

Synod 2018

Presiding Bishop's Charge

Greetings to you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

On this 80th anniversary of the adoption of our CESA Constitution, I'm reminded of the many trials and challenges that our forerunners faced and overcame, with God's help, to bring us to where we are today. By His grace we stand today as a strong fellowship of Reformed Evangelical Anglican churches who, along with our College (GWC) are making significant ministry impact not just on Evangelical witness in SA but across the African continent. Yes, there have been many mistakes made and setbacks aplenty, but, in God's kindness, we have also seen wonderful growth as the Word of God has been faithfully proclaimed by gifted servants raised up by God to reach hearts and win souls for Christ. Many of us gathered here are beneficiaries of the faithfulness of those who served before us. For this we give God grateful thanks.

1. REACHING SOUTHERN AFRICA

³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints ⁵because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶that has come to you. It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has among you since the day you heard it and came to truly appreciate God's grace.

(Colossians 1:3-6 CSB)

Whatever particular methodology and church practice we adopt in our attempts to reach our communities, it's clear that gospel proclamation must be at the very core of what we do. Without the Word of Truth being faithfully proclaimed we will not see faithful followers of Jesus. The Scriptures teach us that gospel fruit is seen in a church community living by faith in Christ and love for Christ's people that flows from their hope of eternal life in Christ.

My task in these first years as Presiding Bishop has largely been to assess how fruitful our local churches really are and to see how best our denominational structures can be harnessed to help make gospel growth happen all the more effectively. The "big three" that I regularly use to assess our effectiveness are Evangelism (Mission), Discipleship (Maturity) and Training (Ministry). I'm also conscious that Magnification and Membership need attention within this context and believe that Leadership should be the sixth aspect of this popular 5M assessment grid.

i. Evangelism

You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. (Acts 20,21 NIV)

Evangelism was a focus of my first charge and essentially the key activity required for ongoing church growth and church planting. It is well noted that the first signs of a dying church are absence of intentional evangelistic activities. There have also been numerous [articles](#) and [blogs](#) noting the decline of intentional evangelism in the local church. I am not talking about the end of revivalist style altar calls, but a decline in Christian concern for the lost as part of the relational fabric and ministry goals of a local church.

One of the overlooked evangelistic strengths of the local church lies in its potential as an authentic redeemed community. A place of genuine, loving relationships. This is something that is surprisingly rare in our social media society. We live in an age where people can have 1000 online friends and be painfully lonely. Fibre optic fellowship is no substitute for face to face personal relationships. Cultivating a culture of relational evangelism is essential for our cyber age church. A simple survey of your own congregations will probably show that the largest majority attended because of a friend or family member's invite rather than a Google search or Facebook invite. Gospel conversations among friends and acquaintances are still one of the most fruitful evangelistic activities. We as pastors, gospel workers and church leaders ought to be taking the lead in practicing, modelling and mentoring others in gospel relationships.¹

It is true that many aspects of society have changed over the years as people become more isolated and polarized. The mood of western society grows more aggressively secular. Accepted moral values move ever further away from Biblical standards (and in some sectors these are even held up as evil). And yet, many people lie awake at night crying out for a merciful God.

Our gospel brings hope to a fallen, failing world that constantly puts on a brazen face to hide its broken heart. This fallen world desperately needs Christ, we have been given that proclamation commission. Let us not fail to answer Christ's call.

¹ Col.4:5,6; 2 Tim.2:2; 1 Pet.3:15,16;

ii. Discipleship

“Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

(Colossians 3:16 CSB)

Last year I pushed on this vital aspect of local church life because it is inseparable from evangelism. Admittedly, it did not get the same follow up as our REACH500 campaign and that fault is largely mine. It’s also true that many of you have implemented discipleship initiatives as the meat of your ministry and I commend and encourage you to persevere in this. The real health of a local church is measured by its disciples more than by its fringe adherents. If we are merely evangelising to get professions of faith and Sunday crowds, then we have failed in our God given task. We are sent to make disciples, not just to get decisions. The New Testament picture of a local church shows God’s people gathered together around God’s Word, growing in the knowledge of God and the service of others. This is accomplished as gifted teachers teach and equip the saints for service and so build the body toward maturity in Christ.²

The key to progress here lies in commitment to long term discipleship lifestyle. The times, however, are against us. Digital distraction and short term attention is the norm in society. Many [studies](#)³ are showing the dumbing down dangers of smart phones. The digital lifestyle is affecting committed, long term discipleship. Entertainment is trumping education and we are all the poorer for it.

We are already seeing shorter commitment expectations for discipleship and training programs in local churches. It’s rare for people to attend church more than once on a Sunday but 20 years ago it was the norm. The use of digital media even adds to the temptation to be distracted during sermons and Bible studies. I sometimes wonder if I am a slave to technology or if it is servant to me. Self-discipline is a fruit of Christian maturity and we must learn and teach our people to pursue the classic spiritual disciplines of prayer, Scripture meditation and even fasting (something that has become redundant in this instant gratification society). Our digital age provides many advantages, even with discipleship. If we have the discipline to use it rightly.

The online edition of this year’s charge is a great advantage in terms of cost saving and wider distribution. It also helps with providing online references and resources for further reading. I just hope some have not already wandered down a rabbit hole of the many links I’ve provided!

² Eph.4:11f

³ Reinke, T (2017) **12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You** Crossway

There is a more serious implication to failed discipleship in the local church. Some pertinent and painful lessons are to be learned from the [current leadership collapse](#) within the Willow Creek church. The failure is reported to have its roots in an earlier admission of a flawed ministry philosophy. The seeker sensitive, program driven, mega church, admitted a failure to properly disciple their 'program participants'. There was no cost to following Jesus. The resulting lack of spiritual maturity and moral growth produced relativistic, consumerist, immature church goers. There is a very important warning for us here. Church growth is more than numbers in pews. It is also growth in godliness. The lack of attention to classic [spiritual disciplines](#) has become a global Christianity problem more than a Willow Creek problem. As much as we can benefit from effective church growth models we must not be fooled into believing that getting people into church is all that matters. Yes, there is a need for us to do all we can to make our churches more welcoming and "user friendly". By all means provide Baristas and sparkling water bottles if your community context suits it. But do not water down the message you preach, both with your lips and your lifestyle.

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them,
because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers"
(1 Tim.4:16).

One final thought on the cost of discipleship relates to Christian suffering. I have been reflecting⁴ on just how much our predecessors suffered for the gospel. In generations past, life spans were shorter and surviving till adulthood was not a given expectation. I worry that we have imbibed more of the comfortable materialistic life than we would care to admit and it shows in our ministry priorities. Comfort driven Christianity is weak Christianity and perhaps the low spiritual vitality of many local churches is testament to that.

So often it's in the hardships that the Lord grows his strongest disciples. Not that we ought to seek it but striving to grow in godliness and gospel faithfulness will certainly put you at odds with the world (2 Tim.3:12). I'm conscious of a number of fellow workers who have been through quite a year of trial and conflict. Brothers and sisters, this is the reality that comes with serving Christ. Gospel ministry brings hardship, there will be suffering, rejection, opposition and conflict. Yet this is the path of the Master. So 'let us go to Him, outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore' (Heb.13:13). Let us learn to carry our cross before we put on the crown.

⁴ Hansen, C; Robinson, J (Eds) (2018) "**12 Faithful Men**" Baker Books

iii. Training

“and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”
(2 Tim.2:2 ESV)

This third essential aspect of local church ministry is one that we have talked about extensively. We have been blessed with an excellent standard of theological training in our Bible College, George Whitefield. Both the residential degree training and the Explore correspondence course are invaluable to our equipping task. We are seeing wonderful responses to the Explore course across the continent as people embrace the material as a valuable tool for grassroots level training. It also provides us with a welcome standard for our own Gospel Workers Licence (the old Lay Reader’s licence).

I also acknowledge again the ongoing debate over residential theological education versus on the job, local church training. My submission has always been that both are necessary. There is no substitute for seminary. The college is a valuable repository that is well supplied with qualified faculty and material resources to help equip our men and women with a sound theology that is so necessary for Christian service.

There is much ministry training, however, that can happen in the regional and local church level. We continue to work towards building a regional network of training hubs which will complement the work done at GWC. Here we can help equip local church workers with basic Bible handling and teaching skills as well as foundational doctrine and church practice (Ministry Apprentice Level).

It's also at our regional level that we can use these training hubs for post graduate curacy and specialised ministry training. Consultations and meetings continue with GWC and other key role players and we hope to have more guidelines for discussion and implementation in the near future.

iv. Magnification

Up to now I have not done much focus on the exaltation aspect of local church ministry. It certainly is important and deserves more focus in the future. Sunday worship has moved way beyond “a hymn and a thing”. A well equipped, trained and coordinated music ministry is an essential part of a Word centred public gathering. I’m pleased to have this year’s synod dovetailing with a church music workshop that promises to be one of the most significant events we have ever done in this field. I’m very grateful to Bronwyn Anderson for pulling together some of our best music leaders from around the country. I’m sure everyone attending will richly benefit from these workshop sessions.

REACH IN SOUTH AFRICA

a. Politics and Prejudice

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. (Matt. 5:13)

I’m sure you are as concerned as I am by the ongoing economic, political and social challenges facing our country. We continue to see distressing levels of crime, poverty and ugly, racist incidents damaging our progress and unity. This is particularly evident in the online world. The anonymity offered by social media gives us opportunity to see something of the doctrine of total depravity in real time.

It is clear that there is much frustration and restlessness for change in our country which is made worse by ongoing revelations of corruption as well as difficult economic and social conditions for the majority of our people.

It would not be right for God’s people to fall into the racial and political polarizations that are forming at this time, we must pursue the Biblical line and implement its applications. Jesus calls us to be salt and light in a world that is desperately in need of Christ’s saving preservation and the Word’s spiritual light. In Christ we must proclaim the gospel *and* live out its implications within the culture He has placed us.

Christians will not benefit society if we are no different to it. Salt’s effectiveness lies in the fact that it is different from the meat it preserves and flavours.⁵ So too, we ought to be noticeably different and beneficial to our society. In a country with so much division and racial tension we have opportunity to demonstrate unity, reconciliation and peace across all the old South African barriers.

My first synod in 2000 ended at a clergy conference where we experienced a wonderful outpouring of confession and forgiveness as stories were shared and tears were shed. The resulting “Cyara Apology” has become part of our CESA story. As much as that was a profound and welcome moment in our history as a denomination, the last 18 years have made it clear that we cannot just tick the box and move on. We must continue to work out the gospel of reconciliation in our lives as we seek to repent of deep seated prejudices and practices as well as forgiving those who have been prejudiced towards us. It is the gospel that must guide us here and we must not shy away from applying its balm.

⁵ From: [Tim Keller](#) talk at UK Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast

b. The Gospel and Social Action

Historically, our denomination has been nervous of prioritising mercy ministry and social justice out of fear of losing our gospel primacy. This kind of caution is good and right, but we must not use it to justify doing nothing.

Prophets like Isaiah gave us many examples of what God expected true repentance to look like:

“Learn to do right; seek justice.
Defend the oppressed.
Take up the cause of the fatherless;
plead the case of the widow.” (Is.1:17)

This is more than a metaphor or some unique historic social context. It is a foreshadowing. An expectation of how the true and faithful Israelite should look and ultimately does look in Jesus. It is in that One True and Faithful Israelite that we can and should show this same sort of Christlikeness in our society today.

We ought to be speaking out against injustice and caring for the poor, marginalized and exploited. Speaking truth to power is not a role for the liberals, evangelicals should be speaking up here. William Wilberforce, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and [John Calvin](#) would be some of many historical examples we can learn from.

Priorities here are vital. Our God given priority is to proclaim the gospel as we make disciples of Christ. But the outworking of that discipleship is seen in believers who are salt and light in the world. Sharing the gospel not just in word, but also in deed. Even as the early church declared the gospel and called people to repentance and faith, its new members spontaneously began to care for each other. They looked after widows, fed the poor, cared for orphans – and all while proclaiming the Kingdom of God. It’s no coincidence that orphanages, hospitals and schools grew out of Christian communities. The gospel and social concern is not a matter of one or the other but rather a matter of one following the other. The gospel births a social action that points back to the gospel.

Its worth recalling John Piper’s memorable [statement](#) as our guide to social justice: *We are concerned about all suffering, especially eternal suffering.*

It is also worth noting that there are many compassion ministries and community projects that *do* emanate from our local REACH churches. We will hear from some of them during this Synod. It is also true that much of our community or social care does not get the same public voice as our gospel proclamation. This is why some accuse us of ignoring the plight of the poor and downtrodden and yet the reality is that a number of our people *are* caring and serving in some of the most difficult of social contexts.

I've also been asked by a number of people why we are not taking a stand against the proposed moves to implement land expropriation without compensation. The short answer from my side is that restitution is a Biblical principle. It is right to return what was stolen. The complexity with the current issue, however, is that expropriating land in many cases might mean taking from people who legally bought land that was originally snatched by long forgotten oppressors from long forgotten possessors. (Although there are ongoing land claims being processed that are more measurable and verifiable.) The government has also recently made it clear that the [first priority](#) is to release state owned land and provide plots and stands to many who are in need. I'm sure we would all support that.

We must beware of giving in to hot-headed responses or reacting to sensationalist media, blogs, tweets etc. We must rather continue praying for our government as well as using right and proper channels to voice concerns and encourage rulers to do what is right and just for all the people. I'm so glad we have a liturgy that reminds us to pray for our country and our government during our public worship gatherings. Let us continue to do so.

c. Gender and Sexuality

Western society in particular continues to move further and further away from Biblical values with regards to gender and sexuality. Our modern media's world wide reach has made same sex relationships and gender fluidity all the more fashionable and normative. We are also moving closer and closer to a society where it is no longer acceptable to agree to disagree on these issues. We must now all agree with what society approves or be labelled a hate monger or homophobic. The intolerance of the tolerant is becoming more and more apparent.⁶

With regards to the current trend toward gender fluidity, the extremes to which the Transgender movement are taking their doctrine is baffling and disturbing. We are facing a serious challenge to Biblical definitions of Male and Female (not to mention obvious genetic ones) which will have some sad implications. One example relates to those who suffer from genuine [gender dysphoria](#) and need professional care rather than fashionable affirmation. The reality is that true peace and fulfilment will not ultimately come in gender reassignment surgery or self-identification as a different gender. Our broken image can only be healed by Christ. There is no time to dig more deeply into the subject now, but I do encourage all our church leaders and pastors to ensure they are adequately equipped to understand the issues as we seek to reach out as a loving redeemed community shaped by sound Biblical understanding.⁷

⁶ Carson, D.A. (2013) [The Intolerance of Tolerance](#), IVP

⁷ Roberts, Vaughn (2016) [Transgender](#), The Good Book Company

Walker, Andrew (2017) [God and the Transgender Debate](#), The Good Book Company

2. REACH FAMILY

The more I work within the wider Christian landscape the more I find myself thanking God for our own REACH family. In an age where many Christian institutions seem to be giving in to the pressure of society's expectations I am grateful for a family of local churches who have remained firm on the authority of Scripture above all things.

I give thanks to God for our many members, workers, pastors and bishops who have taken the lead in holding the gospel line without compromise. I also thank the Lord for many friends and ministry partners around the world who have stood with us in the task of growing our Reformed Evangelical Anglican church family.

This year I want to particularly extend a word of gratitude to God for our Chancellor, Marius le Roux, who officially retires from his office at this synod. Marius has been an invaluable help to us with regards to legal, constitutional and local church matters. He has also represented REACH-SA before parliamentary committees and made numerous submissions on our behalf. I know Marius will be slightly uncomfortable with all this praise, but I also know he will give the glory to God and it is to our God that we offer our grateful thanks for his service.

I'm also comforted to know that Marius will continue to make himself available to us as a consultant and I also urge you all to be prayerfully looking for someone able and willing to fill this increasingly important role within our denomination.

Women in Ministry

We have had a very productive year of consultations with a view to developing a clearer policy on Women in Ministry. Two international visitors, Jenny Salt and Carrie Sandom, have given some invaluable insight as we seek to flesh out complementarian women's ministry in our REACH-SA context. I'm conscious that we do this in the setting of a society (and many Christian churches) pushing for an egalitarian interpretation of Scripture that is also more favourable to the mood of modern Western society.

Complementarian theology affirms and upholds the truth of male and female equality before God but also recognizes a God designed difference in role for male and female.⁸ In the light of this, it is essential that we uphold and affirm the role of women in ministry without gender prejudice or silent side-lining. If anything, we must be more conscious of affirming the role of women rather than merely acknowledging it.

⁸ Sandom, C (2012) **Different by Design**, Christian Focus Publications

We feed into the opposition camp if we minimise women's ministry or have an unbiblical hierarchical church practice. As much as the Scriptures affirm the role that many women are called to in marriage and motherhood, there is also plenty in Scripture to convince us that there are God given and distinct roles for both men and women in local church Word ministry.

As we continue to work out clearer definitions of women's ministry in our REACH-SA family I ask for your ongoing patience as we formulate guidelines and discussion documents for our regional meetings.

Ministry Care

I'm conscious here that we are still falling short of establishing a proper care network for our ministry workers. Various arrangements have been put in place in some regions but there is much more to be done. There are unique stresses in the Christian ministry, made all the more difficult by our diverse social landscape and economic challenges. We need an appropriate and workable care system in place. So far much of our care for workers has been through personal peer relationships and this is a good way to get trusted help. I remain concerned for those who work alone and are not in an accountability or peer support network. We are all vulnerable to physical weakness, temptation and spiritual dryness. We are also called to carry each other's burdens (Gal.6:2). Recognizing our dependency is not a deficiency, it is actually a way of exalting Christ (2 Cor.12:1f). Pretending we are all super capable robs people of seeing the greatness of our all sufficient Saviour.

Missionary Network

I'm aware that we have lost some visibility with regards to REACH-SA members and ministers who serve on the mission field. We used to have a directory of missionaries through which local churches were able to contact and pray for our REACH missionaries across the globe. We have been in contact with a few of our clergy and mission workers to help us improve access to contact and prayer information about our missionaries and their particular mission fields. I hope we will soon be making more progress here. Mission beyond our borders should be part of the vision of all our congregations. I don't see how we can be a healthy local church without a missionary connection and concern. It worries me that the "[missional](#)" mentality of some churches only extends to the end of their suburbs rather than to the ends of the earth. Our God is a global missional God.

REACH-Net

Membership in our local churches is rightly for those who are in agreement with our particular Reformed, Evangelical, Anglican [distinctives](#). As with any organization we choose to freely gather and be identified based on a belief in a commonly held set of ideals and practices. You would not join a fishing club if you had a dislike for fishing and were allergic to fish! So too we expect that you are a member of REACH-SA because you embrace our distinctives with regard to doctrine and practice. We would be quite unstable if we were a house divided from within.

I am also aware that a number of our distinctives are what could be called 'secondary issues' (e.g. baptism; church government; worship practice). We can and do have fellowship with other Christian institutions and organizations even though we may disagree on secondary issues.

In this age of increasing secularism, and even opposition to the Evangelical faith, we are finding it more and more important to forge links and associations with such like-minded church groups, movements and organizations. I see this happening at the local church, regional and national level.

GAFCON is a current example of this sort of extended international network. In practice it really is a vibrant expression of true Anglican communion. It was a great privilege to be part of this year's GAFON-SA delegation chaired by Bishop Bethlehem Nopece. Our relatively small Southern African group was mostly made up of REACH and ACSA members and there was much warm fellowship between us. Yes, GAFCON has the classic Anglican triad of High-Church, Evangelical and Charismatics, but we all gathered within the common framework of the [Jerusalem Declaration](#) which closely matches our own Reformed, Evangelical, Anglican distinctives. Both REACH-SA and GWC found themselves at the centre of much attention during the conference and we are delighted with many new friendships and networks that have grown out of GAFCON 2018.

Structure

A final word on our REACH family relates to ongoing discussions our leadership are having about structure and its effectiveness with regards our use of resources as well as the current demands on our leaders. I'm aware that all our area bishops have tremendous workloads, having to deal with both their own local church as well as wider denominational matters.

There is more work to be done in formulating better ministry expectations and parameters for the role of Area Bishops and the Presiding Bishop.

I'm thankful that our episcopal system rightly understands that bishops are not political or administrative positions but actually play a crucial role in helping to grow local church gospel ministry. By virtue of their position they have opportunity to look at the wider picture. They can mentor, counsel and guide congregations in their ministry.

It is important to understand that although bishops do play an essential role in helping to grow local church gospel ministry, they are not part of the essential nature of the church (Roman Catholicism). This is something our own constitution recognizes - and is good for the humility of our bishops.

The Church of England in South Africa, deriving its authority from Christ, Who is the head over all things to the Church, DECLARES that the General Synod of the Church of England in South Africa, consisting of the Bishops (if any), Clergy and representatives of the Laity, shall have full authority and power to make Canons, Ordinances, and Rules for order and good governments of this Church and to administer its affairs, subject to the following Articles.⁹

This understanding rightly helps us view our role as servants of the churches rather than as pillars of the church itself. At our consecration we commit to defending the apostolic faith by holding to the authority of Scripture, prayerfully teaching sound doctrine and driving away all false doctrine. Essentially, shepherding the shepherds and seeking the lost.¹⁰

We call on our bishops to prove themselves authentic successors to the apostles, not merely by the pedigree of their episcopal consecrators, but by what they teach and what they reject. We call on all our bishops to be the chief missionaries spreading the Word afresh when so many are strangers to the love of God made known in Jesus. We call on our bishops to be the chief apologists in this hostile age, defending the saving truths of Scripture from all assaults, whether inside the church or out.¹¹

I'm grateful to God for a long line of gospel minded CESA bishops and pray that we as REACH-SA will not be tempted to deviate from a mindset that has helped us keep local church gospel growth an episcopal priority.

In the light of this I believe the Presiding Bishop's role is particularly challenging. We must ensure that he is able to function in a structure that enables him to provide the necessary gospel vision and direction for our churches.

⁹ CESA Constitution (1938) Preamble and Declaration (paragraph B)

¹⁰ Prayer book of the Church of England in South Africa (1992) p.136-138

¹¹ Null, A & Yates, J.W III (2017) **Reformation Anglicanism**, Crossway p.198

If there was some wisdom I would leave with Synod it would be to uphold and affirm our federal system that expects local church leadership to take primary responsibility for their ministry affairs. The episcopacy is not a convenient means of passing on problems. We are here to assist and help our local churches do the work of ministry, not to take over their task.

I would also call on Synod to think carefully about the next Presiding Bishop appointment. We have grown as a denomination and our national and international network has also grown. There are also more complex, legal community and public relations matters that the PB needs to navigate without being diverted from his task. An effective admin team as well as a clear "job description" is essential here.

Looking to future succession planning I would recommend assessing and equipping someone with the necessary experience and training for this level of leadership. I certainly would not support appointing a young family man. The demands on his time, particularly travelling, would not be good for his home life. It also does not seem right for us to expect our **chief pastor** to spend many weekends away from his own wife and young children. It's for these reasons that I believe you need to look for someone older (50+) with a good head of wisdom and experience. As conscious as we are about building toward a transformed leadership we must also not be **unduly hasty** but rather ensure that we have the right man at the right time.

Personally, this year has probably been the toughest of all my ministry years and much of it is due to grappling with an overwhelming array of demands from many quarters. Through it all the Lord has been our strength both in ministry and family life. I am also grateful (again) for a liturgy that reminds us to pray for our bishops. Many a Sunday I have been comforted by the knowledge that people in our churches around the country are praying for me. Next year I will be taking a long overdue sabbatical and have asked Bishop Jomo Mchunu to stand in for me over this time. This has the unanimous support of the bishops.

3. REACH NEXT

These last three years have been significant in helping us look honestly at a denomination that had plateaued and with a ministry pipeline that was stuttering at best. We as the REACH-SA leadership made a conscious shift from maintenance to mission mode as we set up funds to help plant more churches. We also sought to increase the connection between GWC and our local churches. Another initiative was taken in expanding our licenced ministry to include all qualified gospel workers, both male and female. There are early signs of life in all these areas.

Looking ahead I can see the next challenge will be to build and expand a longer term vision of gospel growth for REACH-SA in its African context.

How do we move forward and grow our gospel footprint in Southern Africa?

I have been greatly encouraged by the recent example of the Free Church of Scotland.¹² They too are a small denomination with a conservative Reformed Evangelical theology. They also have a rich history of mission and evangelism.

In recent years they assessed their relatively static growth and resolved to work for change. They sought to harness all the inherent strengths of a stable institution and align it with a missional, church planting movement mindset. This involved revitalizing their mission vision through both church planting and church regeneration. Strategy groups met during the first few years and they built a vision and mission based on their strengths and opportunities. Some important function and practice decisions were also made (similar to us changing our operating name to REACH-SA). We have been through a comparable process in our own denomination through the work of Generate workshops and other regional and national strategy groups.

One important mindset change relates to the role of the denomination. The institution exists in order to help the local churches do the work of the gospel. The denomination serves the local churches, not vice versa.¹³ The particular service it extends is to help our congregations be more effective in their gospel ministry as well as help new congregations grow.

Some of the focal points that apply to our context and ought to be discussed, adopted and implemented in future regional meetings and workshops are:

- i. Church Revitalization

Over recent years we have seen demographic and economic shifts in our cities. Some areas have become poorer, in others the population groups have changed. Some suburban churches now find themselves positioned as inner city churches or even care centres and shelters. We have already spoken at leadership level about the need for our regional structures to help struggling local churches assess their options and implement necessary changes.

¹² MacMillan, Neil **Building a Church-Planting Movement in a Traditional Denomination**; Foundations Journal; Issue 72; Spring 2017; Page 41-60

¹³ *Ibid* p.50

ii. Church Planting

The most effective tool for reaching new and growing population areas is through church planting. We have managed to establish our New Projects Fund to help kickstart church plants and it has already seen some encouraging success. There is, however, still a need to better identify, train and deploy gifted church planters and their teams.

iii. Church Hubs

The strength of our mother/daughter church model is that it helps us to identify which churches are sufficiently resourced and able to be the launch base for potentially viable church plants. I'm heartened to see just how many of our resourced churches already have networks and partnerships with other churches in their areas. I hope we can help to further develop these 'hub and spoke' networks in the future.

iv. Church Leadership

Our denomination has historically been led by wonderfully gifted men who have driven the gospel vision. These pioneers have been used by God to make great gospel impact, plant new churches and revitalize struggling ones. Yet we must also not forget that many local church leaders may not have the inbuilt skills for leadership. Many observers are saying that this is an area we desperately need to improve on. Leadership training will be a particular focus of next year's Generate workshops. Beyond that, the plan is to have regional leadership training modules in place as part of the LMin program for all GWC graduates serving in our local churches.

Conclusion

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the St. James massacre. An event that put us on the world stage and provided an opportunity for gospel witness in a way we could never have imagined.

That experience was part of the motivation that drove me as a young Christian to make decisions that matter for eternity and ultimately led me into pastoral ministry.

Bishop Retief spoke to a large gathering at last month's special memorial service. As I looked across the gathered congregation it struck me that there were significantly less survivors than there were 25 years ago. A number have gone to be with the Lord including some who lost loved ones on the night. It brought home to me afresh that the years fly by and eternity draws ever nearer. Our life here is brief and our gospel window is closing.

To my young brothers and sisters in ministry I caution you not to waste the days. These 25 years have felt like a blink of an eye. Our opportunity for labour is very short.

To all my fellow servants of the Word, let us not labour for a comfortable retirement but for the consolations of glory. Our country and continent is home to millions of souls who live without Christ, so let us show them an eternal home for their souls in Christ.

The time is fleeting, the harvest is ready, but are the workers at their posts?

Let us go forward brothers and sisters, calling on our God for the harvest.

Lord, give us Africa for Jesus.

iAfrika mayibuyele ku Jesu.