



Almost lost in the shade of the highway and a palm tree, across from a line of industrial warehouses, stands an old chapel with an open area adjacent to it used as parking by minibus taxi drivers. The building is surrounded by a fence and looks more or less abandoned. This is the only remaining structure of the former Roman Catholic Church and college built on the former mine property, part of which was destroyed in 1958. We discover the house of a caretaker at the back of the property who informs us that this is in fact a church owned by a BaSotho preacher who also rents it to another church group, the African Gospel Church. On Sunday the choral song of the church filters into the industrial space surrounding the church.

The pastor, Albert Dlamini, of the African Gospel Church, came to Johannesburg in the mid-1980s when there was no branch of the church in the inner city: "I was coming to work in Johannesburg, but God was with me that time. I started to preach in the street, Park Station, everywhere, and people came to me." He got a job at a glass fitting centre and would preach in his free time, living in a suburb near the inner city. The late 1980s was a time in which the racial division of the group areas act was collapsing in inner city areas. "I had no space, I went all over... If God says I must go to Braamfontein, I go to Braamfontein to preach, if he says I must go to Denver, I go to Denver. When you preach Gospel, God gives you a space only, not people." In the 1990s he was employed by the Church to establish a branch in the city, but for the following decade they had no permanent base, until finally in 2009 they settled into the building which they presently rent, though they still wish to one day purchase their own building.

"It is important to have a physical space. If you haven't got a physical space for the Church, people have no chance to repent, because if you have no place, they will ask you where are you from? Where is your Church? The street is the street, a house is a house."

On the strip of land between the building and the highway we noticed a stone plaque embedded in the concrete Mooi street off-ramp commemorating the former Catholic church complex.

"St Thomas College, 26 Heidelberg Road, Village Main, Johannesburg. A symbol of the ever living seed and fountain of sound knowledge that was planted by the Dominican Nuns in the year 1939 for the education of Black girls. We, students, remember our alma mater with loving thoughts, this stone is a remembrance of the school whose vitality will live beyond 1958 when it was razed to the ground. May God Bless us all. Unveiled by the Mayor and Mayoress of Greater Johannesburg, Counsellor and Mrs. Mogase on 7 March 1998."

*Bettina Malcolmess and Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon*