



SPTSA Conference from 20 to 22 January 2026 (UP)

Keynote Speakers

Prof Rantoa Letšosa (University of Pretoria)

Title: *Practical Theology's Homecoming: A Systems Thinking Approach To Faith And Human Flourishing.*

The theme of "Practical Theology's Homecoming" invites us to rediscover the discipline as a living, embodied theology that belongs not only in the academy but also in the interwoven systems of everyday life. This keynote lecture explores how systems thinking offers a powerful lens for reimagining Practical Theology's role in fostering inclusion, justice, dialogue, and hospitality. Systems thinking emphasises interconnectedness, feedback loops, and the reality that no issue can be understood in isolation. Applying this to Practical Theology challenges us to view faith communities not as closed circles but as nodes within wider networks, ecological, social, cultural, and spiritual. Homecoming, then, becomes less about nostalgic return and more about re-embedding theology within the complexity of lived human experience, where actions in one space ripple across the whole. This lecture will argue that a systems thinking approach strengthens Practical Theology in three key ways. First, it grounds theological reflection in holistic analysis, showing how faith practices interact with economic, political, and cultural systems. Second, it equips theologians to engage the "messiness" of real contexts, where problems are multi-layered and require adaptive, relational responses. Third, it empowers the church to act as a catalyst for human flourishing, not by controlling outcomes but by nurturing healthy, just, and life-giving systems. By combining Practical Theology with systems thinking, this lecture calls for a homecoming that is not about returning to the familiar, but about inhabiting complexity with wisdom, courage, and hope. It invites us to see theology not as a fragmented discipline but as an integrative, life-oriented practice that seeks the flourishing of all before God.

Prof Nadine Bowers-DuToit (Stellenbosch University)

Title: *Making, Unmaking And Re-Making Home In Practical Theology? An Invitation.*

This paper explores the notion of homemaking within in global Practical Theology as a field. It seeks to deconstruct the notion of Practical Theology as traditionally understood by exploring key voices in PT and argues that the notion of making "home" within our field is often a messy and complex one. Belonging is inherent to feeling at home in our field and this question is further interrogated with regards to practices that make some of us feel "out of place and space" and, therefore, not at home – more especially from the perspective from the Global South and other marginalised identities. Ultimately the paper calls for resistance as homemaking with the intention of building community in the midst of difference both globally and locally. A version of this paper was previously presented as part of the presidential address at the International Academy of Practical Theology Conference in Saskatoon, Canada, in June 2025, however as the speaker was also a former chairperson of PTSA it has also been further contextualised for our South African context.

Prof Cas Wepener (Stellenbosch University)

Title: *Mapping Practical Theology's Homecoming. A Ritual-Liturgical Cartography.*

If your home truly is where your heart is, a key question to be raised for the discipline of Practical Theology, is where it's heart currently resides. In biblical language we can say that "For where your treasure is, there

your heart will also be.” A quest for the heart of Practical Theology, searching for where the discipline’s treasure currently is, will be done in service of putting a Pindrop on its current home. This paper will methodologically employ a ritual-liturgical cartography in search of the heart and home of a discipline. It will approach religion as primarily something that people do and thus the ancient liturgical adage *lex orandi lex credendi* will, in a heuristic fashion, guide this quest, as the law of practice might serve as an indicator and expression of the law of belief. Practice (preaching, teaching, caring etc.) will thus be used to find that heart and concomitantly the home. An array of cultural- and social anthropological, performance-, as well as liturgical theories regarding symbolic and religious practices will be employed to map the cosmos in search of the heart of a discipline.

Presentations (listed alphabetically)

Ali, Joseph Olufemi (South African Theological Seminary)

Title: Sociocultural Considerations In Counselling African Couples Who Want To Adopt: A Pastoral Approach.

Couples living with infertility in Africa are confronted with frustrations ranging from medical to physical to social and cultural challenges. Adoption offers a viable alternative, but it comes with its own challenges. African couples from Gauteng, South Africa, were invited to share their opinions on adoption to explore the acceptability of adoption as an alternative to infertility in the African context. Narrative inquiry was employed to gather the data, which was thematically analysed. Findings reveal that some participants would adopt only to fulfil their Christian obligation of raising disciples for God. Some others consider adoption not viable. This is because of reasons such as the firm belief in ‘having your own biological child’, a stance fuelled by their sociocultural beliefs, among others. Given that adopters/adoptees are often subjected to diverse sociocultural barriers during the adoption process, this study provides relevant insights for pastoral caregivers and counsellors on crucial sociocultural discourses to consider for the adoption process, creating a safe, nonjudgmental space that allows them to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This can bring a sense of relief for couples who struggle with infertility and consider adoption in a culture that is not particularly welcoming of this alternative possibility, and everything it entails socially and culturally. It also contributes to the existing body of knowledge of practical theology and pastoral counselling.

Andrew, Daniel (University of the Free State)

Title: Social Cohesion And Economic Justice: Multicultural Congregations, Spaces Of Exclusion Or Belonging?

The Bible states that ‘the poor you will always have with you,’ (Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8) These are the words Jesus shared with his disciples, which is also found in Deuteronomy 15:11 ‘For there will never cease to be poor in the land.’ Does it suggest no matter what we do to eradicate and alleviate poverty; it is an impossible dream? South Africa is ranked by the World Bank as one of the most unequal societies in the world, and after thirty years of poverty alleviation, the levels of poverty are now at its highest. The church as a grassroots community is best placed to address that reality because the members of local congregations are also citizens of society. The paper reports on a study that was done with participants from five multicultural congregations, that is mostly situated in middle class communities, but the members attending these congregations are from diverse economic statuses. The study utilized the lenses of social cohesion and intergroup contact as theoretical frameworks to find whether multicultural congregations become spaces of inclusion, belonging, participation, legitimacy, and shared values. The study also uses an intersectional approach, that considers the different race, gender, age, and class contexts of participants. A qualitative research methodology, with focused group interviews among participants in five multicultural congregations, was chosen as an appropriate research strategy. The study finds that multicultural congregations as spaces

of contact, reduce bias between members, inclusion in ministries, participation in leadership, and support available for those in need.

Botha, Annelie (University of Pretoria)

Title: Feeling At Home, Belonging, Hospitality And Wellbeing: A Pastoral Approach.

It is essential to feel connected to the world and oneself. This connection is characterised by a sense of belonging, which can be cultivated through hospitality and a deep sense of being at home. The ever-changing world we live in, however, often leads to feelings of disconnection, affecting not only our relationships with others but also our relationship with God, the earth and the self. Therefore, it is crucial to explore pastoral practices that can foster a sense of belonging, promote a sense of feeling at home on earth, and cultivate a deeper connection with others, oneself, and God. This paper will investigate how pastoral care can offer resources for addressing these challenges by cultivating practices of hospitality, nurturing spaces of belonging, and reimagining what it means to feel at home both spiritually and existentially. Drawing on pastoral approaches, it will discuss the role of intentional presence, compassionate listening, and theological reflection as practices that can re-anchor individuals in meaningful relationships. Hospitality is regarded as an ethical and theological imperative that affirms the dignity of the other while opening space for mutual transformation. The paper aims to indicate how fostering belonging through a pastoral lens is crucial for sustaining resilient communities and nurturing spiritual vitality in an increasingly fragmented world.

De Beer, Stephan (University of Pretoria)

Title: Ending Homelessness: The 2021 UN Resolution, Biblical Imperatives, And Our Collective Theological And Political Failure.

Drawing from Deuteronomic, prophetic and Gospel imperatives on the poor, stranger and homeless, as well as the United Nations Resolution on Homelessness of 2021, related United Nations Documents, and updated reports by the Secretary General of the United Nations, this paper asserts our collective theological and political failure to end homelessness for as many people as possible. Grounded in the South African context, it describes the homeless landscape in South Africa, bemoaning grave policy failures, recurrent criminalisation practices, and homeless interventions that either fail to address the root causes of homelessness, or mediate long-term solutions that break perpetual cycles. It continues to consider the failure of civil society, churches and the faith-based sector at-large, and people with lived experience of homelessness, to galvanize a strong and collaborative social movement, able to to arrest the causes of homelessness, whilst demonstrating bold and long-term solutions. Yet, instead of being paralysed by the identified gross failures, it outlines clear policy and pragmatic interventions that could optimize an end to homelessness – integrating housing, spatial, economic, psycho-social, health and environmental considerations, facilitated by appropriate institutional mechanisms and backed by evidence-based knowledge and data generation. It challenges charitable approaches to homelessness that perpetuate indignities, patronize the poor, and fail to make people partners in overcoming vulnerability and exclusion. Departing from our universal longing for 'home', instead of 'othering', it proposes mutual accompaniment as driving principle and posture for ending homelessness sustainably.

De Bruin, Dieter (University of Pretoria)

Title: Addicted To Love: The Eucharist As An Integrative Habit.

This paper will argue that the Eucharist is a vital practical theological discipline for fostering human flourishing. It employs addiction as a theological lens, drawing on a philosophy of addiction to frame the Eucharist not as a pathology but as a character forming life-ordering 'complex habit' that shapes human desire toward the 'fullness of life.' It will be argued that the Eucharist, as a 'thick' liturgical practice, cultivates

this virtue, thereby integrating the immanent and transcendent dimensions of existence. In doing so, the Eucharist provides a powerful counter-practice to the diffuse liturgies of secular culture, offering a coherent telos for achieving genuine human flourishing.

Denton, Rudy (North-West University)

Title: Forgiveness As A Pastoral Care Imperative And A Restorative Social Justice Mechanism For "Homecoming" Within Communities Emerging From Conflict.

When post-conflict communities are struggling to recover from injustice and fractured relationships, the concept of forgiveness appears as a fundamental and practical necessity to reconstruct relationships and "come home" in the pursuit of fostering social cohesion, mental health, justice, and peacebuilding. This paper explores how practical theological frameworks of forgiveness can serve as agents for human flourishing, particularly within social contexts of torn-apart communities. Within the framework of human flourishing, the paper demonstrates how the practical implications of theologically grounded forgiveness could activate communal "homecoming" across individual, interpersonal, and structural dimensions of communal life. An interdisciplinary approach emphasises a praxis-oriented reflection, thereby positioning pastoral care to address contemporary challenges related to social fragmentation and collective trauma. The theological and anthropological aspects of forgiveness, as an essential part of homecoming, explore how a theologically grounded pastoral care praxis serves as a transformative foundation for communal restoration, fostering belonging, mental health, social justice, peacebuilding and human flourishing after trauma. Drawing on post-conflict communities, theologically grounded forgiveness practices function not merely as individual spiritual exercises, but as communal acts of homecoming that can restore communities and create conditions for sustainable peace. By integrating theological reflection with insights from psychology, sociology, and peace studies, the paper demonstrates how forgiveness can operate in praxis as a theological imperative, a mental health intervention, and a restorative social justice mechanism. The paper concludes by introducing a "homecoming" that highlights how forgiveness can serve communities as they navigate the delicate landscape between memory and healing, justice and mercy, individual restoration, and collective flourishing. It provides theoretical insights and practical approaches for communities seeking to create welcoming spaces where the sense of homecoming becomes a hope for transformation.

Dickson, Nicole (University of Pretoria)

Title: The Open Door: Pastoral Narrative Practices And Radical Hospitality.

This paper investigates the role of pastoral narrative practices in shaping inclusive spaces of welcome, dignity, and belonging for individuals and communities situated on the margins. It engages the guiding question of what it means to feel at home in the world. Drawing on the intersection of narrative therapy, pastoral theology, and an ethics of care, the study considers narrative practices—including the privileging of local knowledge, externalizing conversations, re-membling practices, and collective narrative witnessing—as methodological resources for resisting exclusionary discourses and constructing alternative forms of mutual recognition and hospitality. Through dialogue with theological frameworks and practice-based examples, the paper argues that pastoral narrative work can critically disrupt theological and cultural forms of "othering" that have historically reinforced marginalisation. In doing so, it demonstrates how communities of care may be cultivated as sites of radical welcome in which communities are encouraged to re-author stories of dignification, resilience, and belonging. The discussion further reflects on the implications for pastoral practitioners and faith communities, particularly with respect to expanding the moral and theological imagination of care. Narrative-informed pastoral practice is thus proposed as a decolonising and hospitable model of care in which inviting others feel "at home in the world" emerges as both a theological imperative and an ethical orientation.

Du Plessis, Amanda (North-West University)

Title: Human Flourishing Amid Suffering: A Contextual Pastoral Response Based On Micah 6:8.

The African Union's Agenda 2063 has the subtitle, The Africa we want. In the book, African Public Theology, Agang (2020:4) identifies one possible reason for the "Africa we do not want" as that "[F]or too many people, there is a disconnection between their Christian life and the rest of their life, between the sacred and the secular world." Humans created in the image of God (Imago Dei) implies inherent dignity and purpose. Flourishing is, therefore, not merely personal success and happiness, but a way of living in alignment with God's intentions – loving God, loving others and stewarding creation. Justice, mutual care, mercy, reconciliation, equity and compassion are essential aspects of human flourishing that assist Africans in building the Africa we want. A contextual pastoral response to human flourishing amid suffering, doesn't ignore suffering but reframes it. Flourishing can coexist within hardship when life is rooted in faith, love and obedience to God. A flourishing life bears witness to God's goodness through what the prophet Micah implies in Micah 6:8 aimed at everyday life.

Du Toit, Louisa Johanna [Hannelie] (University of Johannesburg)

Title: Can We Have Faith In Sustainability As The Solution For Humanity's Climate Crisis?

In this article the concept of sustainability is investigated to ascertain if it can really provide humanity with the answer to the global environmental crisis. This is brought into conversation with responses from the religious sector. While different religions can find common ethical ground in sustainability measures, it is questioned why it does not translate into concerted action to save humanity from environmental disintegration. Other questions around sustainability that are probed are whether it is driving a deeper wedge between developed (rich) and developing (poorer) countries and if artificial intelligence is playing a role in that process. In conclusion possible alternatives to the sustainability pathway is discussed.

Enang, Bolanle (University of Pretoria)

Title: Pastoral Support For In-Between Families To Flourish.

The landscape of family life is rapidly undergoing change. The dynamics within families are continuously evolving in terms of structure, priorities, challenges, and effects of industrialization and urbanization on family life. Migration is increasing rapidly within and across countries, which has led to many families living outside their communities of origin (Gröger 2021:1). These families are referred to as in-between families (Magezi 2017). Migration results in the loss of vital external support needed by families. Families also experience challenges such as time and financial constraints; encroachment of technology; lack of boundaries; ineffective parenting styles; and absent fathers (SOSAF 2025). Families require innovative pastoral support to flourish (Spagnola and Fiese 2007). Academic discourse on flourishing is growing and continuously expanding. A recent global study describes flourishing as "the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good, including the contexts in which that person lives" (VanderWeele et al. 2025:636). A Church of England Study states that a flourishing family is when "all members of the family accept and respect each other, love each other and are there for each other" (Final Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households 2023:29). This paper will present the findings from a South African study conducted on families and clergy to establish effective guidelines for best practices in providing pastoral support for families to flourish, with a focus on in-between families. It also contributes to the scholarly discussion of what it means to flourish. The paper will present guidelines for relevant and contemporary pastoral support for and from faith communities.

Freeks, Fazel Ebrihiam (North-West University)

Title: From Exclusion To Embrace: Welcoming Fatherless Families In A Diverse World.

The expression "from exclusion to embrace" delineates a transition in attitude, relationship, or policy for example, from rejecting, disregarding, or alienating (exclusion) an individual or family to embracing, welcoming, home, and appreciating them (embrace). The work of Miroslav Volf (2013) is imperative in terms of exclusion, embrace and reconciliation, which are key concepts in the theme of the SPTSA conference 2026 and this paper. His research primarily focuses on the intersection of theology, public life, and reconciliation, particularly in contexts of conflict and division. He also explores themes of identity, otherness, and the role of the church in promoting justice and healing, often drawing on his experiences and the complexities of the post-communist world, including families. Fatherless families are a significant social issue with far-reaching consequences for children's development and well-being. A family's soul is deeply wounded by fatherlessness and father absence as social and destructive ills in society. More than 60% of South African children are growing up without their biological fathers. Moreover, fatherlessness is ranked fourth in the world, next to violence, drugs and crime, as the biggest problem. This vacuum leads many times to the disintegration of numerous families, including nuclear families, and is a great harm to family well-being. Family well-being in this paper, is paramount because it signifies the overall health and cohesion of family units, acknowledging that families significantly impact individual well-being. Family well-being flourishes when members engage in emotional connection, effective communication, and reciprocal support.

Hoffman, Lyzette (University of the Free State)

Title: Practical Theology And Human Flourishing: Planning Sunday School Lessons For Flourishing.

Human flourishing is the fulfilment of God's good purposes for human creatures. It includes various dimensions, for example relationship with God and others, living an integrated life. It is about optimum continuing development. Research found that high religiosity in childhood resulted in the best adult flourishing profiles. Sunday school plays an important role in the faith formation and religiosity of children and youth. Sunday school lessons can be used for more than teaching Biblical content. The eudaimonic view on flourishing, as discussed by Ryff, can be a useful frame for writing Sunday school lessons. Consider for example the six factors in Ryff's eudaimonic account: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self- acceptance. Adding a theological perspective to these factors can enhance intentional faith formation events like Sunday school. Planning Sunday school lessons with these factors in mind can contribute to the flourishing of all the parties involved. This planning involves conceptualizing, writing up, presenting style and follow-up of a Sunday school class. Engaging with children and youth through well-planned Sunday school lessons can help them flourish in the challenging times we are currently living in.

Hurter, Janke (University of the Free State)

Title: On My Way Home: In Conversation With Johannes De Villiers' Oppad Na Die Klooster In Die Sneeu.

As a PhD candidate and youth pastor of a Reformed church, I am currently on a journey with four passengers named faith formation, liturgical renewal, contemplative spirituality, and Reformed worship. Aware of the (creative) tensions in this car, I want to see if there will be a moment on this journey where all four passengers will be able to have a constructive dialogue and enrich one another. Although this forms the bigger PhD project and backdrop I am coming from, in this paper I would like to bring the work of Johannes de Villiers, *Oppad na 'n klooster in die sneeu* (2025), in conversation with only one of these passengers (Faith formation), to see how it wants to contribute to my journey both as PhD candidate and as youth pastor. *Oppad na 'n klooster in die sneeu* is about a man that is, like me, on a search for a space where mysticism is valued. This paper examines the potential for contemplative spirituality and faith formation to engage in dialogue, exploring whether such a conversation could lead to new insights into creating an inclusive space in our youth

ministries. Examples of questions that I think we will need to discuss are: How do I bring mysticism – a Roman Catholic phenomenon – into a Reformed church? How can I create a home, a “klooster in die sneeu”, in our youth ministry for those who prefer a mystical approach? How can De Villiers’ insights help me to spark an interest in silence and mysticism among young people?

Kemm, Nienke (Stellenbosch University)

Title: Needs Of And Ministry To University Students In South Africa.

As a researcher focused on Youth Ministry, this paper details the results of my doctoral empirical investigation into student ministry within South Africa. Behoeftes van en bediening aan universiteitstudiante in Suid-Afrika: ‘n Empiriese studie (Needs of and ministry to university students in South Africa: an Empirical study) is an empirical study conducted in the student congregations of the Reformed Church in South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church, and the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa. The primary research question that this study answers is as follows: What are the ministry needs of Afrikaans-speaking university students in South Africa? The research problem that necessitates this study is that there is a lack of understanding and knowledge of the ministry needs of Afrikaans-speaking student members of the Reformed student congregations in South Africa. There is a lack of research on student ministry in the South African context to support student ministers in their respective ministries. The goal of this study is to determine who the present-day student is and what the reality in which they live looks like, to identify the ministry needs of Afrikaans-speaking university students, so that they can be ministered to in more meaningful and effective ways. From the empirical data, the following three ministry needs of Afrikaans-speaking university students were identified: the need for faith formation, the need for mentorship, and the need for faith community. The data also show that students and student ministers differ in their understanding of the importance of these needs and the contents of each need.

Kipchumba, Mathew (McGill University)

Title: Genesis 1:28: “Fill The Earth”; Re-Imagining Human Migration In An Age Of Fear.

The violent acts of September 11, 2001 became a watershed moment in the fight against terrorism across the world. Not only was it a moment when terrorism became a major security agenda, but also human migration was controlled and perceived more from security lenses. Evidently, this perception of migration, regardless of its intention, was born out of fear. The fear that the migrant, through migration, will alter or transform the identity of the receiving country. That is, they will disrupt the order of existing life and cause social imbalance in the nation. Or that even in some cases, they might bring chaos from the failed states they are running from. Shaped by this fear, migration has become and continues to be associated with elements of social threat. The purpose of this paper is to offer a different understanding of human migration based on Genesis 1:28. I will examine this verse in light of Genesis 1-11, with the aim of demonstrating that; embedded in the meaning of the verb מלא in the divine announcement is the notion of motion, movement, or migration. I will argue that in being created in the image and likeness of God and then being mandated to ‘be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth’, God was not simply inaugurating human movement across the earth but rather he was gifting humanity with migration as a divine gift. Seen this way, migration is not a threat to human societies but a vital dimension of human flourishing, a gift through which humanity grows, thrives, and continually renews itself, and one that God protects against the distortions of human fear.

Knoetze, Hannes (University of Pretoria)

Title: From Valley To Table: Psalm 23 And The Ecumenical Vision Of Homecoming.

This paper explores Practical Theology’s “homecoming” through a constructive and ecumenical reading of Psalm 23. Central to the psalm is the image of God as shepherd and host, leading the faithful through

wilderness and valley into a dwelling place of belonging, restoration, and abundance. The exegetical claim advanced here is that Psalm 23 offers more than individual comfort: it provides a theological vision of communal homecoming, grounded in divine accompaniment and table fellowship. This vision becomes especially significant in contexts of division, displacement, and social fragmentation. The research asks: How can an ecumenically engaged exegesis of Psalm 23 foster dialogue and shared theological imagination broken and divided world? By bringing the psalm into conversation with ecumenical practices of hospitality, shared worship, and joint witness, the study demonstrates how the text functions as a missional scriptural resource that transcends boundaries. Methodologically, the paper employs a dialogical hermeneutic, situating biblical exegesis within conversations, and attending to how Psalm 23 is interpreted and embodied across diverse Christian communities. The argument is that Psalm 23, read ecumenically, invites Practical Theology to re-root itself in a scriptural imagination that nurtures belonging and encounter. The imagery of divine shepherding and the overflowing table resonates as a theological grammar for reconciliation, justice, and peace. In this way, Practical Theology's "homecoming" is not only a return to lived experience but also a return to the shared biblical witness that enables dialogue, cultivates unity, and reimagines the church's vocation in a fractured world.

Koech, Magdaline Chepkirui (University of KwaZulu-Natal)

Title: Homecoming And Restoration: Ezra-Nehemiah's Prophetic Message For Africa's Ecological Rebuilding.

The books of Ezra-Nehemiah narrate Israel's homecoming from exile and the rebuilding of the temple, city, and community. Beyond its historical context, this narrative carries a prophetic message for Africa's present ecological struggles. The African continent faces a form of ecological exile marked by deforestation, climate change, and environmental degradation, which threaten both community life and creation's flourishing. Re-reading Ezra-Nehemiah through an African ecotheological lens illuminates the urgency of ecological rebuilding grounded in indigenous knowledge. Practices such as safeguarding sacred groves, respecting taboos against the overuse of natural resources, and sustaining communal farming systems embody restorative acts that parallel the rebuilding initiatives in Jerusalem. This study argues that Ezra-Nehemiah offers a prophetic call to Africa to embrace ecological homecoming and restoration, where spiritual renewal and ecological responsibility converge for the flourishing of both people and ecosystems. This study employs a contextual and intertextual method, reading Ezra-Nehemiah alongside African indigenous ecological knowledge as a model of ecological rebuilding. The objectives are: (1) to draw parallels between biblical homecoming and Africa's ecological challenges; (2) to affirm indigenous ecological practices as theological resources; and (3) to propose Ezra-Nehemiah as a prophetic call to Africa's ecological homecoming. This study contributes to African ecotheology by envisioning restoration that integrates spiritual renewal, indigenous knowledge, and ecological responsibility for the flourishing of both people and land.

Landman, Christina (University of South Africa)

Title: Using The Psalms As Intertexts During Hospital Visitations.

The context of the paper will be a specific (though unnamed) state hospital in the North West Province where the pastor pays pastoral visits to members of her congregation. Most of these patients, if not all, feel extremely unsafe in the hospital amidst a lack of beds, medicine, doctors and theatre time. Cases will be presented where the pastor uses the Psalms as intertexts to create a safe space for patients with high levels of anxiety. The focus will be on the images of God presented in Psalm 4, 16, 91, 121 and 127. Through these images of God, that are both transcendent and immanent, pastor and patient share their belief and experiences of God as a safe space in a facility that is overcrowded and unhealthy, in spite of the efforts of doctors and nurses to 'do health'. A discourse exists amongst patients (congregants) that once admitted to the hospital, one does not come out alive. The paper will describe how discourses of fear and loss of health

are deconstructed towards discourses of healing, inner peace and safety, by 'talking' the Psalms with patients. In conclusion remarks will be made on how this process contributes to theories and models in Practical Care and Counselling.

Laubscher, Martin (University of the Free State)

Title: Becoming At Home In Ruth's (Un)Preached World? A Letter To My Students On Learning How (Not) To Dwell In The Book Of Ruth ... And Re-C/Enter The (Un)Familiar World Anew.

This is a letter to my students who will soon step into a homiletical classroom for the first time where they will have to perform in the end a digital sermon based on the challenging story heard in the Book of Ruth. By now I know all too well that for a variety of reasons, it is an overwhelming experience for most of them to sign up for such a challenge, and that more cautionary help (pastoral advice and homiletical wisdom) is needed to ensure that they do cross these multiple thresholds along the ways and dwell anew in this module promising to become an ambivalent home whereby we re-c/enter the world anew. In doing so, I shall proceed to put my homiletical/theoretical cards on the table upfront and challenge ourselves whether we are willing to play by these (house) rules of the game we are "hosted" by. Stated differently, at this critical juncture of the expedition, I shall voice some key coordinates of how the hostile space/road is alternatively mapped ahead to enter this envisioned place of belonging. Hereafter three more concrete crucial sections will follow in terms of what is (not) revealed regarding a) the exegesis of listening to and hearing Ruth's (mostly untold and unpreached) story; b) what sort of hermeneutical embodied lenses/frameworks are consciously named (embraced and called out) as we (dis)close some new and/or very familiar horizons of understanding in our context; and c) performing anew the homiletical ways by burying and/or resurrecting our sermon outlines on a digital platform that is framed by a clearly intended liturgy "after the liturgy" that will bring Ruth's story home for us in a world all too (un)familiar.

Lombaard, Christo (University of Pretoria)

Title: Faith As The New Normal.

Many of the tensions in intersections between faith and other aspects of human life, such as politics, economics, education and the law, have primarily to do with the assumptions of modernism. In the wake of the Enlightenment followed the important, positive, form-giving apparatuses of modern/ist life, including democracy. Amongst the strongest signs of these tensions related to religion within democracies, count what has variously been termed the separation between church and state, secularism or being a post-Christian society. Namely, these formulations are conceptually flawed, not only from a confessional point of view, but the more so from a phenomenological perspective. In this contribution, some of these erroneous though deeply entrenched assumptions on faith-and-society or faith-within-society are indicated and briefly described. Once these errors have been highlighted, the alternatives opened from the perspective of post-secularism, better termed religious realism, offer a more realistic, whole(some) manner of viewing the stated intersections between religion and other aspects of human life.

Manuel, Charmaine (University of Pretoria)

Title: Developing An Embodied Disability Theology With Children With Disability In South Africa: The Role Of Christian Leaders.

There is a fractured relationship between the Christian belief system and disability reality in South Africa. Disability gives opportunity for an embodied theological discourse around being human and being spiritual, with limitation. This article is based on a research study that formulated a theological framework that supports advocacy for children with disabilities (CWD) and their families within local congregations. Disability is viewed not merely as a specialized ministry, but as an integral aspect of community life. An ecclesial

theology emerges as the church is presented as an authentic community, with diverse abilities, reflecting a renewed vision of the imago Dei as diverse. Theologians are urged to broaden their perspective on how PWD are used by God. This challenges the traditional notion that faith in God is an adult-orientated, rationale vocation. It stands in contrast to modernism's ideology of utilitarianism, valuing the normative body and mind, while diminishing PWD as a burden to society. For this task, the researcher employs the Christo-centric hermeneutic situated within the school of Child Theology to contemplate "becoming as a child" (Matthew 18: 2-6) to enter the Kingdom of God. Data was collected to survey the progressive theological thinking of disability. Disability models and theologies of those with disabilities advances the human rights and agency of such individuals in the church. Qualitative data collection was localized with the inclusion of four focus group interviews with four Christian special need families presenting a window into the disability theologies of CWD and their families in South Africa. The church in South Africa is encouraged to recognize and value the contributions of families with special needs—and the disability theology they embody—in shaping discipleship, responding authentically to life's challenges and advancing the ongoing work of Christ in the world.

Mdlulwa, Zinzile (University of South Africa)

Title: Coming Home To Earth: Practical Theology, Eco-Theological Frameworks, And Ecclesiastical Responses To Biodiversity Loss.

The accelerating loss of biodiversity challenges Practical Theology to re-imagine "homecoming" not simply as a return to human community, but as a theological re-connection to the Earth, our shared home for all life. This paper explores: How can Practical Theology reinterpret "homecoming" as both an ecclesial and ecological duty in the face of biodiversity decline? It argues that church responses need a fundamental shift: from human-centered views that focus solely on human well-being, to eco-theological perspectives that recognise the interdependence of the entire Earth community as the place of divine presence and moral responsibility. The method combines insights from environmental ethics, African theological views that see land as sacred and communal, and global eco-theological ideas like Conradie's critical anthropocentrism and Boff's eco-liberation theology. Theologically, it suggests rethinking ecclesiology as ecological, where worship, pastoral care, and mission reflect ecological justice and solidarity with endangered ecosystems. Practically, it urges churches to incorporate biodiversity preservation into worship, community growth, and policy efforts aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Africa's Agenda 2063. Philosophically, it examines the concept of "home," arguing that in Practical Theology, to come home means to embrace the soil, the more-than-human world, and the interconnected web of life as essential to both human and divine flourishing. This paper offers a new eco-ecclesiological model for Practical Theology in Africa and beyond, showing that the role of Practical Theology in the Anthropocene is not only to help others feel at home in the world, but to re-conceive the Earth itself as home, a theological, moral, and ecological duty that underpins faith, justice, and hope.

Meulenber, Alef (South African Theological Seminary)

Title: An Exploratory Study Of Faith-Driven Social-Entrepreneurs In Johannesburg, South Africa, Informed By Lydia Of Thyatira's Example In Acts 16:14-16.

This research explores the intersection of faith and social entrepreneurship within the context of Johannesburg, South Africa, using Lydia of Thyatira (Acts 16:14-16) as a normative biblical model. Amidst growing socio-economic challenges, including poverty, inequality, and corruption, faith-driven social entrepreneurs offer a compelling alternative to traditional capitalist and socialist economic models. The study examines how Christian entrepreneurs incorporate spiritual values into their business practices to promote sustainable social impact. Employing Swinton and Mowat's practical theological methodology, the research is structured around four key phases: analysing current praxis among Johannesburg-based faith-driven

entrepreneurs, conducting cultural and contextual analysis, engaging in theological reflection based on Lydia's example, and formulating revised strategies for praxis. The study employs qualitative methods, including interviews with twenty purposively selected entrepreneurs from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, an exegesis of the normative text, and a literature review. Findings aim to bridge the gap between biblical principles and contemporary entrepreneurial practice, offering theological, missional, and practical insights. The research contributes to the underexplored field of faith-driven social entrepreneurship and proposes a gospel-centred framework for economic activity that promotes justice, fosters community transformation, and nurtures spiritual growth.

Mofokeng, Elvis Mokete (University of Johannesburg)

Title: The Role Of Liturgy In The Status Of Environmental Literacy With The United Reformed Church In Southern Africa. At Senwabarwana, Limpopo Province.

This practical theology article examines how liturgical practices within the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), particularly in the Senwabarwana Limpopo province, contribute to the development of environmental literacy and Christian environmental stewardship. Situated within the broader framework of eco-theology and contextual liturgical theology, the study explores how URCSA's confessional heritage, ecclesial identity, and local worship expressions shape ecological consciousness and ethical responsibility among congregants. Through qualitative engagement with sermons, prayers, hymns, and church-led environmental initiatives, the paper argues that liturgy in this context functions as both a theological narrative and a pedagogical tool for ecological formation. Particular attention is given to the interplay between indigenous African cosmology, the Belhar Confession's emphasis on justice, and the socio-economic challenges facing congregations in the rural area. The article concludes by proposing that a contextualized liturgical ecology—grounded in biblical theology, justice-oriented worship, and intergenerational participation—offers a transformative framework for churches to engage with environmental crises in Southern Africa.

Mokone, Puseletso Clementinah (University of the Free State)

Title: Creating Home In A Fragmented World: Pastoral Responses To Family Diversity.

Political and economic changes shape and reshape social structures, especially the family. South African society experienced different political systems that reshaped the nuclear family and the African traditional family structure. Under democracy, different family structures are prevalent. Amongst others are the following: single-parenting, blended families, child-headed, adoptive, and intergenerational households. Four in ten children grow up in single-parent households, and 15% to 30% in blended families, establishing different family frameworks for children. This paper aims to challenge Christian denominations to provide pastoral responses to family diversity, facilitate healthy relationships within the family unit, and help create a responsible society. The family unit remains a building block for the church and society, a transmitter of cultural traditions, norms, and values. Above all, families participate in the mission of God as co-creators. Without healthy families, there would be no healthy societies. This context presents the practical theology discipline with a framework to shape inclusive spaces of welcoming, dignity, and belonging for those on the margins by training ministers who would put this framework into practice in denominations. The methodology applied for this presentation followed a survey of literature, literature analysis, Church tradition, and biblical understanding of the family to ground pastoral responses to family diversity prevalent in our society. To conclude, Christian denominations need to protect the family unit by designing a family ministry framework that caters for diverse families as a vehicle for pastoral responses and train the ministers, catechists, and the congregations to welcome and cherish these diverse families. For better responses, further research is necessary to assess mental health, emotional stability, and psychological side effects of

individuals within these diverse family structures to provide data to help create spaces of welcoming, dignity, and belonging within the South African context.

Mokwena, Gerald (University of Pretoria)

Title: A Missional Leadership Model In Townships Congregations: A Practical Theological Reflection.

The church has a key role to play in addressing the socio-economic challenges in South African communities, especially the townships. It has a biblical mandate to bring about hope and transformation all across South African townships. Missional leadership is a concept that speaks mostly about transformation, and the church should be the agent of transformation in the community. This article examines a suitable missional leadership model for mobilizing local congregations to effectively respond to the socio-economic challenges within their communities. Drawing on the four tasks of practical theological interpretation, this study investigates a suitable model that can assist the church in responding to the growing issues of poverty, unemployment, and social collapse.

Mouton, Dawid (Stellenbosch University)

Title: Pedagogies Of "Home": The Need For Trauma-Informed Practices In Theological Education.

The concept of home may evoke associations with belonging, identity, care, safety, and growth for some. However, for many it may embody experiences of hurt, exclusion, dehumanisation, violence, and disenfranchisement. The ambivalence the notion elicits in our South African context with its high levels of abuse, exclusion and inequalities, is often mirrored in higher education spaces. While students often arrive at university carrying the painful scars of trauma that was experienced at their homes, in their communities, and that are engraved in their histories, hoping for a better future, they may find that university spaces could be rather inhospitable, often perpetuating the systemic inequality, alienation, violence, and epistemic exclusion they so desperately want to get away from. Although one cannot truly speak of a theology faculty as "home" in the same sense as when referring to the living arrangements of a family, one may argue that it does form a "home" for the formation of students, not to mention the familial and lasting relationships that develop during theological studies. For theology faculties to embody the associations of "home" - belonging, identity, care, safety, and growth, to name a few - in their academic offering and formation process, it must at least endeavour to understand and respond to the histories of trauma often carried within students and faculty. It has been established that perceived stress and trauma, whether stemming from personal experiences, societal factors, or historic injustices, can severely impact students' academic performance, engagement, and overall well-being. This paper argues that a deliberate focus on trauma-informed practices in theological education in South Africa may not only assist in the psycho-spiritual healing journey of students and faculty, but also have the potential to deepen theological training, epistemic access, and meaningful formation.

Mzondi, Modisa (South African Theological Seminary)

Title: An Ubuntu Pentecostal And Practical Theology Analysis Of The African Poor In The Post-1994 South Africa.

The poor always features in the Old and New Testaments. In the former, God provided guidelines for the nation of Israel to relate with the poor. In the latter, Jesus re-emphasised these guidelines by echoing Deuteronomy 15:11 in Mark 14:7 when he said to the disciples "You will always have the poor among you." The poor in South Africa, in the past thirty years, now includes African citizens and (il)legal emigrants from various African countries, who see South Africa as a destination for a better life. The presence of the latter due to various socio-economic-political factors in their countries creates a moral dilemma for the South African state and citizens. This challenge makes us ask: How are we supposed to relate with the poor (African

citizens and (il)legal emigrants from various African countries) in the post-1994 South African context? The article employs Ubuntu-Pentecostalism as a framework and the Lekgotla practical theology approach to reflect on how the African poor in the post-1994 South African are treated. The reflection shows that various government departments and a Central Methodist Church clergy display values in the Deuteronomy 15:11 and Mark 14:1-7. These values resonate with those identified in Ubuntu-Pentecostalism.

Ndereba, Kevin Muriithi (St. Paul's University)

Title: Fostering Mental Health Wellbeing For Young Adults In Kenya: A Faith-Based Approach On Sustainable Development Goals.

SDG number 3 seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all people. Specifically, target 3.4 focuses on reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases and promoting mental health and well-being. This recognition acknowledges the significant burden of mental illness and places mental health as a priority for global development. Given that this mental health burden is skewed towards youth (13-35 years in the Kenyan context), this a critical gap to address, given the socio-political, economic and spiritual challenges that mark this life stage. Furthermore, faith communities play a significant role in the lives of young people in Kenya, given that religious and cultural perspectives shape the responses towards mental illness. Grounded in a theology of youth mental health, this research presents a mixed-methods analyses of 187 Kenyan youth in various Christian religious communities and implications for mental health responses from a faith-based perspective.

Nel, Marius (North-West University)

Title: Values Of Sharing And Consuming: Designing Pentecostal Economic Ethics.

The Christian community's task is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, and technological tools have proven helpful in fulfilling the mission of Dei. However, recent history has demonstrated the dangers AI holds for violating the sanctity of human life, created in the image of God, with the emergence of transhumanism. This implies that the church has a vital role in providing a Christian ethical perspective. AI, using technological tools, can assist the church in the task. Still, it remains essential for the church to be vigilant because AI presents several challenges, including the potential misuse and violations of human sanctity. The question is asked: how can the church engage ethically and proactively with AI and the technological advancements presented by the 4IR? The technological disruptions that drive 4IR through exponential velocity, scope and systems impact associated with this transformation are unprecedented. It will probably change daily practices, personal and professional interactions and environments, affecting ethical landscapes. The church's influence over its followers' value systems and worldview needs to reflect AI's moral and ethical challenges during the 4IR and establish guidelines and standards to ensure AI technologies align with biblical values and principles.

Oosthuizen, Gideon (South African Theological Seminary)

Title: A Practical Theological Exploration Of Pastoral Ministry To Believers Engaged In The Divorce Process: A Case Study.

Divorce affects not only individuals involved but also their families, the church, and society as a whole. It is a complex and significant life event of critical pastoral concern. This research examines how pastors at Bet-El Family Church, Bridgemont, South Africa, minister to believers engaged in the divorce process. The study utilises Osmer's model for practical theological interpretation, applied from a conservative evangelical perspective. The study employed qualitative empirical research involving both full-time and volunteer pastors and congregants at different stages of the divorce process. Data were gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with twenty-one participants and were analysed thematically.

Five themes emerged concerning the current extent of pastoral ministry to the divorced at Bet-El Family Church: qualification, understanding, knowledge, support, and insight. In addition, an exegetical study of key Old and New Testament passages concerning divorce and remarriage was conducted, analysing the original Hebrew and Greek terms and engaging with contemporary evangelical scholarship. This provided a biblical and theological foundation for evaluating pastoral ministry at Bet-El Family Church. The preliminary findings indicate that pastoral ministry to believers engaged in the divorce process at Bet-El Family Church is currently insufficient. Contributing factors include limited training, as divorce and remarriage are seldom covered in seminary curricula, a lack of understanding and empathy for the experiences of divorcing believers, and an inadequate and inaccurate interpretation of relevant scriptures. This research contributes to practical theology by emphasising the importance of intentional pastoral training at seminary level concerning divorce and remarriage, ongoing equipping and self-skilling at the congregational level, accurate interpretation of biblical texts, and more empathetic support for individuals engaged in the divorce process. Additionally, it provides insights that could assist evangelical churches in South Africa in developing responses that are both biblically grounded and pastorally sensitive.

Pali, Khamadi Joseph (University of the Free State)

Title: God Who Sees, Hears, Show Compassion And Acts (Exodus 3:7-8): Towards A Participatory Framework Of Congregational Ministry.

Practical theology approach has shifted from clerical and ecclesiastical paradigms towards a commitment to studying actions of believers in their own context. Both paradigms promoted systemic and hegemonic leadership practices within the congregational ministry. The consequence of this systemic and hegemonic leadership practices produced congregations that are accused of being either too focused on the inner ministry, making them guilty of sacralisation or too focused on the world, making them guilty of profanation. In addition, members of the congregations under such leadership practices are passive and dependent on the minister and lack initiative. Furthermore, both clerical and ecclesiastical paradigms, have adverse potential to produce ministry that is controlled by few individuals, believers that are too focused on inward ministerial activities or radical social ministry not driven by values of the gospel. To resolve the above challenges there is a need to shift towards participatory framework of ministry. In participatory framework of ministry, all believers participate in the vision and mission of the Triune God, leadership is shared and internally nurtures, equips, and disciple members to be sent into the world to witness, serve, and transform their society. The aim of this paper is to find out from the scripture possible guidelines for participatory framework of ministry that promotes radical social intervention to be used by pastors and lay leaders to practice balanced and responsible inward and outward ministry of the church. Research questions to be engaged in this paper are: why are congregations still practicing imbalanced ministry that is either inwardly or outwardly focused? What can we learn from the scripture, Exodus 3:7-8 about balanced, responsible and participatory congregational ministry that leads towards radical societal involvement? This paper will use secondary empirical data from Congregational vitality research project and qualitative literature review to analyse the Biblical text from Exodus 3:7-8.

Sibanda, Cathrine (University of Zimbabwe)

Title: Connecting Faith And Action In Harare Communities: A Reflection On Practical Linguistic Theology.

This paper examines the vital connection between faith and action within the multicultural and multilingual context of Harare, reflecting on James 2:17, which asserts, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James 2:17 emphasizes that true faith extends beyond belief; it requires meaningful steps that embody community values, inspiring positive impact through compassion, justice, and belonging. Utilising practical theology as a framework, the paper highlights the need for theology to be grounded in the realities of diverse cultures through practical linguistic models. It is the argument of this paper that language plays a

crucial role in this process. The paper highlights three linguistic aspects that help in practical theology storytelling and narratives contextualization and performative role of language. Drawing on linguistic communication theory, particularly Noam Chomsky's concepts of language as a system of signs, the paper explores how language serves as a bridge between belief and action. This paper concludes that practical theology seeks transformation, fostering positive change within individuals, families, and communities and this can be achieved through language. By thoughtfully examining linguistic practices and beliefs within multilingual and multicultural contexts, a deep connection between faith and action can be achieved. This paper invites dialogue on how to translate theological insights into action, fostering a more compassionate and flourishing world for all through language.

Smit, Stephan (South African Theological Seminary)

Title: The Effect Of Decentralised Leadership On Reaching And Discipling Non-Church-Affiliated Emerging Adults In Doxa Deo, Langeberg.

Effective leadership contributes to reaching and discipling non-church-affiliated emerging adults. Leveraging a strategy derived from a study utilizing Osmer's practical theological reflection model in 15 selected churches in Alberton, Johannesburg, South Africa, this paper discusses findings from a participant-observer's perspective where the same strategy was implemented to varying degrees of effectiveness within a different context. The paper highlights potential reasons for the varying degrees of effectiveness and proposes strategies to support the current leadership. In June 2024, the existing "Young Adult Ministry" at Doxa Deo Langeberg assigned their emerging adults into three small groups, each led by leadership couples and overseen by a young adults ministry leader that offered pastoral care to the small group leaders. Since then, the researcher, as participant observer, has received monthly updates from the young adults ministry leader and weekly updates from the emerging adult, small group leaders and selected emerging adults. Despite the absence of the young adult ministry leader due to personal matters, one of the groups, led by a more task-driven, married couple in their late 20s and early 30s, successfully planted a small group in their home. At the same time, emerging adults from this group have been involved in ministry at church and some have been baptised. Meanwhile, the other two groups, led by more people-oriented, cautious emerging adults, decreased in weekly attendance and merged to form one group. This paper suggests decentralised leadership as a strategy to effectively contribute to reaching and discipling non-church-affiliated emerging adults. In addition, it is recommended that pastoral care of emerging adult leaders must be supplemented by adequate training, clear vision casting, and accountability.

Tettey, Smith Francis Korbla (Global Theological Seminary)

Title: In Search Of Home In A World Of Displacement.

How can those displaced by wars, poverty and natural disasters find home in spaces that are hostile to foreigners and migrants. To what extent has our culture and theology influenced the exacerbation of migration and its problems? This paper reflects on the impact, causes and effects of migration and displacement on human flourishing in light of the Millennium Development Goals(MDGs) and the Africa we want. It finds that the church can play a vital role in addressing the problem of displacement and foster human flourishing.

Weber, Shantelle (Stellenbosch University)

Title: A Home For Children And Young People In Congregations And The Academy? Exploring The Implications Of The South African Child Protection Policy.

All higher education institutions in South Africa require that research conducted with children obtain ethical clearance from such institutions. The child protection policy through the children's act calls on all working

with and alongside children to serve in the best interests of the child. In our efforts to contribute to African knowledge production engaging the voices of our children; both these legislatures have increasingly placed pressure on academics and community practitioners wanting to contribute to research in and from South Africa. The tension, however, lies in the common goal to protect the rights and wellbeing of our children while at the same time advocating for their agency in local communities and academia. This chapter explores the love/hate relationship that academics and community practitioners passionate about children in our country have with institutional research ethics criterion and timelines as well as policies birthed from our Children's Act. It serves as an effort to share the challenges of research with children as researchers and highlight the concerns of children when conducting research. Priority will be given to research in theological education and child theology.

Ximba, Daniel (Psychopneumatic Institute)

Title: Practical Theology And Human Flourishing: Psychopneumatic Centric Therapy, A Theological Framework For Promoting Mental Health.

This paper examines Psychopneumatic Centric Therapy (PCT) as a theological-therapeutic model that integrates biblical truth with practical counselling strategies to promote mental health and human flourishing. PCT approaches human distress through the Situation–Belief–Outcome (SBO) model, recognising that life situations, when interpreted through distorted belief systems, can lead to mental-spiritual disorders (psychopneumases) such as addiction, anxiety, trauma, depression, and obsessive-compulsive tendencies. Grounded in the conviction that people are created in the image of God (Imago Dei), PCT seeks to restore individuals to mental-spiritual wholeness through Spirit-led belief realignment, narrative reframing, and Christ-centered healing practices. By engaging theological scholarship with empirical insight, the paper demonstrates how PCT functions in diverse socio-cultural contexts, particularly within South Africa and other Commonwealth nations. Through illustrative case studies, it shows how Spirit-empowered therapeutic processes facilitate renewed identity, spiritual clarity, and sustained transformation. In doing so, PCT affirms the role of practical theology in addressing contemporary mental health challenges while fostering hope, resilience, and flourishing communities. The study contributes to the conversation on how practical theology can respond meaningfully to mental health needs while remaining deeply rooted in the redemptive work of God.