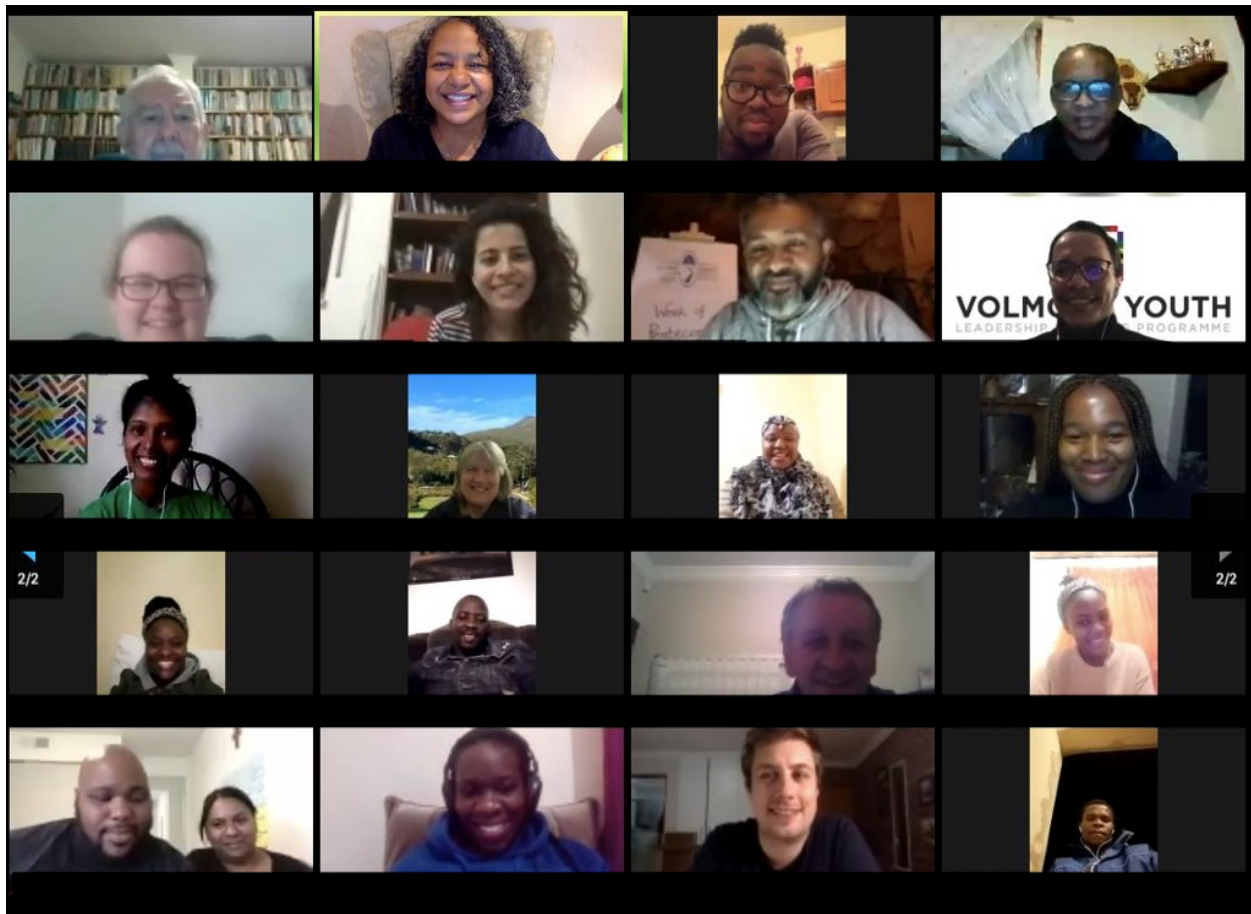


Volmoed Youth Leadership Training Program (VYLTP)

September 2020

Starting in 2016, VYLTP has held four annual youth leadership training programs. We had high hopes for the fifth cohort of young people in 2020, but Covid-19 put a stop to all our usual plans. South Africa has been on lockdown since March 27, 2020, and is not yet back to the point of safely gathering as groups and conferences.

Our decision was to move the program online, and to do so effectively, we have been meeting informally and formally with alumnae of the program to get their feedback about the long term effectiveness of the program and their ideas for online training. We held a zoom meeting with thirty-five alumnae on May 24 to both mourn and celebrate VYLTP amidst the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, and here are the photos and stories:



We mourned because we had to cancel the 2020 cohort of VYLTP. And we celebrated as we could see the faces and hear the voices of alumni from Swaziland, Kenya, Palestine, the USA, Canada and also South Africa. This was the first time that the young leaders from the first four cohorts met. We were determined “not to waste a good crisis”, as one of them said.

When this program started in 2016, it was deemed more than simply important or urgent: it was deemed to be critical that this process of raising new ecumenical leaders be started and continued in faith, hope and love despite the prevailing ecumenical atmosphere in South Africa . The “guinea-pigs” of 2016 sometimes wondered what the outcome of each week was meant to be or lead to. But even when it was explained, the challenge of living in a unique short-term transitional community proved to be difficult for most delegates as it challenged them to learn to listen, resolve conflict and forgive. Despite the challenges, it was important that we do it in order to learn from one another and what it could mean to build a wholesome community.

Listening to the life-journey of every alumnus on the call meant that every voice could be heard and acknowledged. One young nurse told us about her experience as a nurse during this time. The young Christian leader from Palestine talked about the hopelessness she experiences in Palestine as their land is soon going to be annexed. The delegate from Swaziland spoke about how he is now going back to school to further his studies, while the delegate from Kuruman spoke about how she missed working with the young people in her congregation. Those working full-time in congregations spoke about the challenges that they face there. The energy and the excitement to be on the call was clearly evident in the voices and input of all.

Building a connection between the alumni was only a start. We now hope to build strong bridges, strengthening co-operation amongst alumni, and allowing them to help shape VYLTP over the next few years in line with its vision and mission.

At the end of the call it was all summed up: we are planting seeds and we are in the business of transformation. The challenge now is to nurture the seedlings and plant new ones. Who knows what they will grow into? I know that they will give us occasion to celebrate rather than mourn.

VYLTP has also supported the Volmoed Staff Salaries project by donating to the fund to top up staff salaries which have been at 60% since lockdown began in March. We plan to create a databank to support future VYLTP participants who cannot afford data to use in the VYLTP online training, which begins in January 2021.

VYLTP is also in the process of formalizing infrastructure, writing a constitution, and the leadership team meets monthly with smaller sub committees meeting more often. We are excited about developing a hybrid program of online and hopefully in person training in 2021. A huge thank you to all our donors for your support. Check out our website for more news and writings by VYLTP faculty: <https://volmoedyouth.org.za>