



# **SYNOD MIDRAND 2024**

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**Be Steadfast, Immovable  
& Abounding in the work  
of the Lord**

# **Presiding Bishop's Charge: 2024**

## **1. Greetings**

Retired Bishops, Area Bishops, National Bishops, esteemed lay delegates of REACH-SA, Clergy, Deacons, and Deaconesses, members of the Executive Committee, visitors from REACH in Southern Africa, the Chancellor, GWC Principal and lecturers, honoured guests, dear friends, and beloved family. I greet you all with heartfelt joy in the precious and matchless name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Maureen and I are deeply humbled to be entrusted with the sacred responsibility of leading the church that Christ purchased with His own precious blood (Acts 20:28b). We step into this role with a profound sense of fear, trembling, and prayer, earnestly desiring that Christ will be glorified in every aspect of our service. Fully aware of my own inadequacies, I humbly ask for your patience and forgiveness as the Spirit of God continues His work of transforming me into the likeness of His Son. As we embark on this journey, we fervently seek your prayers and support. It is our sincere hope to grow closer to each of you, so that through that bond, we may serve you more faithfully and effectively.

## **2. Thank you, Bishops!**

I would like to take this moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to my predecessor, Bishop Glenn, and his better half, Sandy Lyons, for their faithful and tireless labours on behalf of our church. Over the past nine years, our church has been richly blessed by Glenn's visionary leadership, which has left an indelible mark on REACH-SA. His deep compassion and pastoral heart have touched the lives of many, and his gentle yet firm leadership is something I deeply admire and aspire to emulate as we journey forward together.

Bishop Glenn's tenure was marked by significant achievements, and his influence will undoubtedly have a lasting positive impact on our church. His tireless efforts in building relationships with like-minded Christians, both in South Africa and abroad, have strengthened our fellowship and expanded our reach. The acceptance of REACH as a partner in GAFCON is a testament to the decades of groundwork laid by former Presiding Bishops, yet it was Glenn's relational acumen and unwavering dedication that brought us to the finish line.

We have much to be thankful for from Bishop Glenn’s time of service. Through God’s strength and under Glenn’s leadership, we have seen the launch of our Prayer Book App (as a cell phone application), the planting of new churches in the suburbs, inner cities, and townships, and the establishment of a mechanism for the making of female deacons. These initiatives reflect a deep commitment to both tradition and innovation, and we are grateful for the foundation that has been laid for the future growth of our church.

Bishop Glenn was also on the rudder as the church went through two challenging times—COVID-19 and the transformation talks, which began in 2020. Our churches were not immune to the trials brought on by the pandemic, the financial strain could have been far worse if not for the establishment of the Bishop’s Fund, a lifeline during those difficult days.

Our churches did walk away unscathed by the impact of COVID-19, but the financial situation would have been worse had it not been for the Bishop’s Fund. He was also at the helm as our regions discussed the impact of historical past and its systemic impact on our structures. Against strong opposition, he resisted calls to remain silent as he called for repentance on racism and he refused to remain silent, boldly calling for repentance of the sin of racism.<sup>1</sup> His 2020 Opening Remarks on this matter, where he stated, “It’s clear from God’s Word that we are entrusted with the Kingdom task of demonstrating our unity in Christ as we reflect a saved family of believers from every tongue, tribe, and nation,” continue to resonate powerfully today. His words remind us that the call to unity in Christ is not merely a passing concern but a central aspect of our Kingdom witness.<sup>2</sup>

We offer our heartfelt thanks to God for Bishop Glenn’s devoted service, and we pray that the Lord will continue to bless and sustain both him and Sandy as they serve faithfully at Tokai Community Church. In reflecting on his legacy, I am reminded of the wise words from his 2015 Charge: “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.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Lyons, “Regional Meetings – 2020 Presiding Bishop’s Opening Remarks,”

[https://presidingbishop.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PB\\_opening\\_remarks\\_Areas\\_2020.pdf](https://presidingbishop.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PB_opening_remarks_Areas_2020.pdf), accessed on 18 August 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Lyons, “Regional Meetings.”

There is an urgency to see souls won to Christ, and we dare not be distracted from this task.”<sup>3</sup> These words challenge us to remain focused on our mission, recognising that our time is short and the need for the Gospel is great. As we move forward, may we carry this sense of urgency and commitment, always striving to see Christ exalted in all that we do.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Bishop Alan Noble, who is stepping down as the Cape Area Bishop. His ministry has left an indelible mark not only in the Cape but also in other regions. Bishop Noble’s deep affection for struggling ministers serves as a shining example for all of us to follow. His willingness to listen with understanding and his tireless efforts at Holy Trinity Church transformed that congregation during a challenging time, turning it around when it was in dire need. As he soon retires from his role as the Area Bishop and in the near future as the Rector, one can only hope that he might be persuaded to share his wealth of experience by writing a book on church revitalisation. His insights and wisdom would be an invaluable resource for the current and future generations of church leaders.

Bishop Njabulo Mazibuko also steps down and now joins the esteemed ranks of our bishops emeritus. Bishop Mazibuko is a man of many admirable qualities, foremost among them his genuine concern for the lost and his exemplary prophetic witness within the socio-political sphere in KwaZulu-Natal. He has managed to strike a delicate balance between bold truth-telling and compassionate ministry, a balance that many of us have found challenging to maintain. Perhaps, in the coming years, he can be persuaded to share more of his insights and wisdom with us, guiding us in how to navigate these complexities with the grace and courage he has demonstrated.

We are deeply thankful for the service of Bishop Mazibuko and our other retiring leaders. Their ministries have enriched our lives and strengthened our church in ways we may not yet fully comprehend. Through their faithful labours, the Lord’s Kingdom has been extended, and we are all the better for their contributions.

As we thank God for those who are stepping back from ‘active leadership ministry’ and passing on the mantle, we must also express our deep gratitude to those who have stepped forward to

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<sup>3</sup> G. Lyons, "Charge-Synod 2015," [reachsa.org.za/2015/09/bishop-glenn-lyons-charge-synod-2015/](http://reachsa.org.za/2015/09/bishop-glenn-lyons-charge-synod-2015/), accessed on 09 December 2020.

serve the Lord's people as our new Area Bishops. Special thanks are due to their families and congregations, who will inevitably be impacted—hopefully in a positive way—by their decision to take on even more responsibilities. We are blessed with a young, mostly young, and enthusiastic team of bishops who love the Lord and are passionate about seeing His Gospel spread throughout the world.

Our initial meetings together have left me feeling refreshed and hopeful for the future of our church. These are godly men who are '*genuinely seeking to shepherd the flock, with no interest in personal gain*'. Their election is a powerful testament to our unwavering commitment to the Gospel and the work of discipleship. We now find ourselves with a third generation of bishops who have been raised within our churches, trained at our college, and who are eager to serve. The quality of our leadership is not in decline; in fact, we have not needed to look outside our ranks for leaders. For this, we should praise God for His continued work in REACH South Africa.

### **3. Visitations to SA and Southern Africa**

I officially began my work on the 1st of April 2024. Over the past five months, I have been diligently acquainting myself with the work of our denomination across various regions and countries. I have consulted with fellow bishops, clergy, and laity in both formal and informal settings, seeking to understand the unique challenges and opportunities in each area.

During this time, I have had the privilege of visiting multiple churches in the Western Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape. A visit to the Free State region is also in my plans for the near future. Additionally, I have visited our partner national churches in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. I look forward to extending these visits to Namibia and the Democratic Republic of Congo soon. Through these interactions, I am gaining valuable insights into how we can better serve and support our communities in the mission of Christ.

My preliminary assessment reveals much cause for rejoicing. Our ministers possess a solid grasp of the Gospel and a Christ-centered approach to ministry. In the areas where we have ministers, they are generally well-trained and committed to their calling of bringing hope to the least, the lonely, and the lost.

ome of our churches have not only rebounded from the challenges of COVID-19 but have indeed thrived. Our suburban churches, particularly those near universities, are making a significant impact in reaching the lost and training the next generation of Christian workers. Moreover, we have witnessed the planting of many new churches, especially in urban centres, which have helped to counterbalance the closures of churches in suburban and rural areas. For instance, our church plant in East London has effectively filled a gap left by a church that had to close during the height of the pandemic. We look forward to providing more concrete data on these developments in the coming year as we work to update our reporting system.

This is not to say that all our churches are thriving. In my conversations with some of our pastors, I discovered you are very discouraged. Some of our churches are in a state of intensive care. They are in desperate need of our prayers, resources, and encouragement.

- Our buildings are deteriorating.
- Some of our churches don't have ministers.
- Others are discouraged by low attendance.
- Others are feeling the impact of crime; their buildings are broken into, and some of our churches are being extorted by gangs asking for "protection money".

We should not be surprised by this. Living in these times of post-COVID has left many feeling disconnected, uncertain, and spiritually adrift. Recent studies have continued to look at the lingering impact of COVID-19 on all of societal life and have discovered that "COVID-19 has generated a series of social, economic, and cultural effects which will have long-term impacts. In particular, the pandemic has exposed, exacerbated, and solidified existing societal inequalities. It has also made some individuals and groups living in particular places and communities even more vulnerable than before."<sup>4</sup> For some in ministry, this is felt more acutely than others, while for some, COVID-19 presented areas of growth; for others, it created greater demands on our churches as they seek to help those who have not recovered physically, spiritually, and financially. For some, the struggles have become so overwhelming that they no longer see the value in meeting with fellow believers. They have stopped inviting bishops,

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<sup>4</sup>The British Academy, "The COVID Decade: understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19," <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-understanding-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/>, accessed on 21 August 2024.

attending Area Council meetings, ministry training programmes, or even Synod because they feel isolated in their difficulties.

It is these struggling churches that must become the focus of our concern. We need to ensure they know we are standing with them. Just as we rejoice in the planting of new churches, we must mourn and strive to address the plight of those who are struggling. In business, it is often said that retaining a customer is less costly than acquiring a new one. This principle resonates with the parable of the lost sheep, where the Shepherd leaves the 99 to search for the one that is lost.<sup>5</sup>

We must take this lesson to heart and apply it to our situation. Our Shepherd's example of seeking the one lost sheep highlights the importance of giving serious attention to our struggling churches. We cannot afford to treat our fellowship as merely a survival of the fittest; we must be proactive in caring for those who are on the brink. Let us ensure that we do not neglect our straying churches but rather support and revive them, reflecting the compassion and dedication of our Lord.

I pray that God will use our new bishops to continue building bridges between our healthy and struggling churches. Many of you have developed innovative approaches to address challenges in ministry, and as we gain a clearer understanding of the situation across our denomination, we aim to connect struggling churches with others facing similar issues, even across provincial lines.

However, the success of these interventions will rely on the willingness of churches to accept help. Our federal structure does limit our ability to intervene in local church matters, and we cannot compel anyone to accept assistance. Nevertheless, we hope and pray that our struggling brothers and sisters will recognise our genuine concern and be open to receiving support. It is through our collective efforts and compassion that we can truly make a difference in the lives of those in need.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 15:1-7; Matt 18:10-14.

## 4. Priorities: Spiritual Renewal, Structural Renewal and Growth

### 4.1. Spiritual Renewal

As I reflected on the challenges that many of us have faced, I became increasingly convinced that the first priority of our leadership must be spiritual renewal. My brief thoughts are drawn to the book of Hebrews, where the author writes to a Christian community that began well but was tempted to give up along the way. In Hebrews 10:32-34, we read about believers who once stood boldly for their faith, enduring public abuse, imprisonment, and even the loss of their property. Yet, over time, discouragement began to set in.<sup>6</sup>

Some among them were in danger of drifting away from the faith, becoming spiritually negligent<sup>7</sup> and hardening their hearts due to sinful neglect.<sup>8</sup> Others were tempted to deliberately rebel and commit apostasy.<sup>9</sup> They were growing weary of maintaining their Christian confession in the face of hostility.<sup>10</sup> This community, discouraged and tempted to turn away from Jesus, was considering a return to Judaism.

The author of Hebrews writes to encourage them to persevere in the Christian faith.<sup>11</sup> He begins by reminding them of the core truths of the Gospel, reaffirming their confidence in Christ and the authority of God's word. This message is just as relevant to us today as it was to them. We, too, must remember that our strength and perseverance come from a deep and unwavering trust in Christ. As we face various challenges this season, we must renew our spiritual commitment and anchor ourselves firmly in the Gospel.

Let us take to heart the encouragement given in Hebrews, to hold fast to our faith, and to help each other remain steadfast in the truth of Christ. This spiritual renewal is not only vital for our own souls but is foundational for the health and vitality of our entire denomination.

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<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 5:11; 6:12; 12:12-13.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 2:1, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 5:11; 6:12; 12:3, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 3:12; 4:11; 10:26-29; 12:25.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 12:3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 12: 11; 13:22.



### *Our Confidence in Christ and God's Word*

Hebrews 1:1-4 underscores Christ's supremacy and sufficiency as God's ultimate revelation. In Hebrews 1:1-2 we read: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (ESV)." In a culture that is increasingly characterised by relativism, when truth is viewed as subjective and fluid, we need to remember that our God is a speaking God who has spoken to us through His word. Jesus Christ is a definitive divine truth and last word from God, the climactic revelation, the supreme and final word of God. Therefore, we listen to him and his word, even if that means going against our culture. God is alive; He is not silent. He has revealed Himself through the person of His Son. I like it how Peter O'Brien puts it: "God speaks in all that Jesus is and does."<sup>12</sup> To encourage us to listen to Jesus, the author of Hebrews explains who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

### *Jesus is the Unique Son of God.*

The first thing we learn about Jesus in Hebrews 1:2 is that he is God's Son, the unique divine Son of God. In relation to God, he radiates God's glory, possesses and reveals his nature, and shares his royal majesty ("he sat down at the right hand...").<sup>13</sup> As the apostle John puts it, "We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."<sup>14</sup> When we see Jesus and encounter him, we see and encounter God.<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 1:3b tells us that the Son is "the exact representation of his [God's] being (NIV). This is why Jesus could say to Thomas, "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him,"<sup>16</sup> and to Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).<sup>17</sup> Brothers and sisters, the only way we can start our spiritual renewal and revitalisation is to focus on Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God, not programs. I saw this the other day in an ad for D.A. Carson's book, "A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Praying with Paul." The ad said, "God doesn't demand hectic church programs and frenetic schedules; he only wants his people to know him more intimately." Friends, spiritual renewal begins when

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<sup>12</sup> P. T. O'Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son: A Biblical Theology of Hebrews* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 45.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 1:3-4.

<sup>14</sup> John 1:14; see also John 14:9.

<sup>15</sup> John 14:9.

<sup>16</sup> John 14:7.

<sup>17</sup> John 14:9 (cf. N. E. Brown. *An exegetical outline of Hebrews: The superiority of Christ and His Covenant*, 15)

we, the gospel ministers, get to know Jesus more intimately. He is the unique Son of God who reveals God to us, and He is God's last word for this age and generation. We need to behold, uphold, and magnify Him so that everyone will get to know God.

Jesus is not one of the prophets or one of the ways to heaven. He is unique; He is the Son of God and the one who "sustains the universe by His powerful word."<sup>18</sup> Colossians 1:16-17 tells us, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Hebrews has much to say to us about Jesus' supremacy, the Son who shares fully in the Father's unique majesty as God. He shares the same unique characteristics as God; he is the unchanging Lord who is in charge of all creation.<sup>19</sup> He is the "same yesterday and today and forever."<sup>20</sup> Spiritual renewal will happen only when we meditate on who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Friends, this is the uniqueness of the gospel message.

#### **4.2. Structural Renewal**

Our second priority as the leadership of the denomination will be structural renewal. Our Synodical discussions over the past three years have highlighted the need for our denominational structure to be both reflective of and responsive to our current context. Participating in transformation discussions in Gauteng and the Cape Areas has been particularly encouraging. I will continue to support and motivate other regions to follow the example set by these areas and to persist in the challenging work of transformation.

Our conversations about the federal structure must also continue. I propose that Area Councils elect representatives to form a national committee tasked with investigating our current denominational structure and proposing alternatives if needed. This committee should be given two years to complete its work and report back to Synod.

I am aware that these discussions have impacted our efforts to revise the current constitution. Therefore, my suggestion is that we should implement only minimal changes to ensure we

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<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 1:3c.

<sup>19</sup> Hebrews 1:10-12.

<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 13:8.

remain legally compliant and retain our PBO status. More comprehensive constitutional revisions will need to be addressed after thoroughly discussing and potentially restructuring our denominational framework.

The ministries within REACH SA, like many others, are diverse and complex, reflecting the unique needs and opportunities present in different communities. Good governance is essential to support these ministries effectively and ensure they fulfil their purpose of advancing the Gospel. In this context, governance is not merely a matter of organisational efficiency but a spiritual responsibility. Good governance in our ministries must be characterised by transparency and accountability. Transparency ensures that decisions and actions taken by ministry leaders are open and transparent to those they serve. This openness builds trust within the church community, as members can see that their leaders are acting in their best interest and are in line with the Gospel. Accountability ensures that leaders are held responsible for their actions, maintaining integrity and upholding the standards of the Gospel.

Ultimately, governance in our ministries is about serving in a manner worthy of the Lord and the Gospel of Christ. It is about ensuring that every aspect of ministry, from financial management to pastoral care, reflects the values and principles of our faith. By adhering to these standards, we honour God and create ministries that are effective, trustworthy, and capable of making a lasting impact on the Kingdom.<sup>21</sup>

Over the past decades, our growth has highlighted the need for additional staff at the Head Office to enhance our efficiency. Consequently, we are in the process of hiring people to strengthen the function of our Central Office in the following areas: administration, accounting, communications and events coordinator. These additions will help us enhance accountability and help us better manage and support our growing needs.

We are grateful to my predecessor and his team for ensuring that each bishop had an assistant. We also want to extend our thanks to George Whitefield College for generously accommodating us at Foord House.

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<sup>21</sup> Phil 1:27; Col 1:10.

As we enhance the National Office, we must also be mindful not to undermine the valuable work being done in our regions. We now have bishops or chaplains in each region, and I am committed to supporting them rather than interfering with their efforts. I ask you to do the same. Before requesting my intervention in any local issue, please ensure that all local avenues have been explored, following this general order: your Rector/minister, Church Council, Area Bishop/Chaplain, Area Executive Committee, and finally, the Area Council. This approach will help us maintain a collaborative and respectful process.

Please allow me to express my heartfelt gratitude to our Chancellor, Mr. Jonathan, Mrs. Melanie Botha, our Regional Councils and their functions, and all who give their precious time to serve as Central Trustees and in the National Executive Council. They have made it easy for me to settle in and help me understand my role and function as a PB.

### 4.3. **Growth**

I am sure we can all agree that the spiritual depression among our workers is mainly due to slow growth within our denomination. Additionally, our current structure needs to be adjusted to accelerate this growth. At our 2023 ‘Leaders’ Retreat’ in Pietermaritzburg, we agreed that “Our vision is to see REACH South Africa grow and flourish among all the people of South Africa, irrespective of age, ethnicity, or social status.” To achieve this vision, several key steps must be taken:

- 4.3.1. **Better Understanding of Our Denomination:** We need a clearer and more accurate picture of our people, churches, and resources. The way we report at Synod must be improved to provide a comprehensive understanding of the denomination as a whole.
- 4.3.2. **Better Understanding of Our Context:** We must deepen our knowledge of our country, recognising the areas where we have succeeded and the places where we have struggled. We will do better as we know more.
- 4.3.3. **Increase in Evangelism, Discipleship, and Training:** A renewed emphasis on evangelism, discipleship, and the training of leaders is essential for our growth.
- 4.3.4. **Addressing Inequalities in Salaries:** It is crucial that we address the disparities in salaries across our denomination to ensure fairness.

- 4.3.5. **Strengthening Struggling Churches and Planting New Ones:** We need to focus on revitalising existing struggling churches and strategically planting new ones to expand our reach.
- 4.3.6. **Creativity in Fundraising and Use of Levies:** We must become more innovative in raising funds and in the stewardship of our resources, including how we utilise our levies.
- 4.3.7. **Improvement in Implementing Synod Resolutions:** It’s time to move from merely talking about our plans to taking concrete actions. We must be diligent in implementing Synod resolutions to bring about real change.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to make a commitment to you: your bishops will endeavour with all the strength God gives them to be your servant. We are here to support you in any way we can and to be your cheerleaders. Leadership carries the potential for abuse, and our Lord Jesus cautioned us that those who seek greatness must be servants. He set the ultimate example by giving His life on the cross for the church.<sup>22</sup>

Our former leaders understood the importance of limiting the authority of the Presiding Bishop from the outset. Alan Ewbank, speaking as chairman of the third REACH-SA Synod in 1940, emphasised the need to “carefully guard” the powers of the Presiding Bishop to ensure they do not exceed legitimate rights. He highlighted that the Presiding Bishop should act as “the voice of Synod, its servant and not its master,” operating within limits set by Synod or, if necessary, the Executive Committee.<sup>23</sup>

Former Presiding Bishop Des Ingelsby reminded me that a bishop is a servant of servants—first to God and second, to all within our denomination. Under God, you are our employers; our role exists to meet the denomination’s needs. We have no intention of operating outside the boundaries set by Synod. We will follow Synod resolutions, both past and present, and keep you, the Synod delegates, informed of our actions. Please help us do just that.

INkosi inibusise - May God bless you.

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<sup>22</sup> Mark 9:30-37.

<sup>23</sup> A. Ewbank, “Charge,” 1940 (Sydney: Moore Theological College, 1940): 3. My emphasis.

The Most Rev. Dr. Siegfried Ngubane  
Presiding Bishop REACH-SA

