

AD CLERUM – FEBRUARY 2011

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Wendy Mechanic is a remarkable woman. She began working from the garage of her home and built a company with an annual turnover of over a billion Rand. From newspaper reports it appears that she has now been suspended from trading for not complying with statutory regulations and for allegedly mishandling trust funds. Last week's Sunday Times carried their version of their interview with her about what has happened.

I know from personal experience that newspapers are often far less interested in the truth than in copy that is sensational and will sell. What is reported often bears very little resemblance to what was actually said. The reflection that follows, therefore, is not a commentary on Wendy Mechanic at all; about what she may or may not have done, or what she did or didn't say to the Sunday Times. Rather it is a meditation on the Sunday Times interview as it stands and the way in which the interview was reported because it seems to me to highlight certain aspects of human sinfulness that is all too common in our society today and which deserves prayerful consideration.

Although the report is careful to say that the accusations against Wendy Mechanic are still only allegations, the article seemed to me to assume that the allegations are true and that she is guilty. It provides a detailed account of the allegations made in the court proceedings against her, but offers little of what her lawyers said in her defence. In reporting on the interview they stress that at no time during the interview did Ms Mechanic deny the charges, but rather report her as justifying her actions. From the things they reported her as saying in the interview, I was left with the impression of a person who was guilty as charged and was filled with self-pity for what she perceived to be unfair and totally unnecessary actions taken against her.

A number of comments can be made about what I have said. Firstly, there is the issue of a concern for truth and truthfulness that should take precedence over anything else. Our news is filled at present with allegations that SABC news broadcasts have been deliberately falsified and distorted to serve political agendas. I have listened to people lie under oath in order to protect themselves, with little concern for the damage and hurt that those lies cause others. In so much of life, as in politics and war, truth is often the first casualty. If Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, then truth for us as Christians must never be a casualty.

Secondly, there is the issue of fairness. There is an abuse of power in that the Sunday Times is able to say whatever it wants about Ms Mechanic in their report, while she has no similar access to the public to defend herself against what has been said. I raise this point because it is not all that different from the way some clergy have used the pulpit to criticise people or processes within the parish. This too is an abuse of power and one that we must be at pains to avoid.

There is another aspect of unfairness which is perhaps most clearly to be seen if one poses the question, "Why was it necessary for the Sunday Times to publish such an interview at all?" Clearly the public has a right to 'know' the facts of the matter, but does it 'need' to see

the humiliation of another person and be told that she is filled with self-pity? For me the interview was unnecessary, humiliating and cruel and served little purpose that I could see beyond the entertainment and titillation of the public. The sad truth is that, all too often, we resent the success of others and secretly rejoice when the rich and powerful are brought down or exposed as weak and sinful. Many newspapers and magazines make their living just in the telling of such stories.

But that is not how we should be as Christians; we are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep – even if the cause of their weeping is self-inflicted. And where their weeping is the consequence of sin, we should weep too for their brokenness. And far from revealing their hurt and brokenness for others to see, we should bear each other's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). Shem and Japheth are blessed for covering their father Noah's nakedness; Ham is cursed for seeing it and revealing his father's shame to his brothers (Gen 9:18-27)

And finally, a few thoughts on what Wendy Mechanic is supposed to have said. She is reported as feeling hurt, betrayed and victimised because:-

- She has only done what 'everyone' else in the estate agency industry is doing and yet is the only person being prosecuted.
- She has served in a key leadership role in the very body that is now taking action against her, and therefore deserves better treatment from them.
- She is accused of living a 'lavish lifestyle,' but her lifestyle is no more lavish than that of many others in the industry.
- Even if she has not fully complied with the statutory regulations, it is unfair of them to deprive her of her right to trade, and thus to earn a living.

She might well, as the paper says, not have denied any of the allegations made against her, but neither in the report does she really admit to them. The language used is much more that of not following all the rules than that of acknowledging wrongdoing. That others might well be doing the same thing is not an exoneration of her behaviour; it is simply a statement that, if true, such wrongdoing is rife in the industry. The fact that she served on their Board does not entitle her to special consideration and preferential treatment, but rather suggests that she should have upheld the values and practices to which the Board subscribed. The 'lavish' lifestyle is relevant only insofar as it is in keeping with her income. And finally, her desire to trade is expressed only in terms of her own needs and there is little evidence of concern for those whose monies have been held in trust by her.

Those statements, as they have been reported, powerfully illustrate how sin subtly distorts our perspective; first by minimising the seriousness of the action so that wrongdoing is reduced to just 'making mistakes'; then by justifying and excusing the action; then by seeking to shift the blame for what has happened onto others so that, in the end, the wrongdoer feels wronged and aggrieved. As it stands, it is a modern day parable on the sin of the Garden of Eden.

This story is a powerful one because it holds up a mirror before us in which we can see ourselves. It reveals our bias and the lack of truth and fairness in our daily dealings with others. It illuminates the mind-games we play to rationalise our behaviours and which allow us to avoid being confronted by our own sinfulness and brokenness. It powerfully reminds us of our need for the transforming power of God in our lives. But until we are willing to look deeply into that mirror and see ourselves and learn to know ourselves in all our sinfulness and brokenness there can be no real repentance, no change of direction, no '*conversatio morum*' (that 'continual conversion of life' which, for St Benedict, is the mark of our Christian pilgrimage).

For self reflection:

1. Who are the people for whom I carry a positive bias (show favouritism to, make allowances for, and who I am willing to make excuses for)? Why am I positively biased towards them? Is that positive regard a gift of the Holy Spirit born of love, or is it shaped by the cultural, gender, political and social norms of our time? Pray about your bias. Now repeat the exercise, this time looking at those whom you are biased against and whom you treat suspiciously, unfairly and hurtfully?
2. Reflect on your day (or life in general). Where have you trivialised the sinfulness of your attitudes or behaviours and reduced wrongdoing to just 'making an unimportant mistake'? Is this a regular pattern of your life? When do you excuse and justify your actions or blame others? Why? Speak to God about what you have discovered about yourself.

For group discussion:

1. What are the biases in your parish (for or against - the aged, young, men, women, people of a different colour, tribe, country)? Do we challenge bias and any forms of discrimination in our preaching and teaching?
2. How do we as a parish help our people to recognise both the sin in their lives and the ways in which they justify, excuse or rationalise it? In our preaching and teaching do we burden them with guilt or release the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives?

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 15:13)

† Brian

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Yellow Pages

Please find attached an updated copy of the 2011 Yellow Pages. We request that these dates be distributed as widely as possible throughout the parishes. Please remember that any new churchwardens and parish councillors elected at Vestry will need to be given a copy.

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Further Notes and Reminders about the next few months

1. I heard the other day that in 2010 *every* parish submitted their 2010 financial statements and returns, and that most of you did so within the stipulated time period. Well done. God is good ... **Vestry** plans for 2011 should by now be in the final stages of planning and preparation. Let's make the 2011 Vestry (the Vestry itself, the financial statements

and the completed returns) even better than last year. If you have any problems, please contact your Archdeacon ASAP.

2. **Transformers 2011** has already begun, but I am sure that they will still accommodate some late entries. If you have not sent people from your parish you are missing out on a valuable opportunity to develop your leaders. Please phone your names through to Noxolo Sihlangu at the Diocesan Office before it is too late.
3. The whole diocese will be following a common 6-week **Lent Programme**. All parishes are expected to participate and I hope that you have already made arrangements for the projection of the video in the church or hall. Ideally this should be through an overhead projector able to show videos. Please speak to your Archdeacon if you have difficulties in this regard. We will be looking at the Lent Course as part of the Clergy Workshop.
4. The **Clergy Workshop from 1st – 3rd February** is of obligation for all stipendiary clergy and partially supported clergy. (Self-supported clergy are encouraged to attend where possible and where they are not will be required to attend all the parish Lent Course meetings). The Clergy Workshop will be looking at the Diocesan Strategic Plan for 2011- 2012, and will include a detailed examination of the Lent Course. It will take place at St Martin's-in-the-Veld, Rosebank and will run from 09h00 to 16h30 each day.
5. The **Clergy Day in March** will look at a revised Lenten lectionary and sermon outlines which speak into the focus of each of the videos. It is therefore vital that all clergy who will be preaching during Lent attend. The day will commence at 09h00 at the Parish of St Andrew, Kensington.

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Reading Recommendations

Last month I recommended **Richard Rohr's 2011 Lent book, "Wondrous Encounters: Scripture for Lent"** and will continue to encourage you to use it as a part of your Lenten prayers and meditations. You can get a copy through Duncan McCrombie (011 888 1980) at Herald Books.

I was recently given a copy of "**The Lucifer Effect**" by **Philip Zimbardo**. It is a study of the nature of evil and the systems and situations that foster it. It is not a theological book at all, but raises profound theological and pastoral issues. I commend it to you.

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Clergy Pension Fund

On the 1st of January 2011 a new clergy pension fund known as The ACSA Retirement Fund was set up. This fund is for all newly ordained clergy who are both ordained and stipendiary from the 1st of January 2011. In addition those clergy who were older than age 45 on date of ordination and are presently members of the Layworkers Pension Fund will be switched to the new fund. The pensions of all other clergy remain unchanged.

The following contribution rates apply to this fund: 20% of the salary contributed by the employer contribution plus a 7.5% contribution by the clergyperson.

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Statement from the Archbishop

On the 26th of January the Archbishop issued a statement regarding the recent flooding throughout South Africa. He said: 'I want to encourage the business community, churches and other religious organizations to assist in every possible way, including monetary and in kind donations. Natural disasters such as these floods call on each of us and all of us to reach out to those most affected. It is an opportunity to show the true spirit of ubuntu. I appeal to Anglicans in dioceses across Southern Africa to assist in all possible ways, with those in areas most affected taking the lead.'

Those who wish to make a donation may do so through the Anglican provincial disaster relief fund:

Bank: Standard Bank of SA Ltd
Branch: Cape Town
Branch IBT Code: 02 0009
Account number: 07 007 8394
Account name: CPSA Disaster Relief

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Provincial News

- Revd Canon Brian Marajh has been elected **Bishop of George** Diocese at the Elective Assembly held in George on the 20th of January. Please keep Brian, his wife Lynne, and their children in your prayers.

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Diocesan Family News

- Following a long period of conflict within the **Parish of Jabavu**, I have instituted the following measures to remedy the situation; I will be moving Timothy Mncube from the parish with effect 1st May and will be appointing a curator of the parish from that date. The parish will not hold elections at Vestry but will elect 2 persons from each recognised group within the parish to serve as an advisory body to the curator. All persons who have served as either churchwardens or parish councillors for the past 5 years are debarred from participating in this advisory forum.
- Please continue to pray for **Michelle Pilet** who is recovering from surgery.

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Moves and Placements

- **Errol Dengler** has been appointed as Interim Pastor of the Parish of St Michael and All Angels, Wetevreden Park with effect from the 1st February.

- **Sharmain James** has been appointed as Rector of the Parish of St Luke, Bosmont with effect from the 1st of March.
- **Phillip Louw**, currently in the Diocese of Kimberly and Kuruman, has been appointed as Rector of the Parish of St Francis, Newclare with effect from the 1st of May.
- It is with regret that we inform you that, following a disciplinary hearing, **Lucas Mekgwe** has been suspended from all ministry in the Diocese for a period of 3 years.
- Please also be advised that **Sam Moswathe** has been suspended pending a disciplinary enquiry.
- **Stephen-Damien Walker** has resigned from his position as Chaplain at St Barnabas College as at the end of last year. However in the light of rumours that have abounded about the reasons for his resignation the Bishop will be holding an informal tribunal to test the allegations and to resolve the matter. Please keep him in your prayers.

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Birthdays and Wedding Anniversaries

We would like to wish the following people a very happy birthday and wedding anniversary:-

FEBRUARY		MARCH	
1 st	Wilfred Pohl	1 st	Roy Collins
1 st	Thato & Fecilia Molipa (W/A)	1 st	Mathabo Dlwati
2 nd	Mapula Mphaki	1 st	David Butcher
2 nd	Abram & Pearl Mokgohlane (W/A)	3 rd	Peter Roberts
4 th	Ivan & Pat Lane (W/A)	4 th	Primrose Seku
5 th	+Brian's Consecration	5 th	Pearl Sharp
6 th	Margaret Place	5 th	Chris Aitken
7 th	Bridgette Oliphant	6 th	Chris & Maureen Rowland-Aitken
9 th	Wouter & Karen Uitzinger (W/A)	8 th	Errol Dengler
10 th	Jerry Bailey	10 th	Peter Witbooi
10 th	Gail Dengler	16 th	Eugenia Zeka
10 th	Andrew Payne	16 th	Kim Jacobs
11 th	Margaret Beckley	16 th	Gill Lee
13 th	Ranithie & Moipone Namu (W/A)	17 th	Ethel Mbalula
14 th	Ray & Lynette Bewsher (W/A)	17 th	Charles Germond
14 th	Margaret & Sidney Place (W/A)	17 th	Claire & Jonathan Holden (W/A)
14 th	Kevin Balkwill	20 th	Steve Moreo
15 th	Edna Cooke	20 th	Geoff Paxton
17 th	Paul Singleton	21 st	Beatrice Mpupu
18 th	Dorcas Baleni	22 nd	Helen Smith
18 th	Lorraine Williamson	22 nd	Kgoro Mogami
19 th	Margaret Eades	23 rd	Meshack Nhlapo
19 th	Gail Westwood	25 th	Sedupe Ramokgopa
19 th	Wendy Henwood	27 th	Beverley Longbottom
20 th	Corrie Mekgwe	29 th	Jeanette Ross
21 st	Geraldine Singleton	29 th	John Whyte
21 st	Michael Oliphant	29 th	Motlalepula Namu
22 nd	Lynette Ellis	30 th	Douglas Torr
22 nd	Nokwezi Dodo	31 st	Paul & Ntombi Molefe (W/A)
22 nd	Modisaotsile Monala	31 st	Rosemary Gray
23 rd	Lefetlho Lethoko		
23 th	Thelma Walmsley		
25 th	Michael & Bridgette Oliphant (W/A)		
27 th	Nompulelo Mcilongo		

27 th	Errol & Gail Dengler (W/A)		
29 th	Mashikane & Buyile Montjane (W/A)		

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Dates for Diary

Please see the attached Yellow Pages for all the upcoming dates in the Diocesan calendar.

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General Notices

- The Parish of St Francis of Assisi, Parkview will be hosting an **Eco congregation Sharing Morning** on Saturday the 5th of February from 09h00 to 13h00. Laura Tyrer of WWF- SA will provide some input but the idea is to talk and share around our eco-involvements and the processes of becoming an eco congregation. All parishes and individuals are invited to participate. Please contact Tim Gray 0828230752 or timgray@global.co.za for further information and to RSVP.
- The **Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre** in Sophiatown has launched an amateur theatre company. This group will be performing at the Kofifi Youth Theatre on the 9th of February. If you wish to attend the event or join the theatre company please see the attached advertisement for more details.
- "**Park Views**" is a series of short talks, on current issues, presented by experts, sometimes living in Parkview. The talks take place at St.Francis, Parkview. All are welcome! On Thursday 10th February at 6pm sharp, Morne du Plessis (of WWF) will talk about "Climate Meetings in Copenhagen, Cancun and Durban - What's the difference and what difference can it make?"
- A reminder to all the Clergy of **Archdeaconry Region 6**: Your clergy meeting will take place on Wednesday the 16th of February starting at 11h00 at the Parish of St Stephen, Sunninghill.

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Directory Updates

- Please note that the email address for the Parish of **Holy Cross** has changed to hac@telkomsa.net. This address is not working at the moment due to technical problems but please do update your directory accordingly.
- **Steve Moreo** has a new email address: steve.moreo@anglicanjoburg.org.za Please update your directory accordingly.
- Please update your email address and parish details for **Chris Uitzinger**. He is now based at St John's College as the Assistant Chaplain and his email address is Uitzinger@stjohnscollege.co.za

