

The Amos project: The church and the public space

"Ye the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. [Matthew 5v 13].

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Zimbabwe (ELCZ) national coordinator for Evangelism, self-reliance and Christian education Reverend Shakemore Shoko hosted a one day seminar on 15 April 2022 at Kafusi parish in Gwanda, Matabeleland South Province to teach the community and congregates about how the church should relate with nature and other people.

Dubbed the Amos Project, the seminar was anchored in the Biblical book of Amos which fosters harmony in the church, communities and nature.

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?[Amos 3v3]?" Rev Shoko asked the gathering.

He lamented that most societies are passively living where there is land pollution, degradation, confusion and hatred.

Rev Shoko said the Amos Project was also aimed at the underprivileged and the vulnerable.

"There are orphans and underprivileged in the church who do not get the opportunity to get education and a better life yet there are individuals who are able to support them in the church. No one seems to care for environment and the society it's all individualism.

"That's where the Amos project gets in, the project teaches people to be responsible citizens, to look after one another as according to the bible, it brings togetherness and oneness to all humanity and to scrap out the concept of individualism," he said.

Who, he asked, is to be blamed for these injustices that are happening within the society?

" No one!" he said rhetorically.

Rev Shoko said it is a matter of upbringing, wisdom, knowledge and education. He said there is no peace or oneness yet there are Christians in the church who are supposed to be peacemakers.

The Amos project emphasised the need to teach the Kafusi community the infinite benefits of working together for a better society and a better tomorrow. Just like the heavenly Father, the project did not discriminate the poor from the rich, Christians from the non-Christians and the elderly from the young. It accommodated every member of the society and the Lutheran church.

The Amos project runs under the theme: "The Church and the Public Space" and looked at the church and how it relates to the society, it encouraged people to be environmentally friendly, clean, smart, responsible and to care for one another. Christians were advised to help fellow brothers and sisters because they God's children – both the lost and the found. Based on Christian values and biblical teachings, the Amos Project notes that when Christians withhold their help, there are turning their backs

on God. They should make sure that their hearts are set on helping those in need at all times and such servitude is always rewarding spiritually and enriches Christian growth at individual and church level.

Rev Shoko emphasized that the goodness within the society must come with the Christians. Christians should take action and be exemplary. For example, they can organise a clean-up campaign to pick litter in the community. The church was also encouraged not to look after itself only, they should look after the community and the people who live in it. They should participate, take lead and work together with the society, helping in funerals, the poor [Amos 3v3]. The Amos project taught people to possess social skills, they should be able to deal with anger, hatred, hate speech and be the light to the community.

"The church should be the light and the salt to the community, the good should start with you meaning the church should be seen doing good to the society," Rev Shoko said.

By the end of the day the project had brought a positive and a different mindset to Kafusi community. Congregants and community members realised that they were not paying attention to the small matters that might change someone's life and they promised a change.

Mrs Ncube one of the Church members said that there were not aware how small things could make a difference to the community. She said following the eye-opening teachings of the Amos Project they will prioritise helping the poor, elderly, underprivileged and orphans in and outside the church. They will also involve the community leaders, communities and the business people

She said it was the duty of the church to reach even children at schools with the morally enriching teachings of the project, organise cleaning campaigns, pick litter, help the poor and reconstruct damaged roads and bridges.