

GOEDGEDACHT: A plan for survival

International funding cuts are hurting many South African organisations. One that has a plan in place for self-sustainability is the Goedgedacht Trust — with olives and weddings.

Günther Simmermacher visited the rural project in the Swartland to find out more.

SOUTH AFRICAN CHURCH organisations are facing a funding crisis, caused in the immediate term by the Trump administration's gutting of USAID and, in the longer term, by the gradual withdrawal of international development agencies from South Africa, a country seen as rich enough to care for its own needs.

The latter process has been going on for at least two decades, but when funding disappears, it is crippling for Church agencies that lack the capacity for self-sustainability. Even those that planned for the future feel the pinch severely.

One such organisation is the Goedgedacht Trust, a Catholic-founded NGO that runs programmes to develop rural communities in the Swartland region of the Western Cape. The Trust was established in 1993 when its founders, led by former Catholic Welfare & Development director Peter Templeton, bought the historic Goedgedacht Farm on the slopes of the Kasteelberg. Fittingly, the farm's name means "good thought."

Originally intended as a hub for social justice work, especially through its Goedgedacht Forums, the Trust's main focus soon became transforming the lives of farm-working communities facing deep and persistent poverty, limited opportunity, and the inequalities of South Africa's past.

The forums were reintroduced last year, with Speaker of Parliament Thoko Didiza as the keynote speaker and attended by senior politicians, academics, and journalists.

Flagship project

In 1998, the Trust launched its flagship initiative, the Path Out of Poverty (POP) programme, now known as Path Onto Prosperity. "The POP programme follows

children and young people from their earliest years through to adulthood. We offer education, nutrition, healthcare and personal development. The goal is to help break the cycle of rural poverty and its toxic social effects," Goedgedacht managing director Dr Deon Snyman told *The Southern Cross*.

"We know that one project alone isn't enough to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty, so the Trust runs a range of connected programmes open to all rural children and young people."

Over the years, the Trust has set up POP centres in Riebeeck Kasteel, Riebeeck West, Chatsworth, Riverlands, Koringberg and Porterville. Each centre serves as a community hub, offering safe spaces, meals, educational support as well as mentoring.

"The intention from the outset was that, after five years of support and development, each POP Centre would be handed back to the community, to be managed independently. This vision is now being realised, with three centres successfully transitioning to community ownership. It's a powerful step towards local empowerment and long-term sustainability," Snyman said.

Other related projects include the Youth-at-Risk Programme, which tackles bullying and supports positive



The chapel on Goedgedacht Farm. It opened in 2008.

development through school partnerships, weekend camps, counselling and follow-up reports. By addressing bullying, the programme helps remove barriers to learning, mental wellbeing and community engagement.

Goedgedacht's Critical Consciousness Programme is designed to help young people "develop the ability to reflect critically on their lives, their circumstances, and the society around them, and to take constructive action towards positive change", Snyman said.

During holidays, children benefit from safe spaces, creative and educational activities, and a daily hot meal, helping them return to school motivated and prepared. Workshops support parents and guardians in fostering strong family relationships, including Father-and-Son sessions, quarterly teacher-parent meetings, and monthly Men's Group gatherings.

The Trust also promotes environmental awareness through its Social Employment Fund, and has provided practical responses to crises, such as converting its facilities for community use during the Covid-19 pandemic.

End of funding

Recently, a large German funding agency that had supported Goedgedacht since its founding announced that all financing would cease. Snyman stressed that he fully understands the agency's



Dr Deon Snyman, the Goedgedacht Trust's managing director.



Left: One of the cottages that form part of Goedgedacht's accommodation offerings, located at a tranquil dam lake.



Right: A wedding on Goedgedacht Farm. Its hospitality services include various indoor and outdoor options, with in-house catering and a dedicated function coordinator.

reasoning and lauded its transparency and fairness — but the decision leaves a massive budget hole that cannot be filled. As a consequence, Goedgedacht has had to make retrenchments and cut some projects.

Still, the Trust has loyal local supporters and an infrastructure that will keep it going. "The founders of Goedgedacht had great foresight in setting up substructures that generate income for our projects," Snyman said. Located on a large farm between Malmesbury and the picturesque town of Riebeeck-Kasteel, Goedgedacht has expansive olive groves that produce an income stream — and also serve as symbols of remembrance.

Through the Olive Peace Grove and the recently established Justice Grove, individuals and groups can sponsor trees in memory of loved ones or to honour those who worked for justice and peace. Donations support the POP programme.

The olive tree, a traditional symbol of peace and endurance, can be said to reflect Goedgedacht's mission of hope rooted in the soil. More than 14 000 trees now cover the farm.

In 2023 and 2024, Cardinal Stephen Brislin celebrated the olive harvest Eucharist on the farm. "We presented him with Goedgedacht olive oil that was earmarked for the religious ceremonies of the archdiocese of Cape Town," Snyman said.

Remembrance of giants

The Justice Grove, inaugurated in 2023 in association with the Christian Institute, honours Christian leaders such as Archbishop Denis Hurley, Ds Beyers Naudé, Bishop David Russell and Fr Albert Nolan OP, as well as Christian activists for justice like Steve Biko, Anne Hope, Lindi Myeza, Dot Cleminshaw, Manas

Buthelezi, and Paddy Kearney.

Another significant stream of revenue in support of the Trust's projects is hospitality. Goedgedacht Farm has become a popular venue for retreats, conferences and weddings. Set amid olive groves, tranquil dams and roaming guinea fowl, the farm offers a range of comfortable self-catering accommodation scattered across the

A stream of revenue in support of Goedgedacht's projects is in the field of hospitality

property, some housed in beautifully converted barns that retain their appealing rustic character.

For those who enjoy a vigorous hike or a calm walk, maybe in a spirit of contemplation, there is a variety of signposted routes, some providing great panoramas of the rural landscape.

The peaceful environment is conducive to prayer and reflection, offering an opportunity to switch off from the hustle and bustle of daily life — even if WiFi is available for those who prefer to stay connected. When *The Southern Cross* visited Goedgedacht, a group of Buddhists was having a retreat on the farm.

Wedding venue

Goedgedacht is also an increasingly popular choice for weddings. The estate includes an interdenominational chapel, charming historic buildings, and both indoor and outdoor reception venues, including a "Tea House in a Tree" for smaller celebrations.

Up to 86 guests can stay on the farm (and there are also many lodging options in Riebeeck-Kasteel). Bridal couples benefit from full event planning, including in-house catering and a dedicated function coordinator. Scenic photographic settings abound within the olive groves, around the dam lakes, and at the early 19th-century Manor House.

Although the Goedgedacht Trust was founded by Catholics, its outlook has always been ecumenical. Snyman is only its second director, having succeeded Peter Templeton in 2019. He is a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church — and an avid reader of the Vatican website.

He sees Goedgedacht as a vehicle for "combining social justice, rural upliftment and holistic development, for building bridges of hope, and creating opportunity for those at the margins of society".

While the gap left by the end of international funding cannot be fully filled, Dr Snyman is positive that Goedgedacht's future is secure, with ongoing local support and the farm's income potential ensuring the Trust's self-sustainability.

Günther Simmermacher was a guest at Goedgedacht Farm. For more information on the Trust see goedgedacht.org and for its hospitality offerings see goedgedachtevents.org.za



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