

## **Presiding Bishop's Charge 2016**

Greetings to you all in the name of our Saviour.

It is a great joy to be meeting together at St. Stephen's Church, which this year celebrates 75 years of gospel ministry. Numbers of people have come to know Christ, grow in Christ and gone on to serve Christ from this place. Much of our denomination's history is also connected to this local church and we give God all the glory for what has been accomplished for the Kingdom through St. Stephen's, Claremont.

### **The State of REACH-SA**

Last year I noted, with some concern, the relative plateau in our membership, clergy and college numbers. This situation is not going to turn around overnight, but one year later there are already positive signs of action and answers to prayer. I believe the honest assessment of our situation has been a healthy reality check for us and I'm encouraged by the many conversations and proposals that have come my way in the last year. There is also evidence of much creative thinking and planning with regards to evangelism, discipleship and training which really are the three ministry pillars of our gospel work (Evangelism, Edification, Equipping). I plan to do a yearly focus on one the 6 E's in the charge. This year will be Evangelism.

I must also add how helpful it has been for me to visit many of our churches and see first hand the varied challenges and opportunities you all face. Many of our workers labour in the context of great social and financial disadvantages yet I am regularly humbled by the attitude of those same workers who continue to persevere in their task without seeking worldly attention or earthly reward. I thank our God for giving us men and women with such Kingdom hearts. To those of you who toil in trying circumstances, with little or no recognition, I assure you that the Lord knows all your labours for Him and you shall not lose your reward.

I'm particularly excited to see more and more young people involved in our churches. I have been to numerous youth, young adult and student events in the last year and have been amazed and encouraged at the sight of hundreds of young men and women with a hunger for God's Word. I have also had many conversations with gifted, young believers from a diversity of colours and cultures about the possibility of future full time ministry. This is a wonderful sign and an answer to prayer. We give thanks to God for showing us His hand on a new generation and for giving us a part to play in shaping and growing these young followers of Christ.

I also see more and more the value of regional and local church based Ministry Apprenticeship Programs and the role they play in equipping God's people for more effective service. I'm grateful to God for our hard working ministers who take time to train and mentor young workers under their charge. I know that many of you could be tempted to more comfortable overseas opportunities or to earning more money in higher paying careers but it's clear that the Kingdom of God has gripped your hearts and you willingly serve self-sacrificially because of the Jesus who sacrificed to save you. It is a great blessing to be serving the Lord with you.

I'm sure you will hear more in the George Whitefield College principal's report of the marked upswing in GWC enrolments. This is a wonderful answer to prayer and we give thanks to God for a college that is committed to the authority of God's Word as well as to the particular distinctives of our Reformed, Evangelical, Anglican denomination. We must continue to pray that our College will be used by God all the more fruitfully as we work together to equip men and women to be effective servants of the gospel in Africa.

I want to spend some time revisiting the five focus points I raised in 2016.

### **1. Personal - Strengthening our Workers**

The care of our clergy and ministry workers remains a constant concern for me. This year we gather again with faces missing from our ranks due to some or other issue that has resulted in a minister's exit from ministry. These situations are a cause of much sadness to me and also a reminder of how each of us continues to stand by God's grace alone. The combination of our own sinful hearts and the stresses and temptations of modern life do take their toll. Some of our ministers are battling issues and temptations and feel there is no one to help. Some are struggling with physical and mental troubles others are grappling with deep financial, marriage or family difficulties. There are also those who are sinking deeper into secret habitual sins. Even issues of pornography and drug addiction are not foreign to clergy.

Addressing these problems is complex. Admitting them may well be an important first step for some of us. Avoiding them is my first concern for all of us. I want to urge all our workers to 'watch your life and doctrine closely' (1Tim.4:16). Do not allow the daily disciplines to slip away. Be regular in prayer and Bible reading, avoid isolation and maintain transparency with a trusted fellow worker. Let us also avoid the sinful temptation to show ourselves as omni-competent islands of strength. Beware of pride (1Cor.10:12; Gal.6:3). It is boasting in our weakness that causes Christ's power to be seen in us (2 Cor.12:9).

Our dependence on each other is not a sign of failure. Our Saviour Himself was born reliant on a mother's care and a father's protection. Dependence actually affords us opportunity to serve one another and so glorify God. Remember that we are all called to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal.6:1,2).

In response to the Synod 2015 motion calling for recommendations on care for our workers I am glad to report that progress has been made. We are exploring a partnership with a counseling retreat centre in the Western Cape and hope to see more developments in other regions too.

Secondly on this topic I want to add a niggling concern. It is true that some are struggling to work effectively due to ill health and workload stress, but others seem to be nothing other than lazy. Some local church workers are clearly coasting and even idling. This is unacceptable for men and women who have been given such a high calling. Remember that many in our congregations give sacrificially to enable us to commit ourselves to full time gospel ministry. What an awesome privilege! God's people are right to expect us to give ourselves wholly to the task. I would strongly urge every church worker to take seriously the Bible's urging to labour faithfully for the Master (Col.1:28,29; 2 Tim.2:15; 1 Pet.5:2). It would be shameful for us to regard ministry as sheltered employment or an easy career move. It would also not be honouring to God to continue in ministry when you are clearly not gifted or willing to work at it. Part of this fault also lies with leadership not being honest and confronting situations early enough. We leaders must be willing to have the hard conversations for the ultimate good of the gospel.

## **2. Planning - Seeking Church Growth**

Last year I emphasised the importance of intentional planning as essential to moving toward church growth. Every local church should be structuring their year ahead to include community mission and evangelistic outreach. It is also good wisdom for church leaders to take time to learn tools for managing people and projects at a local church level. This kind of skill is not a Bible College responsibility but something every church leader should give some time to. Andrew Heard ([genevapush.com](http://genevapush.com)) was recently in SA and gave us very helpful seminars on leadership and growing healthy churches. You can download these sessions from the Generate website ([Generatesa.com](http://Generatesa.com)).

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of J.C.Ryle. This first Bishop of Liverpool has been a great influence to many of us over our years in the Church of England in South Africa. Many of our ministers cut their teeth on books such as Holiness, Practical Religion and Knots Untied. I recommend you

take time to read Ryle if you have not yet done so. Much of his writing and wisdom remains relevant because it is so rooted in Biblical truth.

It has been interesting to learn how Ryle went about his work in a new diocese that was poorly funded and poorly staffed. Their mission field was a city sprawling with thousands of poor working class miners and dockyard workers. His task of reaching the lost seemed almost impossible. Yet Ryle set himself to work and his methods still bear consideration. He set aside much of the day's formal and ceremonial Anglicanism and even shelved expensive plans for a cathedral. Instead he set to work on what matters most, getting the gospel to the people. Andrew Atherstone notes:

Ryle's plan was to break up the large parishes into districts of 3,500 inhabitants and to deploy a team of three gospel workers in each - a missionary curate, aided by two lay assistants (a 'Scripture Reader' and a 'Bible Woman'). He looked for them to engage in energetic door-to-door evangelism and to plant a church which should be self-supporting within five years. Liverpool was one of the poorest dioceses in the country, without the significant endowments, in the form of tithe and glebe, enjoyed by some of its older neighbours.<sup>1</sup>

Ryle's tactics paid off and the Lord grew the churches in Liverpool as masses of people were reached and won to Christ.

Notice a few things about Ryle's approach:

- a. He targeted the high population areas and broke down the challenge into **achievable goals**. He divided the parishes into smaller districts and deployed a gospel team at 'ground level'. These workers used any room available to hold gospel meetings and Bible studies as well as entering people's homes. The new churches grew from these activities.

I believe we too need to break down the vast challenge of reaching our population into achievable goals. Much work has been done in the past with regards to identifying key population areas and assessing church planting methods. Some of the challenges seem huge but breaking down tasks into bite size tasks makes it easier to get momentum going. So start a new Bible study in a new suburb before you try and start a new church.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://new.virtueonline.org/jc-ryles-evangelistic-strategy>

- b. There is also something to learn from Ryle's **evangelistic tactics**. He put trained people on the ground, Bible in hand and face to face with the people. The gospel workers became a part of the community they set out to reach as they took 'church' to the people. In this regard it has been good to see many of our local churches committed to 1-2-1 relational evangelism and discipleship. Richard Borgonon's recent South African seminars on the [Word121](#) studies have been a welcome help in this regard. I commend this material to you as a vital tool for your outreach and discipleship cabinet.
- c. Ryle used **lay workers** as part of his evangelism and outreach teams. Its interesting to note that this same mixed gender, 3 person home evangelism strategy has been used globally, with great success, by the EEIII evangelism program. I'm pleased to see a resurgence of interest in the new EEII material. Some of our churches as well as GWC will be implementing this course in 2017. The strength of EEIII is that it includes "on the job training". This should be an obvious tactic because evangelism demands we actually evangelise and not just learn about it. I have yet to be convinced of any better way of learning to share the gospel and I encourage every one of our local churches to be intentionally training *and* doing evangelism as part of their yearly calendar. It should be every local church's strategy to be teaching the gospel publicly *and* from house to house (Acts 20:20).
- d. One other thing to note about Ryle was his absolute **heart for the lost** regardless of their social standing. The class system was a huge divide in 19th century and was deeply ingrained in society. It's not that hard to see similarities to our own history. Ryle's words are still relevant:

"I never will admit for a moment that the working classes in Lancashire are not to be won to Christ, if the proper means are used. It is false to say that naturally they are a bit more inclined to infidelity or immorality than other classes. They are all descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve, and are all born with the same hearts and consciences as the highest and noblest in the land. But they are what they are, apparently Godless and non-worshippers, simply because they are 'let alone,' never visited, never spoken to, never dealt with lovingly, as Christ dealt with the Samaritan woman. They are a field which, if rightly cultivated, is capable of bearing a rich harvest to the glory of God." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ryle, J.C. Charges and Addresses - Light by Design.net Kindle (loc.1304)

In our country we continue to struggle with prejudice that has seen racism elevated again and again to levels of national debate. Scandalous tweets and hate speech have been regularly highlighted often overshadowing the good relations the majority of our country pursues and enjoys. It must certainly go without saying in this Christian gathering but I say it now to put it on record. No racism (subtle or overt) is acceptable among ministers of the gospel in REACH-SA. We must do *all* that we can by *all* means possible to reach *all* the people of our country for Christ.

This connects us to my next point.

### **3. Partnership - Building Gospel Work**

I have continually called for cross cultural partnerships as an effective way forward in a country with such vast economic disparity. As I have travelled around I have been thrilled to see evidence of strong gospel relationships between our suburban and township churches. I know that there is much more to be done and crossing cultural, social and ethnic boundaries does not happen easily. Homogenous groups come naturally and pragmatic desire for church growth may even encourage such an approach. Yet in Christ we are called to express our diversity in unity and so we must do so intentionally. A vibrant, ethnically diverse, local church is a powerful witness to a country still struggling with division and prejudice. I pray that our God will make us more and more a reflection of the united Body of Christ to the world around us.

In considering partnership I also want to highlight the benefits of creative gospel partnership through establishing community projects and mercy ministries. Many of our township or inner city contexts can be reached for Christ through creches, day care centres, feeding schemes, clinics and schools. I commend the yearly [Love Trust](#) Conference to you as a great opportunity to hear and learn more about reaching our communities through education initiatives.

Our universities are also essential targets for evangelistic attention. Many people in ministry today can trace their conversion to their university or young adult years. We would be foolish to ignore such a key sector of our country's population. During this synod meetings will be taking place to discuss ways to strengthen our partnership and focus resources on building a more effective and unified gospel network on our university campuses. I particularly encourage all student workers to attend those meetings.

#### **4. Planting - Widening our REACH**

I am happy to report that the New Projects Fund has benefited from a healthy surplus this year and for this we give much praise to our God. You will hear more on this during the financial report. In these difficult economic days God's provision is not to be taken for granted. I am also grateful to God for our local church congregations who continue to pay their levies. Your commitment makes you privileged participants in the work of planting and supporting new gospel works. One encouraging result of this New Projects plan is that it shows us it is possible to manage our current financial model in such a way that we can set aside significant funds for gospel work in our poorest communities and key population areas. I believe there is even more we can do in the future, but this is a promising start.

The real challenge now is for local churches to put their teams together and get working. There has already been plenty of work done in identifying key population centres and many strategy and planning meetings have been happening. I've also had some promising exploratory meetings with various local church groupings who have an eye on future church plants. Remember, it's not up to the denomination to plant churches. Local churches plant local churches. Our REACH-SA trustees have helped to set aside some 'start up' financial resources, but brothers and sisters, the ball is now in your court.

#### **5. Praying - Acknowledging our dependence**

This seems such an obvious point to emphasise. Yet from my own experience it's often the biggest struggle. I'm concerned that prayer does not have the same urgency in our churches as it did in former years. I'm also not seeing it modelled or taught to our congregations. I once asked a large church youth group if any of them had family devotions or Bible time in their home. Not a single hand was raised. Has the Christian culture of family and corporate prayer also been swallowed up by our increasingly distracted society? I myself have been recently rebuked for too often reaching for my cell phone before my prayer diary in the mornings.

"Unless the Lord builds the house the workers labour in vain" (Ps.127:1). We cannot work unless God works in us, therefore we must pray. In the new year I intend to renew our focus on the annual Ascension Day of Prayer (and fasting). I also want to urge our regions to make adequate time for group prayer during regional meetings and gatherings. Our country needs revival and we must be persistently praying for God to be at work in our land. The Great evangelists of the past recognized the power of prayer and always recruited intercessors for fervent prayer during gospel preaching events. And the Lord answered their requests! Prayer and evangelism are inseparable.

Before we look to the year ahead I want us to reflect on something we possibly take for granted. You will notice that this charge and our Synod agenda contains little or nothing to raise the eyebrows. It's highly unlikely that our synod discussions will make headlines in any newspapers.

We are not meeting this week to clash over the authority of the Bible or the exclusivity of Christ. We have no contentions over the definition of marriage or the sinfulness of fornication and homosexual practice. We are not fighting over liberation theology or debating the ethics of abortion and euthanasia. Other denominations have found themselves deeply divided over these issues and many are fracturing. The Anglican church is, of course, right in the middle of such battles and is, to all intents and purposes, a deeply divided communion. But here at the REACH-SA synod we are talking about the gospel and how we can more effectively reach the lost and disciple the found. Praise God!

Yes we must thank God for our gospel unity but we must also guard against complacency. I suspect that greater pressure will come our way as society swings further and further away from Biblical values. Opposition to the Evangelical faith is becoming more militant. We are also surrounded by many priests who say what the itching ears of society want to hear. We must be ready and equipped to guard the gospel and not shy away from tackling the tough issues of the day. To that end we can also be thankful for a Bible college that provides us with sound Biblical training and clear Reformed scholarship. We can also be grateful for the broader Anglican Evangelical network which helps and supports us through fellowship and shared resources. May the Lord continue to keep us united in the gospel and committed to living by our motto: "God's Word above all things".

### **Looking Ahead**

Next year will mark 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In October 1517, Martin Luther famously nailed his 95 Theses on the Wittenberg church door and set off a chain of events that has changed the world. I anticipate that this historic milestone will garner little interest from the non Christian world and perhaps not much more from the Christian world. I also suspect that whatever publicity the Reformation does receive will be largely negative.

Certainly we know better than that. Our Reformed Evangelical Anglican Church in South Africa has continually stood firm on the doctrines that the great Reformers rediscovered and proclaimed. Our God has graciously brought great returns from the faithful preaching of His Word.

The Reformation also had a ripple effect on society. As the Word of God spread, hearts were changed for Christ. In turn priorities changed. Education became important, care for the poor and the sick also improved. Society changed as souls were saved. But we must not miss the heart of it all - the return of the gospel to the people. The message of justification by grace through faith reverberated across Europe and on into the world. We must not forget or play down what God accomplished through the Reformation.

Some circles are making noise about the 500th anniversary marking the end of the Reformation. I believe this is not the case. The gospel of justification by grace through faith is still the separation point between true believers and mere religious observers. It also continues to be the great divide between Protestants and the Roman Catholic church. We cannot relegate the essence of the gospel to a minor difference. We hold to the Reformation cry that sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, through Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

The Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God and is our final authority, not human reason, not modern society and not the Church. The message of the Bible is about what God has done for us not what we must do for God. May God help us never to compromise on this salvation truth.

Through the years the doctrine of justification has endured much attack intentionally and subversively. Yet God in His kindness has preserved and grown His church on the backs and blood of those first Reformers. We owe a great debt to Luther, Calvin, Cranmer and a myriad of other witnesses who put their lives and comfort second to the cause of Christ. We owe it to them to examine our own lives and ask of ourselves how greatly we value this precious gospel of justification by faith.

That a holy God loves sinners like me is an astounding truth that runs contrary to every sinful thought of the fallen mind. But God has shone His light in our hearts and by grace awakened us from the dead and brought us to life in Christ. We would be foolish (nay wicked) not to do all that we can to share the light of Christ's saving grace with a dark and lost world around us.

To that end, this is my challenge to you for 2017 and the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation.

**#REACH500**

**To put it simply, the goal I give to every local church is to share the gospel with 500 new people in 2017.**

I am not talking about church attendance, but intentional face to face sharing of the gospel through 1-2-1 meetings, home evangelism, evangelistic events (with record of responses) and similar tactics. You will need to be creative and courageous in your outreach approach. You will need to take time to assess your community and use the resources at your disposal. Yes, use door to door and traditional evangelistic events but also look for the doors that our society and culture unknowingly gives us. There are many opportunities on our doorstep (literally). Did you know that the PokemonGo game is bringing teenagers to the front doors of our church buildings? In this gaming app, every church is a Pokemon Gym or PokeStop. This means many teenagers are visiting your church property every day. (If you don't know what I'm talking about ask the nearest teenager.) My own local church had its first Pokemon visitors to youth some weeks ago. What are you doing to invite these welcome trespassers to hear the gospel? Maybe try offering free Wi-Fi or free coffee? Maybe have some outdoor activity that provides opportunity for people to connect. Be prayerfully thinking about creative ways to engage people with the gospel.

A statistic I heard from the Billy Graham Organization is that on average 5% of people who heard the gospel became followers of Christ. This means that (under God) if you share the gospel with 500 people in 2017 you could have 25 new believers in your church in 2018. I believe this is a target every one of us could aspire to reach, even smaller congregations could partner with others to achieve this goal.

It's important to also maintain a culture of relational outreach in our local churches. Statistics show that about 80% of new visitors come because of a friend's invitation.<sup>3</sup> That teaches us something about the importance of a people loving and welcoming local church family. We naturally become inward looking so we must constantly work against that tendency because the Gospel drives us to be outward looking (Matt.28:19f). You may also need to do some practical assessment of your local church context. Is your venue "user friendly"? Will it be easy for a visitor to enter and be shown a seat. Is there something a newcomer will not understand or find off-putting? Sometimes we can be so used to an in-house obstacle that we don't even realize it's a deterrent to a visitor.

We must also harness the internet and social media culture which holds so much attention for people today. Lets use it to spread news of gospel events. Recruit people in your church who know how to use advertising methods and graphic design tools. Produce good quality online tracts, blogs and pictures for

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.evangelismcoach.org/2012/personal-invitations-to-church-are-most-effective/>

people to see. We live in a very visual and multi-media age. Lets take advantage of it. Make sure you also share the images of your events and activities so we can encourage and pray for each other. Its also good to share ideas for evangelism for the rest of us to try too. I look forward to seeing lots of #REACH500 posts and pics in 2017.

Brothers and sisters, let us make 2017 a year of Evangelism. There will be numerous events celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in various ways. We too should rejoice in the rediscovery of Grace. I can see no better way of celebrating Luther than by giving all of our efforts and harnessing all of our resources to proclaim the gospel of justification by grace through faith to a whole new generation living in our beautiful land and continent.

Lord give us Africa for Jesus. Amen.