different classes in Mowbray (Respondent 2, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). Like the Church of the Holy Spirit, St Peter's Church also hosted a micro-site for street-based people during the hard lockdown of March 2020 in South Africa (Respondent 2, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). This form of action is labelled as 'testing ecclesiality', forming an emergent framework for innovation (Aldous 2019:106).

In a similar fashion there was contestation against the Thursday dinners from the local neighbourhood improvement security personnel and the police (Respondent 2, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). There were also some contestations against the micro-site from those living in the neighbourhood and those within the church itself. These actions against inclusive living reveal another example of the closed living in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. However, there are some people who opened up in accepting the street-based people in this suburban space after learning the stories of those who were street-based during those dinners, and those at the micro-site (Respondent 2, pers. comm., 27 September 2021).

The contests and stories allowed discussion and open learning of how different people lived, creating growth in different spatial knowledge in the vicinity of the church (Respondent 2, pers. comm., 27 September 2021). The interviewee was asked what they think the concept of spatial justice means and the interviewee's reply was that:

[O]ne of the ways it resonates with me is that we haven't done near enough work to dismantle that and so we live the spatial imagination of colonialists and Apartheid people to this day, how we occupy spaces, the spaces we are afraid of, the spaces we welcome, the spaces we feel welcomed and the places we feel excluded, I would say are still predominantly determined by the imagination of the Apartheid engineers, and so for me spatial justice is about how do we undo and dismantle that spatial imagination for something else ... it is then like how do we insert catalyst for imagination for some of this that can show an alternative reality.

This explanation from a parish leader reveals that this leader has a consciousness around space in South Africa and how it still reflects the Apartheid spatial planning. Furthermore, the leader reflects that South Africans may not have done enough to shift this dynamic. Finally, they believe justice in space is creating a new reality where all have wellbeing in that space.

Overall, both these churches had a history of having space in key places in the southern suburb Cape Town. Also, there have been moments in which those who lead attempted to help and to include the excluded through the church space and church actions. Using the same case study of St Peter's Church, Aldous (2019:106–107) says that this process of testing ecclesiality, produces dissatisfaction with the status quo and a sense of innovation to do more in the said churches' context. Furthermore, it allows exploration of ideas to create safe spaces, a sense-making of what is emerging and transforming (Aldous 2019:107–112). This continuous action

of 'testing ecclesiality' allows a sense of chaos and messiness,<sup>2</sup> but it is working towards justice in church spaces.

## Parish leadership

One interviewee, who is part of the Parish leadership, reveals their story exactly how important stories are (Respondent 3, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). This interviewee has been part of the Anglican clergy for over 39 years across South Africa in different cities. They were in each city before the fall of Apartheid and therefore witnessed the exclusionary nature of the Apartheid spatial planning in their pastoral history. The interviewee pastored in the 1980s in Rustenburg (Respondent 3, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). This experience involved crossing spatial boundaries based on race during the Apartheid era while pastoring people divided into different races. This experience raised the spatial awareness of the interviewee, showing them the importance of love that crosses boundaries. The stories of the other during the Apartheid regime showed the interviewer that people are not that much different and deserve equality.

Due to the number of years in the Anglican structures and St John's Parish, the interviewee, has insight into the Christ Church in Kenilworth and its history with its properties (Respondent 3, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). The interviewee participated in expanding the property ownership of Christ Church with one building being purchased for the staff. Respondent 3 (pers. comm., 28 September 2021) explains that:

[The parish] bought it because we were expanding, so idea was we move the staff team up there and so move into that space, but it was a problematic building and there was an old house that [was] divide[d] into two, it had to be reconfigured into one unit and there was a lot of maintenance that had to be done on it and, so the building was problematic, it wasn't built for purpose, it wasn't adapted for purpose, and I think that is part of what the church struggles with is that it is dealing with buildings that were built for one thing and now were are adapting and using them for something else.

The expanded property ownership was not built for the purpose it was purchased for. Also, there was financial pressure due to Christ Church obtaining a lower income. Therefore, Christ Church began to reimagine how to use the building (Respondent 3, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). The interviewee explains further that there was a lengthy process of interacting with congregants, discussing whether to sell it, or to use it for another missionary or community purpose. After much discussion and contestation, it was decided upon that it should be used for a non-governmental organisation called U-Turn, which offers housing for street-based people in Cape Town while they were in transition and trying to find jobs. The next step of the discussions was with neighbours in the neighbourhood (as the building is in the suburb of Kenilworth) (Respondent 3, pers. comm., 28 September 2021).

<sup>2</sup>The chaos and messiness are produced in the process of testing new processes and ways of thinking, to create just church spaces and just spaces at large. However, this chaos is needed to create a new spatial dynamic.

Some neighbours felt they needed to be asked permission, but the church decided to rather consult after the decision was made (Respondent 3, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). These discussions opened an opportunity for the U-Turn to explain the work they do; this helped neighbours to more clearly understand the decision made. Furthermore, one person who came through the U-Turn accommodation and programme helped the people to realise the impact that the move would make (Respondent 3, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). Overall, the decision put pressure on a neighbourhood to open itself up and to reveal the importance of stories and inclusive thinking in re-imagining spaces that very much operated in the Apartheid spatial planning in Cape Town. Moreover, the case study at Christ Church shows Aldous' 'testing ecclesiality' (2019) by indicating what does not work and by presenting other options to transform their space for the good of others.

### St Phillip's Church, Kenwyn

In another part of the southern suburbs, where more people of colour live, St Philip's is situated in Kenwyn, and two of the interviewees were interviewed here. The first one is a leader who was ordained in the early 2000s and had been leading there for 5 years at the time of the interview (Respondent 4, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). The spatial configuration for activities at the church is one that is interesting. The church has its services on Sundays but rents out its space to a charismatic church at other times on Sunday and during the week (Respondent 4, pers. comm., 28 September 2021).

Initially the decision to share the space was financial, however, the relationships between the clergy of the churches have grown. Discussing the congregants' thoughts on the move, the interviewee admits that the community is quite insular, and it does have contestations between those at St Philip's and the other church. Interestingly, the interviewee's thoughts on justice in space is tolerance, grace, and multipurpose thinking in using the church space (Respondent 4, pers. comm., 28 September 2021).

Their dream for the space is to see young and old using the space in an inclusive manner to bring life to their spirit and social justice (Respondent 4, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). The interviewee also expresses a deep compassion for street-based people who frequent the area, and he wants to do things to invite them into the church space rather than to serve them on the streets. The interview reflects a desire for justice through inclusive living and grace and tolerance in shared spaces (Respondent 4, pers. comm., 28 September 2021).

The second interview done at St Philips, was with a younger leader in the Parish network (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). The interviewee has engaged in space and changes in space in interesting ways. The interviewee lived in the Cape Flats region of Cape Town, known for its gang violence and poverty, but also went to school in the southern suburbs (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). The Cape Flats and the southern suburbs are known to be largely different in the number of resources (Lloyd et al. 2021).

This movement between the Cape Flats and the southern suburbs helped to develop a sense on how a change in space shows a change in economic activity, safety and health in Cape Town and South Africa at large (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). Throughout this discussion on space, space and its culture were brought up multiple times.

The interviewee engages in, what they call 'White culture' of the church and experiences its effect on those who do not fit the mould of that culture (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). The language used displays concern around the culture, with the interviewee detailing that:

[T]he Parish itself [*has a*] very white culture and it ignores the plight and the experience of people of colour as a real experience in the country, it is painful and people have left as a result of that, people have left burdened, pained, hurt, abused, ignored, sidelined, marginalised and the status quo continues [*sic*].

The interviewee is clear about moving between spaces and how those spaces make them feel. The detail communicates the parish's internal spatial contestations and how this affects choices and culture within the parish (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). The people further communicate that the parish has people, 'with different historical backgrounds, and different [*socio-economic*] classes, with different understandings of how God functions in the world, with different theologies ...'. Now, within the parish is there hope for the spatial justice within it? The interviewee believes this, saying that they hold hope for the future (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021).

They believe that, despite institutional structures that may destroy in some cases, it is people that can bring change in churches and South Africa (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021). Spatial injustice, according to the interviewee, is the inability for all in the space to engage it and to have an agency of obtaining wellbeing within it (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021).

Spatial justice for them, is achieved when those (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021):

[W]ho are present in those spaces are recognized equally and are able not to just be seen but are able to participate in the space or the place that they are living in, frequenting, part of connecting with whether that is a church [*or*] space church community, and it doesn't cater for one group of people but actually anybody who indoors feels that they can participate in building that community [*sic*].

Finally, if those who believe in the Triune God are looking to bring justice in space, they need to have a 'living faith' where they go beyond what they believe and tap into what that should mean for the communities around them (Respondent 5, pers. comm., 28 September 2021).

### Christ Church, Kenilworth

The final interview was with a former leader in the congregation of Christ Church (Respondent 6, pers. comm.,

29 September 2021). The interviewee grew up being Anglican, had moved around in denominations and then returned to an Anglican church (Respondent 6, pers. comm., 29 September 2021). They had an upbringing which had a politically involved family, and they worked in the social action field; therefore, social justice is a term and praxis they are intimately involved with (Respondent 6, pers. comm., 29 September 2021). Over time, they became interested in Christ Church's journey on re-purposing one of its properties (as mentioned above) as a '[P]redominantly white church in a previously white only suburb' (Respondent 6, pers. comm., 29 September 2021). The interviewee is aware of the exclusive nature of the previously white suburbs in Cape Town, noting that:

[Q]uite a few of the churches are on CID's [*community improvement districts*] which means the active citizenship in the area is about keeping the area exclusive and in inverted commas clean [*sic*].

The knowledge of an exclusive space and an opportunity to be part of the change, greatly affected her involvement in the U-Turn project (Respondent 6, pers. comm., 29 September, 2021). The interviewee was also involved (through their work at a non-governmental organisation) in finding housing for street-based people during COVID-19 at micro sites in various churches across the country. They had a growing relationship with the concept and praxis of spatial justice. Interestingly, their thoughts were that the U-Turn project did not go as far as it could go in radical justice through space (Respondent 6, pers. comm., 29 September 2021). Spatial justice, particularly in churches, for them is '[B]eing more messy than we are willing to be [*sic*]' (Respondent 6, pers. comm., 29 September 2021). This view of spatial justice is a further reflection of 'testing ecclesiality' toward justice. Also, it is the church being open about the sinful nature of exclusive spaces and pushing forward to being part of the change.

Furthermore, Respondent 6 (pers. comm., 29 September 2021) states that justice in and through space is:

[T]he invitation, it is to go right into the heart of it and then to say we have to dig we have to understand and we have to act with everything that we've got, that is the praxis of spatial justice for me, and then identify what are the things that are holding us back, why do we struggle with that, what's in our theology that we just don't see it this way, that we are able to see space and place and land as something that is out there and doesn't really touch us, so you know depending on all you wanna do with it, but I just think it needs to all be done in ever increasing and deepening ways [*sic*].

## Learnings from interviews

The city in which the Parish dwells in, has been studied and stated as a city which has Apartheid spatial planning (Lloyd et al. 2021). Apartheid legislation has created a city in which those in areas with people of colour do not have resources and have higher crime, while historically white suburbs have more resources and wellbeing among residents. This type of spatial planning creates inequality in the city. Soja (2010) mentions South African planning as a sign of spatial injustice. However, in the same way unequal spaces have been created by humanity, equality can also be created (Soja 2010).

Churches, as part of communities, are part of the spatial planning and can also be part of the solution.

The interviews were not just about gaining information about what has happened in St John's Parish, but also about what those actions did to develop thoughts around space and spatial justice. The leaders reflect a missional statement of wellbeing for all in and around their churches. All interviewees, in some form, believed in reforming space as it currently stands in their contexts. The awareness of inequality in spaces and between spaces, is a clear part of their journeys as leaders. The interviewees were all clear on the inequity of the spaces they inhabit within the church, but also of the inequitable spatial planning of the City of Cape Town. Furthermore, through the varying experiences and stories, they shared reflected actions toward spatial consciousness, as well as ideas for the balancing of equity in spaces around them. Numerous reflections reflected as 'testing ecclesiality', on a continuous series of actions that is dissatisfied with the status quo. It also acts within the chaos of the context toward justice in their spaces and communities. The theological paradigm reflected by the leaders, is one towards liberating the spatially oppressed. The different interviews revealed a belief that God believes in freedom in the current context, and justice is God's plan.

Also, the involvement of stories is clear. Stories from the 'other' helped to decrease the spatial contestation in many of the happenings of the interviewees. They also helped in building knowledge around inequality and to inspire change. Once interviewees reflected on stories, they expressed that these stories from street-based people changed their minds and the minds of other people. These changes helped to educate and to open them up for ideas to create spaces for all. Stories open up those who contend against the 'other', to come to an understanding toward inclusive living.

Finally, the readings of the Bible from the interviewees, show a sense of reading with a liberating hermeneutic towards right living, justice for all, and inclusivity. These leaders reflect the understanding that the Bible is a tool for opening up spaces and minds toward balance and justice. It is clear then, that a theologising that breeds inclusivity and justice, is one that will develop the spatial consciousness and desire for spatial justice.

## Conclusion

St John's Parish has a colonial spatial history. However, there has been actions and thoughts towards subverting colonial and Apartheid spatial planning in their communities, as part of their spiritual practice. It is clear that the church has internal contestations, and these cannot be removed from the story. Even with these contestations, the revelations of the interviewees show lessons of storytelling and justice, awareness of spatial inequality, and hermeneutics in the parish around inclusivity and justice. The interviewees revealed the need to find and enact justice in their spaces, and that God is interested in wellbeing in space. Their actions reflect liberation as a key theological foundation. Moreover,

the interviewees reveal journeys of justice and hope in a spatially broken city.

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### Authors' contributions

N.M. contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the article. H.M. supervised the PhD thesis that the article is from and provided content guidance on the article.

### Ethical considerations

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### Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, N.M. The data are not publicly available due to the privacy of the research participants.

### Disclaimer

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