

Bishop Peter John Storey's Profile

Peter John Storey was born in Brakpan on 04 December 1938, a descendent of the Oates family that settled at Salem in the Eastern Cape in 1820. As a boy, he attended a number of schools, finally matriculating in 1955 from Rondebosch Boys' High School in Cape Town. He joined the South African Navy, a career that was soon interrupted by his experiencing a call to the Methodist Ministry and the decision to enter the Divinity School at Rhodes University in 1957. At Rhodes University, he served on the Student Representative Council in 1959, graduating in the same year in Theology and Philosophy.

Newly ordained in 1962, one of his responsibilities was as Methodist Chaplain to the new Robben Island Prison, where he ministered to political prisoner Robert Sobukwe, and later to Nelson Mandela and his fellow Rivonia Trialists. At the end of 1994, Storey was barred "on security grounds," from further access to the Island and decided to take up a two-year offer to study urban ministry in Sydney, Australia, where he became Director of the world's first *Life Line* 24-hour telephone counselling centre, initiated by the Central Methodist Mission in that city.

Returning to South Africa in 1967, he became Methodist minister in District Six just after it was declared a "white area" under the Group Areas Act. His church (now the District Six Museum) and other churches and mosques spent the following years working with the people of District Six both protesting the forced removals and empowering residents to resist as best they may. He also founded *Dimension*, the Methodist National Newspaper which became SA Methodism's consistent voice of opposition to apartheid policies. In these years he also brought *Life Line* to South Africa, opening 24-hour telephone counselling centres in a number of cities.

In 1972 he was transferred to Johannesburg, serving an off-campus student church in Braamfontein and as Chaplain to Wits University. His church pioneered the first after-school care centres in South Africa, in Braamfontein, Zola and Jabavu.

In 1976, Storey was appointed to SA Methodism's premier pulpit in central Johannesburg. He determined that the historically white Central Methodist congregation needed to become racially inclusive and to engage the political crises of the country much more robustly. By this time Storey was a Vice-President of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and when the June '76 uprising began, he arranged special solidarity services for SACC staff working in Soweto and offered sanctuary for youth fleeing the police and seeking study space. These controversial

moves as well as his forthright pulpit statements soon cost many white members, at the same time drawing a new non-racial, politically engaged following. Over the years the Central Methodist Mission (CMM) as it was now named became widely known as a sanctuary and platform for anti-apartheid protests and memorial services. It became a target for bomb-threats, was tear-gassed many times and invaded by armed police more than once.

As Vice-President and later President of the SACC Storey was engaged alongside SACC General Secretary, Bishop Desmond Tutu in the ecumenical leadership of the Churches' anti-apartheid struggle, sometimes confronting PW Botha and his cabinet in the Union Buildings, at other times demonstrating on the streets of the nation or campaigning across the world for international support in the struggle. In 1984, Storey co-led an ecumenical delegation to the parliaments of Europe, the UK, the US Congress and the United Nations successfully calling for pressure to end South Africa's Forced Removals Policy. He and Desmond Tutu were detained on a number of occasions, including one in which they were taken into the bush by soldiers and told that they were to be shot. When President PW Botha set up a two-year-long tribunal to try and suppress the SACC, Tutu and Storey gave evidence-in-chief to defend the organisation. When that failed to bring forth Botha's desired result, he gave orders for SACC headquarters Khotso House to be destroyed and the building was blown up in the small hours of 31 August 1988. Storey immediately offered emergency accommodation at nearby CMM and it became the "home" of SACC for two years.

Storey had in the meantime become Presiding Bishop of the MCSA and Bishop of the Johannesburg/Soweto/West Rand area. With political change in the offing, he chaired the Message Committee of the 1990 Rustenburg Church Leaders' Conference where the Dutch Reformed Church made its historic apology for apartheid. He threw himself into the non-governmental National Peace Accord set up to intervene in the growing interparty war that preceded the 1994 elections. As co-Chair of the Wits-Waal Regional Peace Committee and other peacebuilding structures, he instructed his clergy to each give at least one day per week to this work. During the election itself he was a Peace Monitor in Soweto. In the run-up to the election, he also founded the *Gun Free South Africa* organisation to reduce the number of firearms in circulation in the country.

Following the 1994 election, President Mandela appointed him a member of the committee to select the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a last duty before retiring as Methodist Bishop in 1997.

Peter Storey then spent nine years teaching in Methodist seminaries in the United States, the most significant period being six years at Duke University Divinity School, where he was named a Distinguished Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry and awarded a Doctorate of Humane Letters (*honoris causa*) by Duke University. He had also previously been honoured thus by Ohio Wesleyan University and Albion College, Michigan. During his time at Duke, he was an adviser to the first Truth and Reconciliation project in the US in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Returning to South Africa in 2006, Storey was asked to head the planning, funding and opening of the new Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary in Pietermaritzburg, KZN, a task completed in three years. In 2015 he lost his amazing spouse, Elizabeth and now lives in retirement in Cape Town in the 60th year of his Ordination.

Peter Storey's publications include: *With God in the Crucible – Preaching Costly Discipleship* (Abingdon, 2002, 175pp), *I Beg to Differ – Ministry Amid the Teargas* (Tafelberg, 2018, 466pp), *Protest at Midnight – Ministry to a Nation Torn Apart* (Edited by Sarah Musser, Cascade Books, Eugene Oregon, 262pp)