

## Presiding Bishop's Charge 2023

My greetings to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ndiyanibulisa nonke ngegama leNkosi yethu u Yesu Krestu.

It's hard to believe that I am about to deliver my final charge as Presiding Bishop. These last nine years have flown by, and I feel that there is so much more I had hoped to accomplish before my time was done. I'm sure this is a common feeling for those of us engaged in the Great Commission. Compared to the size of the task, our list of achievements seems so tiny. Our God, however, urges us not to despise the 'day of small things' and to trust that our little efforts will be used by Him for great Kingdom impact. In this way He alone will get the glory.

### **1. Looking back to look forward.**

This final year has given me opportunity to look back on my time in this role. I really do believe that the Lord called me to this task as one called to oversee a transition into a new chapter of REACH-SA's history. This, in God's plan, has involved some turbulent and testing times. Our "lockdown" years were, as I've said in previously, an especially difficult period. It felt as if we were in the midst of a "perfect storm" of pandemic, social unrest, economic crisis and racial tensions. Here in KZN it seemed as if the storm (literally) hit the hardest!

During those days I thought, at times, that I would be overwhelmed and undone by the multitude of blows that seemed to be coming from all quarters. The COVID years were indeed a painful time. Many people lost loved ones and financial ruin threatened several people. It also affected ministry relationships and it grieved me to see how easily factions can form amongst brothers and sisters in Christ. Too many assumptions and presumptions were made, and our social isolation (and social media) did not help us find each other easily. I'm very sure that the pandemic experiment has proved that a world of 'remote living' is severely damaging to humans created for community. God has designed us to be in need of each other. We need our different strengths which together can bridge our different weaknesses. This is God's design for us. Not independence, nor co-dependence, but rather inter-dependence.

I am still not convinced that any of us handled the challenge of confronting our racially divided heritage with any great success. I do hope that we can

at least be honest about our predecessor's leadership failures *and* gospel victories. Any attempt to assess our denomination as completely one or the other is foolish and ignores the complexity of sinful saints serving the King in all our brokenness and blindness. We stand in the line of Luther the anti-semite and great reformer, Whitefield the slave owner and global evangelist and Peter the pioneering but prejudiced apostle (Gal.2:14). Even the 'best of us' has feet of clay. This condition we neither excuse nor excommunicate – and it is one which infects every one of us. Only Jesus stands righteous. What glorious grace is that message of imputed righteousness, which is ours by faith to possess and to proclaim.

The late, Tim Keller, made a wise observation about the state of the church today. The evangelical world has been rocked by successive scandals and leadership failures. We have seen the downfall of several “celebrity pastors” and “internet icons”. Keller noted that the Lord has used this trial to teach His people that the gifted individual is not the beginning and end of Christianity. We are being reminded that the institution is not as bad as was once popularly believed. The church on earth provides the accountability and stability that we all need as saved sinners in the Saviour's service. Even with all her earthly faults, we are better together than apart. I know some of us like to be trendy and cheeky with our 'anti-establishment' rhetoric, but that would be to ignore some clear doctrinal truths. The Lord has given us His church on earth for a Spirit filled purpose. It is His design for the work of the Kingdom in this world. To disparage the church is to disparage the Bride of Christ. Yes, the Bride on earth is not quite ready for glory, (as the seven Revelation churches teach us) but it is still Christ's church, and our Saviour is at work, preparing her for the glorious wedding banquet.

Our role is to pursue the holy service that reflects the coming glory. That is not a lofty platitude, it is very applicable. The Bride on earth readies herself by putting God's word into action. We apply His wisdom to our ministry. We devise plans for mission, evangelism, discipleship and training. We design structures to best facilitate ministry, partnership and growth. We build networks of welfare support, community care and transformational discipleship. This is a far better road than giving into selfish divisions, criticism, and isolation. Let us affirm, in a world that instinctively and sinfully rebels against authority, that submitting to godly leadership is a good thing. Working together for a common gospel goal is a good thing. Being

transparent and accountable to each other is a good thing. Yes, it will mean some disagreements and debates – that is part of ministry life. How we deal with those disputes will be the measure of our maturity in Christ. Looking back on the conflicts of recent years, I would suggest an honest assessment of our own hearts would cause us all to admit that we could have done better.

## **2. Leadership Retreat**

As I come to the end of my time, I look back, on this last year, with great gratitude to God. Somehow, through all the difficulties and trials, God's people came together and united for the sake of the Gospel. It was both humbling and encouraging to see so many of you make the effort to join us for this year's most significant leadership retreat.

In God's kindness He answered our prayers and we united to get down to the business of making our denomination a better place for growing gospel ministry. Our discussion groups focussed on the big challenges, with Kingdom centred solutions in mind. The task at first seemed insurmountable, but the Lord was with us, and I remain "gratefully astonished" at the progress that was made. To that end, I want to record a particular vote of thanks to **Geoff Jacobs**, whose skills and experience ensured that we navigated our way through the challenges towards solutions in unity of purpose.

The fruit of that retreat is seen in several of the motions now presented to Synod 2023. These are the first of a number of significant structural and functional changes that we hope will make us a more interdependent family of churches, working together in partnership, across our previously divided communities to grow gospel ministry in this most complex South African society. **Personally, I feel so blessed by God to be able to hand over the baton with some progress achieved in this area.**

## **3. New Leadership**

I want to take a moment to correct any rumours or misperceptions about my early "retirement" (by one year) as Presiding Bishop. It certainly has nothing to do with discouragement, pressure or opposition. No matter where we serve, there will always be conflict and there is always a temptation to give in to negativity and criticism - that is ministry in a fallen world. For me it was clear that we had navigated through a very turbulent

season and some long overdue progress was made in addressing structural and ministry priorities. With that in mind, my wife and I were prayerfully convinced that an exit at this stage would give us opportunity, Lord willing, to serve a decent term in a new ministry context. If I had remained to serve another term it would mean that I step down at age 60+, which would make it more difficult to find a ministry position elsewhere. Given that I cannot serve as PB till retirement, my best option is to move on at this timely moment.

I believe that the Lord has confirmed that decision, with the unprecedented situation of having four Presiding Bishop nominees. It's clear to me that we are ready for a new era of leadership in REACH-SA. I certainly would have no hesitation in following any of the four nominated candidates and I commend them to your prayerful choice.

We do also need to bear in mind that none of the Presiding Bishop nominees is certain of election and therefore they cannot make any changes (or give notice) at their current place of ministry employment. It is for this reason that we have all agreed to a transition period to allow the PB elect's church to acquire a replacement and for him to transition into the new role. During this interim, I will continue to assist the PB elect with his duties. The length of time will depend on who is elected and the context of their current employment.

Whatever happens, we will have a new PB at the end of this Synod. Depending on who is elected, we will do a short commissioning or prayer service at the end of Synod. We will then arrange an installation (and consecration if required) at a date and place that is most suitable. The delay will be useful as it will allow us to give this event the place it deserves as well as allow us to invite participants from our REACH-Southern Africa and GAFCON partners. We are functioning in a wider circle of churches now and we must reflect that in our great occasions and milestones. The days of isolation are over. We are in Africa, and we will proclaim the Gospel and reflect our Anglicanism in our African way. At the very least, I hope the singing will joyous and spontaneous – maybe there will even be dancing!

#### **4. Structure**

I think one common mistake we make with the 'trellis and the vine' model, is that we can view the trellis as a necessary evil. We will then think that the trellis must be as small as possible, so that the vine can grow. Not so. Rather, the trellis must be as *supportive* as possible so that the vine can flourish. If we are going to grow into a larger denomination, we need to adjust and grow our structures to facilitate that growth. In practice, this means stronger regional support for the Area Bishops to enable them to give more time to the task entrusted to them. Parallel to that we also need an increased admin functionality at a regional level. At present, we have two full time national admin staff who do the job of at least four people. Most of the regional admin assistance is voluntary or tacked on to the work of the Area Bishop's local church team.

Incidentally, our Chancellor gives a great deal of his free time to what is, essentially, a volunteer role. Perhaps you are not all aware, but without Jonathan Veeran's help we would have had many serious problems on our hands. We are so grateful to the Lord for the valuable time he gives to this vital ministry. We cannot do without his legal guidance in these complicated days.

##### **a. Trustees**

We thank the Lord for a largely new and expanded group of Central Trustees who are all experts in their respective fields. They are truly a God send to us as they give so much time (voluntarily) to this most critical task. Our Trustees gladly apply their skills to help ensure that we get the maximum ministry benefit from our very limited resources. The financial challenges at hand are complex and their collective wisdom is much needed. You will notice one of the motions calls for us to look for viable alternative financial models and I believe this need is becoming more and more urgent.

Lastly, I must mention how grateful I am to our Administrator, Melanie, who assists our Trustees and manages the many demands of our finances, properties, pension fund, insurance and hundreds of other tasks and 'strange requests' that come across her desk. We are blessed to have her on the team.

## **b. Executive Committee**

Our recent retreat and other leadership discussions have made it clear that this body needs to be used more extensively in our growth plans. Some further thought can also be given as to who is represented on this body. Currently we have two members from each of the five regions elected to the Exec (one clergy, one laity). All the other national office bearers serve on this body, namely, the Area Bishops, Chancellor, Administrator, GWC chair and principal – and more recently the national Women’s and Children’s ministry co-ordinators. I believe there is room to include other “specialist” national roles on this body, including mission, church planting, mercy ministry and student ministry.

The Exec also appoints committees, including the Leadership Committee (Bishops, Chancellor, Principal and Administrator) as well as other ad hoc committees deemed necessary by Synod. Most recently, they have been entrusted with the appointment of a Transformation Committee. The Executive are also responsible for overseeing and implementing decisions of Synod. In time I believe we can become more efficient in executing these responsibilities and a strengthened admin and regional leadership will help us in this regard.

## **c. Bishops**

As I’ve already mentioned, it is unusual to have a PB who is not stepping down into retirement. This has also been the case with some of our area bishops. I once again, advise the Synod to bear this in mind and to consider revising tenure periods for our future bishops. It would be wise to at least standardise the tenure periods of both Area and Presiding Bishops. Currently, the PB can serve 3x5 year terms and the AB’s serve 1x10 year term. I would suggest a wise first step would be to standardize tenures to 3x5 year terms. We want to guard against an unhealthy excess of non-serving bishops, although they all can remain useful. In our Anglican system, a bishop remains a bishop, even though he may step down from a particular role (Area Bishop or Presiding Bishop). All our active bishops continue to serve in our structures and can be appointed by the Presiding Bishop to head up various tasks, projects, or committees. They also remain available to conduct ordination and confirmation services as well as serve on our National Selection Committee.

I must also mention that at this stage we are agreed to focus our resources on supporting the Area Bishops in the 3 largest regions (Gauteng, KZN and WC). Our Trustees have made budget allocations to assist in employing an extra worker in the Area Bishop's local church. We are also agreed that, given the number of churches, a Bishop's Chaplain for EC and FS will be sufficient at this stage. Bishop Alan Noble has agreed to continue oversight of the FS region, with Lekhetso Sennanyane as Bishop's Chaplain. I will continue to assist in the EC with The Rev Kyle Barrow nominated as Bishop's Chaplain for the Eastern Cape.

At this point, I also want to express my particular thanks to Bishop Martin Morrison who took on the "Africa Bishop" mantle after he stepped down from his Gauteng responsibilities. Martin has put a great deal of effort into helping to establish and resource REACH churches in other African countries. The formalization of our REACH-Southern Africa partnership has a great deal to do with his ongoing efforts to take the gospel beyond our borders.

#### **d. Administration**

Our Admin office has been a large part of the focus in our structural discussions. We are aware that we need to expand our capability in order to better facilitate growth, but that will need to be a step-by-step process as we secure a larger budget allocation for a wider circle of roles. At present we have used volunteers and contract workers to assist us with these extra needs. In time we will need to revisit these arrangements.

- **Digital Media:** We have contracted helpers for our Digital Media office, but it's clear that, with the growth of technology in this area, the media office will soon become a full-time need. We would need a dedicated team who can create high quality content for REACH media as well as assist smaller churches with their digital tech needs. I'm so grateful to Joe, Johan, Velma, Gerard, Gareth, Kwazi, Josh and many others who have assisted us in this area over the years.
- **Database:** I am hoping that by now you are all skilled users of our Breeze digital database. This system has replaced our "paper" directory for some years now and I am concerned that not enough of us are using this great resource. If you still need help here, I urge you to visit the Breeze desk and get yourself online asap. I want to also give a word of

thanks to Velma Bedderson who invested many hours into setting up this system (as well as helping to co-ordinate our WC and Synod gatherings). We are blessed to have such efficient workers at our side.

- **Counselling:** We have also been glad have our Admin office co-ordinate trained Biblical counsellors to assist our local church ministry workers. This is another growing need in our ‘high stress’ age. In an ideal economy, this would also be a full-time office in our denomination. I am grateful for the ministry of Biblical Counselling Africa, who have trained workers in several of our local churches.

I can also report that we are now a fully functional “digital office” and all our essential documents, records and files are in an ‘online filing cabinet’. This will also give us more flexibility for the placement of the next Presiding Bishop’s office. It’s not always possible to move a PB to Cape Town or Joburg, depending on his own family circumstances. A digital office gives us far more options in this regard.

I must also record that a great deal of effort has gone into converting the admin office from paper to digital. This process has taken hundreds of hours. A special mention must go to our “office manager” Giselle Ginsburg. With Dawn’s retirement, she took on a double role as Admin and PB assistant and has accomplished the massive task of managing both roles. I cannot even begin to express how much Melanie and myself owe to Giselle for the many hours she has put into the digital conversion process - on top of dealing with the many complicated daily admin demands. She has gone above and beyond the call of duty and we express our deepest gratitude to her for this great accomplishment.

## **5. Handbook of Procedures**

You will notice in your Synod pack that we have included a 2023 revision of the Handbook of Procedures. This edition is largely a “clean up” edition and most of the changes are grammatical or gender clarifications. Any significant changes are currently in blue font.

You will also notice that we have included Role Descriptions for office bearers, including our Presiding Bishop and Area Bishops. These have



come out of our leadership discussions as well as submissions and presentations made at Area Council level.

The other Handbook changes relate to the significant milestone that was passed at Synod 2021. We now have male and female Deacons, and our first women Deacons were made earlier this year. We delight to see that our denomination's complementarian ministry reflected in such a visible way.

I would also like to pay a special tribute to Sandy Wilcox in this regard. Sandy was very gracious and persistent in supplying me with material to assist us in our thinking about how to properly execute a complementarian ministry in REACH-SA. Sadly, her awful death cut short any possibility of us making her a Deacon, but I would be grateful if this Synod affords her the posthumous recognition of being REACH-SA's "honourary" first woman Deacon.

With the office of Deacon being open to suitably qualified men and women, it has also become necessary to be clearer in displaying our three Anglican offices. This is in line with the practice of our sister denomination REACH-Namibia. You will notice, in the revised guidelines of the 2023 Prayer Book, that we have made a minor dress code change for recognition purposes.

Take note of these extracts from the revised 2023 Handbook:

**Deacons:** A Deacon's formal ceremonial dress is a **blue clerical shirt** with a white surplice (optional black cassock) as well as a grey scarf of office.

**Presbyters:** The formal ceremonial dress for a Presbyter is a **black or grey clerical shirt**, (optional black cassock) and a white surplice and black preaching scarf.

**Bishops:** The formal ceremonial dress for a Bishop is a **magenta or purple clerical shirt** (optional magenta cassock) with a white rochet and black chimere, cuffs and preaching scarf. Due to our recognition as members of GAFCON, we agree that a red chimere can be worn at GAFCON events and other occasions where it is warranted.

The revised handbook will now be available for Area Council comment and then ratified at Synod 2024.

## 6. Training

I'm excited to note that GWC have made great progress in developing new post graduate study options as well as new systems to help build a 'hybrid'

class system, integrating both residential and online learners engaged in post-grad studies. I am so encouraged to see how our college has become a role player in theological education across the African continent and I affirm again how blessed we are, as a small denomination, to have such a prominent role to play in this academic field. We have a high calibre of faculty and I delight to see the increasing numbers of monographs, commentaries and papers that are being produced by our faculty and college graduates. I will leave the details for the GWC Synod slot.

Our other key training focus is on how to prepare graduates and other local church workers for effective 'on the ground' ministry. Over the last few years, we have presented and discussed ways in which we can build Curacy modules for Children's Workers, Student Workers, Women's Workers, and Pastoral Ministry. It is evident that this training needs to be regionalised, in partnership with local churches, so that we can properly harness the skills of our most experienced ministers in their respective fields. All curacy training remains under the oversight of the Area Bishops. This will ensure that they all get access to the same training no matter where they are placed. The regional curacies will also give us opportunity to ensure that the mandatory modules are completed by all curates (e.g. Preaching, Leadership, Language).

We are also in the process of developing a more extensive training program for future Children's Ministry workers. I hope there will be more information in the new year.

## **7. GAFCON**

This year, at the GAFCON IV gathering in Kigali, the Primates Council formally recognized REACH-Southern Africa as an 'authentically Anglican Province' in communion with GAFCON. This body represents 75%+ of the Anglican world and the relationship is certainly of global significance. Part of the reason for formalizing our REACH-Southern Africa "province" is because of this wider recognition. In God's providence, during the Kigali gathering, we were afforded an opportunity to share about REACH-Southern Africa. Our speakers lifted the gospel banner high and the response we had was overwhelmingly encouraging. I left that stage feeling

so grateful and privileged to be part of this amazing work God is doing in Southern Africa.

It is important to note that there are no parochial requirements placed on us by this recognition, but it is expected that we will work with and not contrary to our fellow GAFCON members in neighbouring countries. It is important for us to recognize the wider role we have now been called to play and to be wise in how we build on our GAFCON partnerships as we expand our African footprint. Both our College and Denomination are very much on the radar of our GAFCON Africa network.

Also note that the GAFCON-SA branch is not a REACH-SA body. It is a separate association that exists to provide a gathering point for all confessing Anglicans who subscribe to the Jerusalem Declaration 2008. This includes REACH-SA, but it also attracts a wider circle of Anglican interest. A number of ACSA clergy and laity are subscribers and I have built good relationships with several of their clergy and bishops. I am currently the elected Chair of this body, and I will retain this position until a successor is elected at the next GAFCON-SA meeting.

## **8. The Mission**

If you keep too close an eye on social media, you may be persuaded to think that the world has moved on from Christian truth and Biblical morality (as if it ever really embraced it!). It may be true that we are seeing a deconstruction of moral values and social conduct unseen since the so called 'Dark Ages'. It is true that we have likely never seen a time when even the obvious distinctions of gender and sexuality have been so ridiculously and dangerously distorted. The Biblical world view, from a Western perspective, has all but disappeared. Sadly, many sectors of the wider church have once again rubber-stamped popular immorality and gleefully applauded sin.

“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6)

In the light of all of this, some may say, 'never before has the church been in such a crisis' but I would say: 'Never before have we had such an opportunity!' Perhaps not since the Roman Empire and the Reformation has the battlefield been so clearly delineated. The sham of 'cultural Christianity' is falling away, and the opportunity for a new chapter of creative evangelism and discipleship awaits us. What a time to be a servant of

Christ! What an excellent opportunity to engage in the mission with fresh creativity and freedom!

By 2065 it is estimated that 40% of the world's Christians will be in sub-Saharan Africa. I believe we are best placed to play a significant role in the divine plan of God for His church. Our expanding REACH-Africa network, our strengthening local church partnerships, and our outstanding theological college, provide us with excellent tools to work together for gospel growth, plant new churches and train new workers for the harvest fields.

For this task we must be much in prayer. I suspect we often think that finances are the restriction, but in my experience the challenge has been finding the right workers. And that problem has a lot to do with the priorities of our prayer life.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."  
(Matt.9:37,38)

## **Gratitude**

I have mentioned thanks to many throughout this charge, but I want to finally give a word of thanks to all of you, my fellow workers in REACH-SA. In all the turbulence of this task, so many of you have been a blessing and encouragement to me. I'm thankful for your patience with progress and forgiveness for my many errors. Whatever success has come my way is all to the glory of God and not my own.

I'm especially humbled by how many of you pray for me. I'm grateful for the regular prayers in your church services and I'm thankful to God for every message of prayer and encouragement that came my way. I won't mention names, but I've treasured the WhatsApp inspiration, the coffee shop wisdom and the prayer walk conversations that I've had with several of you. These have been a tonic to my soul. To know so many of you think of me in prayer is the most precious part of this most privileged task. Truly I have felt myself among the real family of God and I know you will continue to be this family for my successor.

If I may be allowed to add one final word of thanks it is to my wife and family. They have been the silent support and my closest allies, and I praise God for them. How blessed I am to be upheld by their love and understanding

through all the days of trial and triumph. They are God's gift to me. I step down on the eve of our 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and I look forward to a celebration that will hopefully be free of "urgent messages" and "national crisis" phone calls!

## The Future of REACH-SA

It's important to be honest about any denomination or Christian organization. History tells us that even the strongest gospel institutions can have a limited lifespan. Orthodoxy regularly gives way to heterodoxy and REACH-SA is not immune from this future threat. Even the great Protestant denominations, including large parts of the Anglican communion, have compromised into liberalism and embraced the spirit of the age rather than the Spirit of truth. It may seem as if we are secure from such a slide, but compromise comes very subtly – and error lies on both the liberal and conservative wings. There are many famous denominations and theological institutions that were once model guardians of the Gospel and now stand as spiritually derelict, whitewashed tombs.

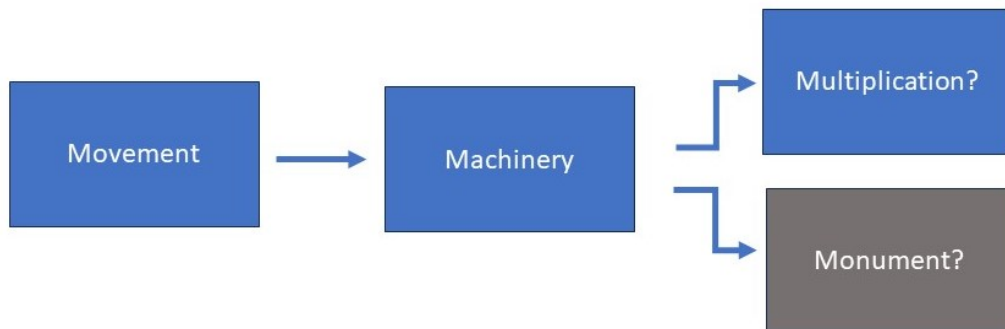
What will keep us faithful? Ultimately that answer lies in the hands of a gracious and sovereign God, but that does not excuse us from ignoring the call of Scripture to guard the gospel with doctrinal rigour and prayerful resilience.

At a recent conference I was challenged by the speaker's call to consider the future of our REACH family.

Every denomination has a trajectory. It begins as a spiritual **movement**, spurred by a revival or awakening. The Lord will galvanise this movement around leaders with a courageous vision to achieve great things for Christ, and through them the movement will grow.

In time the movement will grow to the point where **machinery** needs to be put in place so that a structure can be built to sustain the growth. In this way, the organisation succeeds the organism. But it is here that the movement can quickly lose its momentum. In time, as the movement runs its course, this machinery becomes the institution, with structures, constitutions, policies and procedures in place. These are necessary tools to aid good governance and functionality. But, within a generation that institution will be at a crossroads. It either structures itself to **multiply**

growth for a new generation or it becomes a stagnant **monument** to glory days of long ago.



I believe we are at this juncture in the story of REACH-SA. The machinery has brought us to a place where a new momentum is needed to multiply growth. New structures must be developed with the goal of launching a move of the Gospel into even wider circles. We must use our base to provide the launch pad for the next great movement. We need courageous preachers who are compelled by Christ to take the Gospel to the lost. We need prayer warriors, evangelists, teachers, trainers, administrators, counsellors, social workers and others with a heart to give their lives to the Great Commission. Above all I believe we need to pray for God to raise up a new generation courageous leaders and passionate visionaries, who “understand the times and know what Israel should do” (1 Chron.12:32).

The current leadership of our REACH family have made some brave gospel choices in this last year. They have made sensible decisions to pursue avenues of gospel growth that will help us partner together to engage our rapidly changing society. Putting these plans into action won’t come without pain and sacrifice. No one exempt from that cost.

The great challenge for us all is to implement these changes rightly as we embrace inventive ministry without compromising our gospel convictions.

It can be done, all the pieces are in place.

Let us use the machinery of REACH - our people, our buildings, our networks and our college, to partner together for this next great chapter of a growing southern African gospel movement.

So, let me say one last time:

Lord, give us Africa for Jesus!

Mayibuile iAfrika kuJesu.

Amen!