

Synod 2015 Charge

Dear Friends

I greet you all in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I'm unsure whether I'll be bringing you this year's charge in my capacity as Chairman of the Leadership Committee or as the next Presiding Bishop. In either case the responsibility is a great privilege and I accept this role with much fear and trembling. I'm well aware of my own inadequacies and I am absolutely reliant on the enabling Spirit of God for the task. I value most deeply your regular prayers as we go forward as fellow servants of the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

This synod will see new faces at the chairman's table, it's illustrative of the fact that many of our stalwart servants have retired or gone to be with the Lord. I write this charge still saddened by the sudden passing of Rev Jeremiah Zondi and hope you will continue to keep his family in your prayers. This is life in our world, we are all perishable pilgrims on our way to glory. We must not forget that we too will very quickly pass the baton to another. Let us keep that perspective in mind as we conduct our discussions and make our decisions this week. There is an urgency to see souls won to Christ and we dare not be distracted from this task.

This will be the first time in over 50 years that Rev Brian Cameron will not be present at a Synod. We give grateful thanks to God for his committed service and ask the Lord to keep him and Thy fruitful for His service. His retirement has left big shoes to fill and I am grateful that we have a new Administrator, James Schonegevel, who is clearly the right man for the task.

I would also like to pay tribute to Bishop Des Inglesby who helped steer CESA into the REACH-South Africa era and did much to move our denomination forward. We saw many initiatives to improve our training standards (the L.Min course for Curates) and develop new leadership structures. The fact that we now have seven Bishops and two new

regions is a tribute to his vision. I trust you will all continue to pray for Des' health and for his and Jenny's continued usefulness to the work of the Kingdom.

This year has given me opportunity to reflect more on our common ministry within REACH-SA. I have had some time to consult with fellow leaders as well as meet and discuss our work at various formal and informal meetings. This leadership transition has afforded us an opportunity to pause and assess ourselves. Who are we and where are we going? I believe we must measure ourselves with honest eyes, as the Lord would have us. Let us celebrate the Kingdom progress to His glory but let us also take responsibility and action in places where we are failing to answer His call.

I would like us take a moment to reflect on our Identity and Practice.

WHO ARE WE?

At Synod 2011, Bishop Des Inglesby succinctly summarized our identity in the **10 Distinctives**. Let us briefly recall them:

1. We are a Word centred church.

The Bible occupies the primary place of authority in our denomination. This is expressed in our motto: 'God's word above all things'.

2. We are an Evangelical church

Holy Scripture carries the final word, not "the church" nor any human institution. God works by His Holy Spirit through His Word to bring us to Christ and keep us in Christ.

3. We are a Protestant church.

We believe in the right of every believer to read, understand and obey the Scriptures. We hold to the priesthood of all believers.

4. We are a Reformed church

We stand in the shadow of the great Reformers and hold to the heart cry of the Reformation: "By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone and to the glory of God alone."

5. We are a Missional church

We believe in the Great Commission. Jesus is the only way of salvation for the world. Therefore, we are Evangelistic and Missionary in our outlook.

6. We are a Confessional church

The Church of England is a church that uses confessions of faith to express our beliefs according to the teaching of the Bible.

7. We are a Covenantal church

We understand Scripture to teach God's one single saving covenant with His people begun with Abraham. This covenantal theology finds expression in our church practice, most notably in infant baptism.

8. We are an Episcopal church

We see Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons as a part of a church government structure that is agreeable to Scripture.

9. We are a Liturgical church

We value and use set liturgy (confession, prayer, praise) in public services.

10. We are an Anglican Church

The 39 Articles and the 1662 Book of Common Prayer are the touchstone of genuine Anglicanism. We hold unswervingly to those foundations.

It follows that we consider how this works out in practice.

WHAT ARE WE ABOUT?

In 1999 Bishop Frank Retief memorably outlined the 6E's to help us build healthy ministry in our local churches. They are still part of our professed vision and remain an excellent measure for our gospel communities. You will find a full version of the 6E's on our [REACH-SA website](#). Let me give you a condensed summary and reflect on their ongoing application:

1. EXALTATION

Our understanding of the gospel is that it will culminate and consummate in the worship, adoration and praise of God the father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now in part, in fullness in eternity (1 Cor.15:28; Rev.4:11). Our goal is that God is Exalted (or Glorified) through all we do as servants of the gospel.

2. EVANGELISM

We are committed to ongoing, unceasing, Biblical evangelism. An evangelistic edge should sharpen every aspect of local church ministry. We must prayerfully seek to use every Biblical means to win souls to the Saviour. This includes Church Planting, evangelistic discipleship (1-2-1), training, local and regional outreach programs as well as foreign missions.

3. EDIFICATION

Consistent expository Bible teaching is the most effective way for God's people to be built up in their most holy faith. We gather together to encourage and edify one another with the Word of Christ. This is also seen in the outworking of the Word in our lives as we love and care for one another.

4. EQUIPPING

God's ministers are called to "equip the saints for works of service" (Eph.4:12). Everyone in our church family needs to be discipled and trained in Christian service according to their gifts. Discipleship and lay ministry training should be an integral part of local church activity and a key responsibility of the ministers in that church.

5. EMPLOYING

Every local church should have a team of gospel workers. This involves more than the need to employ full time pastoral staff. Many of us are overlooking a vast resource in our lay members and volunteers. It's my

conviction that we need to revive our “lay-reader” office in a way that allows us to train and employ a wide variety of (paid and volunteer) workers in our churches.

6. EXPORTING

Local churches cannot ignore the missionary call of Christ. We are all to be resource centres for sending and supporting missionaries and gospel workers in our neighbourhoods *and* in the nations. A local church with no vision for mission is failing the Great Commission. Our mission includes taking the gospel to the poor and marginalized with all the care and compassion that context demands.

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My brothers and sisters, when I reflect on our Identity and Practice I rejoice that God has placed me in a denomination gifted with such a sound lifeboat in which to be fishers of men. But we need to ask a further question of ourselves today. If this is our confessed Identity and Practice, then what are we actually doing about it?

WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT?

To put it plainly, our statistics don't paint an encouraging picture of church growth. In a survey of the last 10 years, our official membership figures have remained largely static, with a slight increase in clergy figures. We also note an alarming decline in the numbers of ministry candidates being sent to GWC.

Diagram 1:
Membership

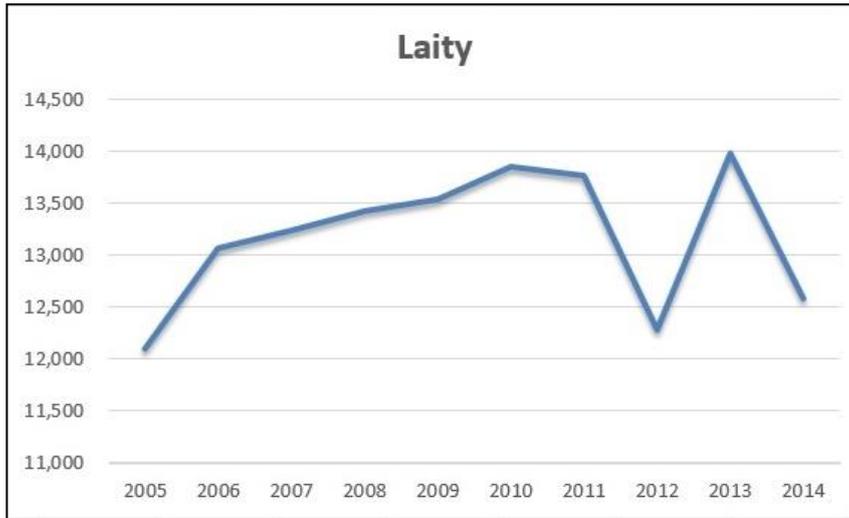


Diagram 2:
Clergy

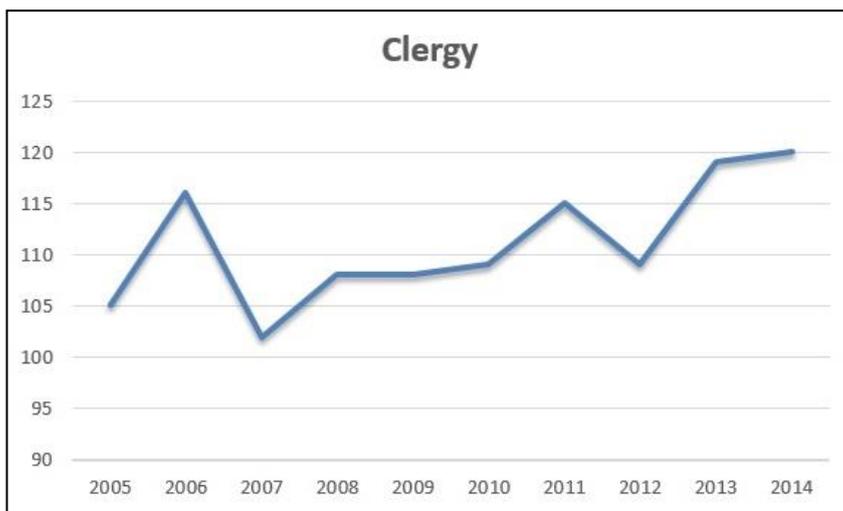
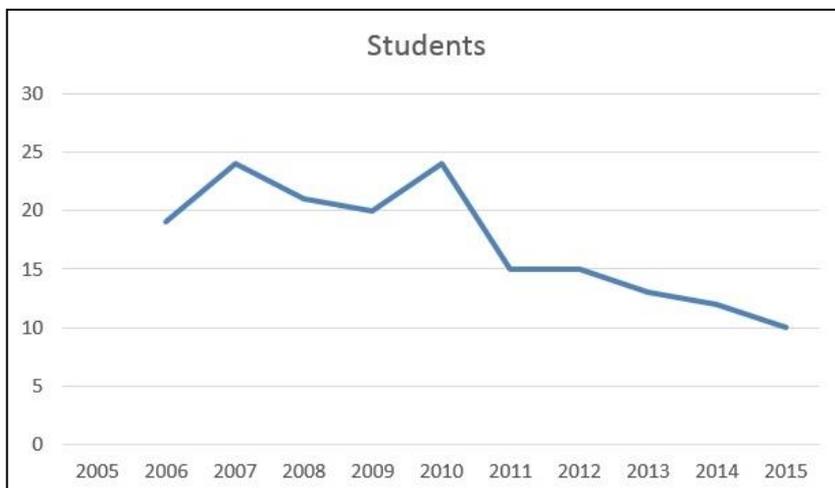


Diagram 3:
**GWC - REACH-SA
Student Enrolments**



It's probably true that the membership numbers only represent a portion of our congregations because of inaccurate record keeping or the high numbers of adherents. It is also true that local churches *are* reporting gospel conversions and discipling new believers. Overall, however, the figures are concerning.

Even with this basic survey and its imperfect measurements, its clear that we are not seeing significant growth in membership, ministry candidates, clergy or new churches. It is also concerning that we are not seeing much growth in our ministry to poorer communities, townships and new population centres. Our regional leaderships have identified several key areas where we have little or no gospel ministry. Soweto (Gaut), Mdantsane (E.C), the Cape Flats (W.C), Newcastle (KZN), Bethlehem (FS) and many other similar places.

Some may say that church is not about numbers but I would venture to suggest that the Gospel teaches us otherwise. God's declared will for the world is that He 'wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim.2:4). Does the lack of growth reflect a fault in our ministry model or denominational structure? Or could it be that an evangelistic passion no longer drives us as it once used to? Are we not concerned for the lost millions who face an eternity in Hell? Have we grown complacent in our passion for winning souls to Christ? Are we perhaps also being worn down by the economic and social pressures of our day? Or have we become like the theologically strong Ephesian church and lost our first love (Rev.2:1-7)? I ask these questions of myself as much as I ask them of you.

In seeking a way forward, I have greatly appreciated the help of our Generate team in guiding and resourcing our efforts at church growth. Recent formal and informal clergy gatherings have helped me gain an understanding of the obstacles and opportunities we face. In assessing our strengths and weak-nesses. Here are some common answers that emerged.

Strengths

- Expository Preaching and Teaching (The Word is central to our activities)
- Denominational Unity (We are a close knit fellowship of churches)
- Theological Strength (GWC; Ministry Conferences etc.)

Weaknesses

- Lack effective strategy for reaching total population (e.g. poor, townships)
- Raising a diversity of gospel workers (more representative of population)
- Evangelism / Mission / Outreach - not finding the mark

I'm sure we could add more to both lists. It also must be noted that some of us are doing better than others on these points. Nevertheless, it's clear we have some work to do as a fellowship of gospel minded churches.

The good news is that we are not at the bottom of the bell curve. With some intentional and timely strategy we can make upward progress by God's grace.

I certainly do not have all the answers, I am also still finding my feet in this new responsibility. However, as an initial response I would like to leave you with four action steps that I hope will help us break deadlocks and move forward. (I ask your indulgence for one more alliterated list in the hope that it will aid memorization.)

Action Plan

Personal: I'm convinced we need first and foremost to examine our own hearts. Perhaps our frustrated progress is a discipline from the Father (Heb.12:4-12)? Some of us may need to repent of complacency, sinful habits or selfish ambition. Is there still prejudice lingering in some of our hearts? Are some of us still too ego or status driven to be servant hearted?

Regardless of what people may think of you in your public ministry the question some of us need to ask is: What does my wife or husband or family think of me? Am I the same in public as I am in private?

It's also concerning to see how some technological advances, as helpful as they are, are also hindering many believers from growing in His Word. There is a dark side to modern television, media and internet that is capturing an alarming number of believers. Our society is rapidly (and aggressively) moving away from Biblical moral values and we are being flooded with sensuality and pornography at every turn. We ministers are not immune to its temptations. The Apostle Paul urged Timothy to "watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Tim.4:16). If we separate our lives from our teaching we place ourselves in great peril. An ungodly pastor is an anomaly the world has seen more than enough of. I also urge all ministry workers to beware of isolation, I know from experience how dangerous this is. If you have not done so, I encourage you to form prayer partnerships and be accountable to a fellow trustworthy co-worker or mature Christian friend. We should not be afraid to confess our weaknesses to one another in order that the all sufficient Grace of our Lord may be powerfully seen in us (2 Cor.12:9,10).

Recommended Reading: "Dangerous Calling" - Paul David Tripp; "You can change" - Tim Chester; "Holiness" - J.C. Ryle

Planning: I'm concerned that a number of us are drifting or struggling to make progress. I feel for fellow workers who labour alone or with very little help. Relentless ministry pressure can mean that we enter "survival" mode and fail to make progress. Many of us feel that we are chasing our tails in our ministries. I believe that planning makes a huge difference in motivating and sustaining direction. I encourage all church leaders to set gospel goals and plan their steps. Having a purpose gives us direction and

also helps us shed the unnecessary work that other people often offload on us.

Begin by diarizing a vision and planning week with key leaders and partners. It's worth taking one week of planning to make the other 51 more effective. Make purposeful plans for church outreach, mission partnership and targeted expository preaching series. It's important for us to regularly assess where our church communities are at and make plans for gospel progress.

Recommended reading: "The Trellis and the Vine" – Colin Marshall and Tony Payne; "Everyday Church" – Tim Chester and Steve Timmis; "Going the Distance" – Peter Brain

Partnership:

Regional Partnership: Resources are a struggle for us all. On our own, many of us just cannot find enough time or money to train workers, conduct outreach projects or plant churches. It goes without saying that we can do more together than apart.

We live in a country with one of the largest financial disparities in the world. This leaves us with many inequalities between our local churches. We must develop more creative and adventurous ways to bridge this gap. It should be unthinkable for comfortable suburban churches to ignore the plight of brothers and sisters struggling with far fewer resources in much larger population areas.

Denominational Partnership: I believe a proper partnership mentality will help remove an "us and them" mindset. Its not you and the denomination, we are all REACH-South Africa, its our church family and we are all working together in partnership for the Gospel. We cannot make progress if we are building individual kingdoms instead of God's Kingdom.

Let us make good use of our REACH-SA family resources. One of the positives with our current structure is that we are not an admin heavy denomination. This helps us move much of our funding to the frontlines of ministry. This year I expect to see a particularly healthy financial report which means that any surplus will be directed back to the regions for ministry use. I believe there may even be enough to help launch at least one new gospel work in each region.

If we are going to harness these type of resources effectively there will need to be selfless collaboration for the sake of the gospel. We will need a united strategy to harness our resources effectively. During this Synod there will be breakaway sessions where delegates from the different regions will meet and discuss the various opportunities that exist in their context. I encourage you all to attend and contribute to the discussions.

Over this coming year I will also ask all the regional leadership to conduct an audit of their support commitments. Some of our ministries need to move from maintenance mode to missional mode. Are we using our material and people resources to the best gospel use? This may mean cutting some funding for unproductive or dying projects and rerouting funding to support new gospel initiatives in population growth areas. Friends, we need to ask some hard questions. Do some radical changes need to be made? Are we ready to take risks for the gospel?

The solutions will not be without difficulty but we cannot maintain the current status quo. We all need to work together. Our God is calling us to take the Gospel to all the nations *and* to all the people of our nation. uNkulunkulu uthi masihambise iVangeli ezizweni zonke, nalana kwesethu isizwe.

Modimo wa rona o re biletsa ho isa Evangedi ho ditjhaba tsohle Le ho batho bohle ba setjhaba sa rona.

Planting: Church Planting seems to be daunting to some of us. It also has a risk of becoming a 'cure all' solution to our problems. Perhaps the perceived cost of a church plant puts many of us off. Some out of the box thinking may be needed here. A local church could begin by planting a second service. Perhaps even in a different venue? A strategically placed Bible Study group could become a future church plant. Some churches have had some gospel success by planting an evening service in a local coffee shop or shopping mall. Other church plants began as Day Care Centres, Adult education projects, Pre-primary schools etc. Planting may also mean "re-planting". It may be that some of us have to re-jig our church to reach a changing demographic. Some of you have decided on a new name for your local church or new logo and service times. Renovations and other practical building changes have also proved to be helpful in giving our members more confidence to invite friends to hear the gospel. One church reported an increase in attendance just by switching from instant coffee to filter coffee!

There are many creative ways to help us reach our communities with the Gospel if we will take the time to be more intentional in our outreach. Our Generate team have also done much to help us through conferences, workshops and resources. I gratefully urge them to continue in their efforts. Remember, we do not change the Gospel message, but we need to consider new ways to get more people to hear it.

Resources: www.thegospelcoalition.org ; thegospelpartnerships.org.uk
genevapush.com ; www.redeemercitytocity.com

Prayer: 'Unless the LORD builds the house, the workers labour in vain' (Psalm 127:1). How can we even begin to make progress if we do not fall to our knees before the Lord of the harvest? We must be fervent in prayer at a personal and corporate level. Prayerless ministry is a contradiction and a reflection of our own unbelief. Church history teaches us that prayer was the aroma surrounding all the great revivals of the

church. It will not be different with us. At the end of this charge I will call us all to our knees as we implore God to help us achieve this humanly impossible task. May the Lord be pleased to hear us and accomplish His work even through unworthy servants like us.

Recommended Reading: "Prayer and the Voice of God" – Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne; "A Call to Spiritual Reformation" – D.A. Carson

A final word to my fellow pastors. In the light of this charge, it must not be assumed that the preaching of the Word is just one aspect of our work that needs attention. It is the very core of our calling and cannot be compromised. Give yourselves to continued study, prayer and preparation because God is still pleased to save people through the 'folly of what we preach' (1 Cor.1.21 ESV). Our God brings people to faith through the hearing of His Word (Rom.10:17) and we dare not neglect this high office in favour of some other more attractive, multi-media solution. Let us not take this strength of our denomination for granted but work all the more fervently at our task. I ask all of you to pray for the proclaimed Word to find fruitful soil and for God to raise up faithful servants of Christ who will carry on our God given task.

May our God give us more men like George Whitefield in our pulpits today.

J.C. Ryle says of him: "Whitefield preached a singularly pure gospel. Few men, perhaps, ever gave their hearers so much wheat and so little chaff. He did not get up to talk about his party, his cause, his interest, or his office. He was perpetually telling you about your sins, your heart, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, the absolute need of repentance, faith and holiness, in the way that the Bible presents these mighty subjects. 'Oh the righteousness of Christ!' he would often say; 'I must be excused if I mention it in almost all my sermons.' Preaching of this kind is the preaching that God delights to honour."

(Christian Leaders of the 18th Century – J.C. Ryle; Banner of Truth. p.51)

My brothers and sisters, may I be so bold as to ask you not to give this charge polite applause and then forget about it. May God be pleased to use what is true and necessary to spur us on in the task of seeking the lost and discipling the found. Let us fall on our knees together and ask God to give us Africa for Jesus. iNkosi inibusise. Amen.