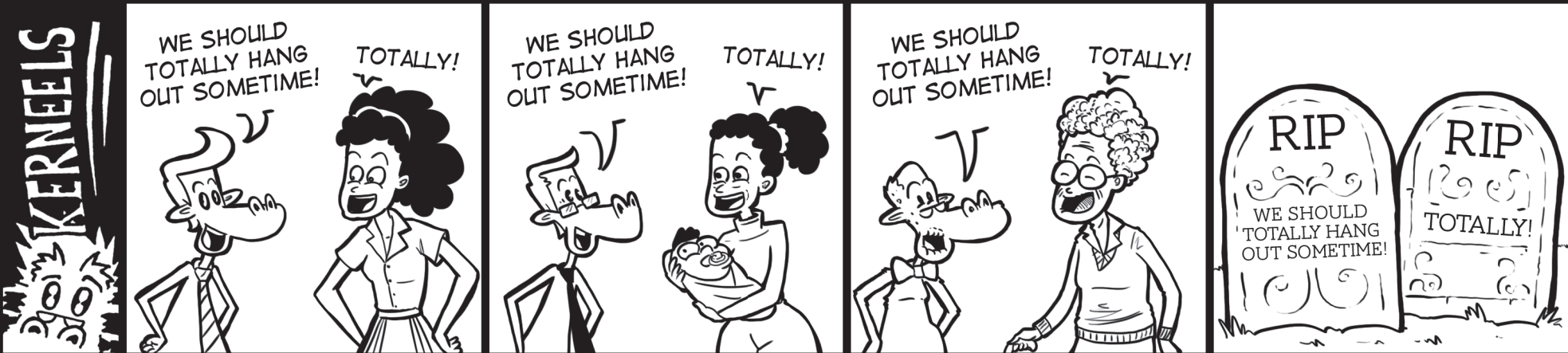




Church gunmen sentenced

Rustenburg – Despite the hefty sentence handed down to two Lesotho nationals, on charges of business robbery and four counts of attempted murder, some New Covenant Church members are still traumatised, and several had since left the church altogether. Three men, two armed, entered the church, during the Sunday service at approximately 10h45 on 19 March 2017, and opened fire on the congregation.

According to captain Elsabé Augoustides, police spokesperson, Molefe Lehole (22) and Thabiso Rankhasa (32) were sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment on Thursday 14 June 2018, for armed robbery with aggravating circumstances and both accused were declared unfit to possess a firearm. In an interview with the *Platinum Weekly*, Bishop Isaac Mokgope of New Covenant Fellowship International in Rustenburg recalled: "We heard a gunshot go off and

men yelling to lie down on the ground. Three men walked in and fired another two shots in the air, with what looked like 9mm pistols. The one gunman demanded cell phones and cash. The other armed man walked up to me and pointed his gun to my chest, demanding cash, cell phones and a firearm, upon which I replied that I have no weapons."

Members of the church were assaulted, and four members were shot while their bags were ransacked, and they were searched for valuables.

"When I saw my people bleeding, I snapped out of the initial shock and decided to take action. The two armed men were moving around, in and out of the building all the time. When both were outside at the same time, I shut the slam lock security door. They shouted something that sounded like 'Molifi is still inside!' and then took off, leaving their unarmed gang member inside the locked church. Our members quickly tied him up while the police were summoned," Bishop Mokgope said.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our members for their bravery, prayers and support. I also thank our brothers and sisters of other churches for their supporting messages, as well as our political figures for their support during this time. Thank God that no lives were lost during this ordeal," Bishop Mokgope said.

"Our congregation is shocked and traumatised beyond words. Nevertheless, now is the time to flock together and stand strong," Bishop Mokgope added. "I hope that the sentencing will bring closure to us all. To be honest, we were hoping for even harsher sentences, but we have to accept the court's decision."



Three armed men stormed a local church, during a Sunday service, and opened fire on churchgoers on 20 March 2017 in Boitekong.



Three men, two armed, entered the church, during the Sunday service at approximately 10h45 on 19 March 2017, and opened fire on churchgoers.

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TRADITIONAL HEALER ARRESTED WITH LIVE SNAKES

Rustenburg – A 21-year old Malawian national was arrested for the illegal possession of three live snakes whilst displaying the reptiles to the public in the Rustenburg Central Business (CBD) area on Monday, 18 June. According to sergeant Ofentse Mokgadi, police spokesperson, the suspect alleged to be a traditional healer, but failed to produce the necessary permits when approached and questioned. "It was further established that the suspect has entered the country illegally as he was unable to furnish the police with a passport," Mokgadi added.

The suspect will appear before the Rustenburg Magistrates' Court for the possession of live snakes.



Captain TT Ramokgadi and a snake handler confiscated the snakes from the suspect.

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Snakes confiscated from a Malawian, supposedly a traditional healer.

