Towards Stellenbosch as ‘the cradle of reconciliation and hope’

An incident (alleged “blackfacing”) at Stellenbosch University was met with outrage and indignation, but also with a fair amount of confusion. Was it “blackface” or not? Should blame be awarded and, if so, to whom? Who should apologise – the women who painted themselves, those who (perhaps prematurely) called for their condemnation, or both?

Church leaders of the Council for Church Cooperation in Stellenbosch met with Mr Pieter Kloppers of the University to better understand the current context and climate in our town and at our university. Mr Kloppers provided us with a valuable “fire” metaphor. He explained that having a braai and making a fire in the Western Cape’s winter will not carry much risk. Everything is wet and not prone to ignite. However, making a fire in summer and not being aware of the potential danger of sparks setting the mountains alight would not be responsible. The current “racial climate” is dry. To say “we’re just having a braai” without being sensitive and taking unusual measures of precaution, would speak of ignorance of the sensitive nature of current racial debate. Unusually high levels of awareness, sensitivity and compassion are needed.

We then turned our discussion into the direction of hope.

The SRC chairperson, Axolile Qina, said eloquently that Stellenbosch could have been regarded as a historical cradle of apartheid, but that this same Stellenbosch can be an influential cradle once again, this time around the cradle of reconciliation and hope.

We recommitted ourselves as faithful followers of Jesus to courageous conversations of listening and understanding, to compassionate support of students and to be the answer to the most important question that can be asked right now, namely, “Who should we love?”

JAN VAN ZYL
STELLENBOSCH

This material has been copied under a DALRO licence and is not for resale or retransmission.