

## Feedback on the ACRP Zoom Conference of 4 March 2022

### Theme: Ministry in Africa: Challenges in Perspective

*Thank you to all the participants of the 2022 ACRP online Conference. We trust that you enjoyed sharing the day with us and found the presentations to be thought provoking and informative. We are including articles from the various presenters in this issue of the ACRP Newsletter. Please see Annexures 1-5.*

*Another "thank you!" goes out to the amazing team that worked so hard to make the Conference a success.*

*Lastly, we would like to remind you that if you were unable to attend the Conference, you can still earn your 8 ACRP CPD points! One of the wonderful benefits of an online Conference is that we could make recordings and those are still available. Should you be interested in receiving the link to those recordings, please contact Andrea at the ACRP Central Office at [acrp@acrpafrica.co.za](mailto:acrp@acrpafrica.co.za) for more information.*

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# The guiding light Newsletter



## Issue 15 – May 2022



### A message from Dr Tertius Erasmus, CEO of ACRP

Dear friend in Christ, it is an honour to be part of ACRP. We are blessed with an organisation who is looking for every opportunity to serve the needs of the church and all our affiliates. We are privileged to have competent and caring personal in our offices and cannot thank them enough for their dedication. We hosted an uttermost successful conference and again our team did excellent! We appreciate every one of them!

There's an old hymn that says, "In times like these, you need a Saviour, in times like these, you need an anchor. Be very sure, be very sure, your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock." It surely reflects on our circumstances today. In our country we live in uncertainty and need to find hope and meaning in life. We can assume the disciples experienced the same. Jesus was crucified and buried and they were scared and feared for their life. On the Sunday morning, according to Luke 24, the women went to greet Jesus ritually for their own closure but received the shock of their life. Jesus wasn't there. They saw an open grave and angels proclaiming that Jesus has risen. We must reflect on their words: "Why do you seek the Living among the dead"? Our focus can be so much on our circumstances that we forgot all the promises that God has made (like the women and disciples). He said to them that He will die, but also rise from the dead. The same Jesus promised that He will be with us all the days of our life. The promise doesn't change our circumstances, life happens, but we are never alone in it, He will be our Anchor, our Saviour, our Companion, etc. When the women were reminded of Jesus's prophetic words, they believed and went gladly to cheer up the miserable disciples. They struggled to believe and we can hear Thomas's unbelief. It took a personal visit from Jesus to change his heart. Therefore, we are God's gift to the world.

As Jesus was sent to the world to restore our relationship with Him, we are here to represent Him (He commissioned us) in the world with the same message. "Do not seek life among the dead but open your heart to the living Jesus and give Him the opportunity to change your ability to face your challenges." We can echo David's words in Psalm 18:28 "LORD, you light my lamp; my God illuminates my darkness. <sup>29</sup> With you I can attack a barricade, and with my God I can leap over a wall. <sup>30</sup> God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is pure. He is a shield to all who take refuge in him. <sup>31</sup> For who is God besides the LORD? And who is a rock? Only our God." (Christian Standard Bible 2020). Jesus has risen for us never to be alone, vulnerable or hopeless. With His presence and in His power, we are conquerors over our challenges and hardships. What we have experienced make us witnesses as the women in Luke 24, or Peter in Acts 4. You can only witness or testify about things you have experienced. If your God is alive, and your life testifies of it, your will be a life changer and hope giver wherever you serve! If your God is dead, you will live in memories and ceremonies, but will give no meaning and life for yourself and others. In times like these, we must proclaim a caring God, a God who is still in control, just as He was in control over the happenings at Passover 2000 years ago. It was then chaos, turmoil, hardship and lead to death, but God used it for our salvation. He is still God, still near, still busy in our life and endless in His love for us!

#### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views / opinions of ACRP. ACRP will not be liable for any action taken or decision made in reliance on this information.

### Contribution as Token of Appreciation

During the ACRP online Conference of 4 March 2022, Dr JP (Hannes) van der Walt was presented with an honorary award certificate of appreciation for his true and selfless dedication, years of hard work, and time and effort spent to bringing ACRP into being, up to where it stands now.

We also invited our affiliates and friends to make a small contribution in another effort to show him our deepest gratitude and as acknowledgement for his dedication. You have certainly opened your hearts, and your wallets! A significant amount has been received, and we want to thank you for your generosity.

Dr Hannes greatly appreciates every person who has made a contribution. He has also indicated that he would like to use this money that has been received as seed-money to start an ACRP Development Trust Fund which will be created to support all the various aspects of ACRP's work. More information about this will be given in the next issue of the Newsletter.



**OASIS**  
INTERNATIONAL

Oasis Int. has been intensely involved with the development and distribution of books by authors speaking to the African contexts. The Africa Study Bible is one of the these. Please read part 9C of their sponsored article:

### *Article sponsored by OASIS International – Publishers of the Africa Study Bible*

#### **INTERPRETING THE BIBLE- PART 9C**

Considering the context, the type of literature, and the use of figurative language are among the tools that help us interpret the Bible well. And good interpretation forms the basis for good application.

#### **Application**

To interpret the Bible, we must correctly understand what was in the mind of the original writer as he wrote and what the original readers would have understood from the communication. As such, there is a simple original meaning of individual texts in the Bible. Application, on the other hand, means making the words of the Bible relevant to our world. There are an unlimited number of applications to each Bible passage. Many times the application of the text is exactly the same as the original. When Paul tells the Thessalonians: "Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), that is applied today in exactly the same way it was when Paul wrote it. However, when Paul wrote, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear" (Ephesians 6:5), we may be tempted to think that because we are not slaves and have no slaves in our church, that passage has no application to us. However, it does. Though we are not slaves, most of us have employers or supervisors. Our attitude towards those authorities should be the same as the attitudes slaves were to have towards their masters.

Application involves three steps. First, determine the interpretation by extracting the meaning intended by the writer. Second, establish the principle by peeling back the layers of figurative language and cultural issues. Third, state the application by explaining how the eternal principle has relevance in today's world. The following is a typical example. Paul tells the church at Corinth to "Greet each other with a sacred kiss," which was a cultural practice in his time. The interpretation is Corinthian Christians were to greet one another with a kiss. The principle is the Christian faith encourages people to be friendly and loving, and we should demonstrate that friendliness and love through warm greetings. The application could be, "Greet one another with a warm handshake." Since kissing is not an appropriate cultural way of greeting in much of Africa, one should greet others in another culturally acceptable way. In other areas it may be a hug, hitting walking sticks together, a dance, or banging foreheads together.

Of all the ways that God could have chosen to communicate his eternal truth to us, he chose to write his truth in a book. That means we must use all the principles we normally use in reading, plus the specialized rules related to special types of literature to understand the right interpretation and teach the right application of the various sections of the Bible.

To learn more about interpreting and applying the Bible, and read the complete piece, see the article entitled Interpreting the Bible in the Africa Study Bible.

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The two **Must Have Resources** for the private library of pastors of the African continent. Together they form a complete library!

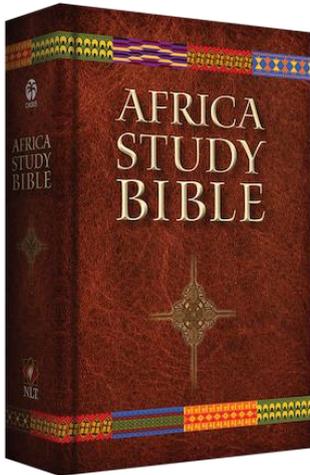
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**Both available from ACRP office**

(place orders by sending an e-mail to [cgmp@acrpafrica.co.za](mailto:cgmp@acrpafrica.co.za))

## 1. Africa Study Bible (ASB) (Hardcover)

*General Editor: Dr John Jusu*



### Key features:

The Africa Study Bible (ASB) was written by 338 contributors from 48 African countries, making it the most ethnically diverse, single-volume, biblical resource to date.

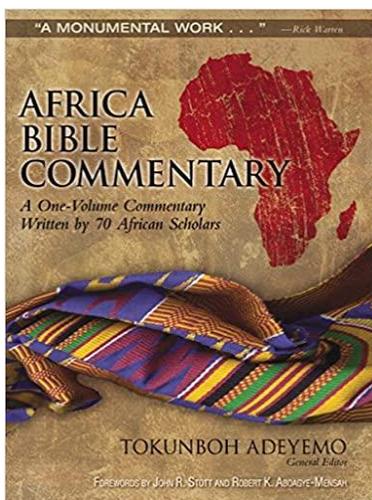
- It was built from the ground up by scholars and pastors in Africa who see the critical need to make Scripture relevant to our everyday lives.
- It contains more than 2,600 features that illuminate the truth of Scripture with a unique, African perspective.
- It is an all-in-one course in biblical content, theology, history, and culture.
- "Touchpoints", "Proverbs" and "Stories" gives an African perspective on the Bible and also show parallels with African wisdom.
- An absolute treasure of 2100 pages

**Price:** R450.00 (excluding delivery costs). A discount for orders of 10 or more can be arranged.

*"The Africa Study Bible is a pacesetter in using the African experience for understanding the Bible. I recommend it highly to those who have sought to understand life and the world from an African perspective".* **Dr Myume Dandala**, former presiding bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and former head of the All Africa Conference of Churches.

## 2. Africa Bible Commentary (ABC) (Hardcover)

*General Editor: Dr Tokunboh Adeyemo*



### Key features:

- One-volume Bible commentary produced by African theologians, in Africa, for the needs of African pastors, students and lay leaders—and for the world.
- Section-by-section interpretive commentary, providing a useful guide to the entire Bible.
- More than 70 special articles dealing with topics of key importance in ministry in Africa today, but that have global implications.
- 70 African contributors from both English- and French-speaking countries in Africa
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**Price:** R450.00 (excluding delivery costs). A discount for orders of 10 or more can be arranged.

*"A rich and valuable contribution to biblical knowledge and understanding. I commend it to Christian leaders. not only in Africa but the world over".* **Dr Justice James Ogenyi Ogebe**, High Court Nigeria

*For information on how to place an advertisement in our newsletter, prices involved and type of advertisements, please contact ACRP head office at [acrpafrica.co.za](mailto:acrpafrica.co.za)*

**The various presenters that participated in the ACRP Online Conference 4 March made their articles available for this Newsletter. These articles can be read in the following Annexures:**

- Annexure 1:** Pastoral Care Amidst Challenges: An African Perspective (by Benaya Niyukuri)  
**Annexure 2:** Creating a Culture of Excellence at work: The Game Changer Leadership Approach – Leading from Within (by Rooks Moodley)  
**Annexure 3:** Diversification Approach to Ministry as an Attempt to Meet the Challenges – Part 1 (by Busangokwakhe Dlamini)  
**Annexure 4:** Values, roles and Contributions of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) to the Church (by Mary Klinkradt)  
**Annexure 5:** Online Theological education within the South African context (by Johannes Knoetze)

## Annexure 1



### Pastoral Care Amidst Challenges: An African Perspective

By Benaya Niyukuri, Clinical Pastoral Therapist

#### 1. Introduction

Pastoral care faces many challenges in Africa. As pastoral caregivers endeavour to look after those in need of their ministry, they have to deal with issues such as poverty, illness, political crisis, and wars. In addition, the African identity is challenged by foreign influence. The traditional African spirituality becomes another matter of concern for pastoral caregivers to achieve success in their endeavour to care for souls. Thus, this article looks at the challenges affecting pastoral care in Africa in order to suggest ways through which such challenges can be addressed.

#### 2. The unique nature of pastoral care

Louw (2012) demonstrates the uniqueness of pastoral care by pointing out the distinction between the pastoral care discipline and all other disciplines within the field of health and care. In this regard, pastoral care displays empathy by dovetailing the suffering of Christ and human predicament. For this reason, “In pastoral care the pastor doesn’t wait for the people to make an appointment. Instead, the shepherd seeks out the sheep to care for them. Pastoral care meets people where they are; the space of life is our office, not primarily the counselling room of a clinical professional in an official building. Pastoral care entails being with people where they are and meeting them in their being functions with deep concern and sincere empathy” (Louw, 2012:4). Furthermore, in its task to save individuals from their life crises, pastoral care “takes social and political circumstances into consideration, includes religious rituals, accompanies people in times of crises, addresses everyday themes and problems, values occasional services, and collaborates with diaconal services” (Ağılkaya-Şahin, 2016:71). While taking care of the human soul, pastoral care takes into consideration the support for a human being as a whole, i.e. the care for the body, soul, and spirit (Louw, 2012).

#### 3. The Challenges of Pastoral Care in Africa

Notwithstanding the already existing weaknesses in African theological discussion, pastoral care in Africa has remained fragmented with diverse and seemingly knee-jerk approaches in guiding individuals who provide pastoral care (Vhumani, 2017:1). The organisation of *homo africanus* is based on the sanctity of life, relation between illness, misfortune and sin, spirits and ancestors in the life of the community, as well as life experienced as a whole (Masamba ma Mpolo, 2013). As far as the resources in pastoral care in Africa are concerned, Vhumani (2017) points out the following dimensions:

- i. Lack of literature (research, publications) on Pastoral Care
- ii. The way pastoral care is practiced in ministry:
  - a. Missionary churches prioritise enculturation as well as the connection between African culture and theology
  - b. Differences between churches: Roman Catholic and Protestant (conservative and liberal) relying on monographs, academic papers and journals; while the Pentecostals and Charismatics rely on their leaders’ popular booklets.

Another challenge is that pastoral care in Africa takes place more in a church set up due to little or no specialisation/training in chaplaincy as compared to the West. Moreover, Vhumani (2017:5-7) presents seven ways of practicing pastoral care in Africa:

- i. Mixture between African traditional practices and Christian pastoral care practices.

In this context, prophets work like traditional diviners. They perform rituals through exorcism to do away with misfortune. In this way, sessions are organised where healing practices take place by the use of water and oil. This is often observed in African Independent Churches (AIC), white garment churches or Zionist churches in Southern Africa. By the way, such healing practices are performed so as to address spiritual causes of misfortune and restore the person back to full health.

- ii. Dichotomy between Christian values and practical life.

The dichotomy between Christian values and practical life is defined by syncretism, a concept where people seek extra help from diviners and magicians after prayers and preaching at church, while still maintaining the position in the church. As pastoral caregivers focus on teaching people to grow their faith in Jesus as a solution to their problems, they have threats of spiritual forces making them not see pastoral care as convincing and practical, especially in missionary churches where issues of spirituality are not sufficiently addressed.

- iii. Agonising and alienating Christianity

Here, church members stand firm in the message of Jesus by responding to the caregivers' supporting, sustaining and empowerment despite the pressure from extended family and community members.

- iv. Formation of family and community coping with support structures

On this point, the role of pastoral care givers is to empower communities to build strong family systems that are inspired to care for the emotional strain on people detested by other family members.

- v. Family group enrichment

The task of pastoral care in Africa is to the setup of groups such as youth, family, male, female to solve challenges. The formation of such groups allows group members to address their life pickles through sharing with peers facing or recovering from the same life experiences.

- vi. Exorcism and healing

In Africa, pastoral care often happens through establishing healing and exorcism sessions. Prayer for water, oil, handkerchiefs, as well as pieces of cloth to empower them to do the work of healing. This is common in the emerging Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

- vii. Position reversal

In Africa, some people opt to leave the Christian faith when life becomes difficult. They decide to go for African traditional ways of care. Thus, pastoral caregivers should help people to come back and trust the Lord Jesus for the solution of their problems.

#### 4. More challenges

Fugoyo (2021) unlocks the reality about the challenges of pastoral care in Africa. His reflection relies on Dr Tokunboh Adeyemo's work "Is Africa Cursed?" The presumed curse of Africa comes from the fact that Africans are forced to begin the book of Genesis with the curse of Canaan (Genesis 9:25). The problems Africa faces have to be addressed holistically. The curse of Africa emerges from the error of imposing a negative image on Africa (both by Africans and non-Africans). Africa faces issues such as wars, poverty, slavery and neo-colonialism, child trafficking, hunger, diseases, and poor governance. At the same time, Africa is a wealth of natural resources, mineral resources, energy resources, human resources, and spiritual blessings.

In this regard, pastoral care should encourage Africans to undo the 'presumed' curse through obeying God (Deuteronomy 27:10), worshiping one God and shunning idolatry (Exodus 20:2-3), hardworking to do away with idleness and laziness (Genesis 2:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:10), as well as being a generous continent that is willing to share its resources not only with the outside but also within its borders (Acts 20:35).

## 5. Conclusion

In Africa, the challenges of pastoral care are seen in the intersection between the gospel and African traditional beliefs. Also, pastoral care finds protuberances due to the situation of wars, diseases, and poverty which haunt African people. Whatever it takes, pastoral caregivers in Africa should strive to join people in their suffering. Despite many challenges, pastoral caregivers should encourage African people toward believing Christ who sacrificed His life to deal with Africa's pain. After all, the gospel should be preached by word and deed while encouraging African people to paint a positive self-image and focus on the one true God who is able to save them from their ordeal.

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## Annexure 2



### Creating a CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE at WORK: THE GAME CHANGER LEADERSHIP APPROACH – LEADING FROM WITHIN

By Rooks Moodley, Academic Coordinator, Reaching a Generation Leadership Academy

#### Context

It has become very clear that we live in a VUCCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Covid, Ambiguous) context and it cannot be business as usual. In the words of Albert Einstein, "We cannot do things the same way and expect different results". The VUCCA context forces us to adapt or die. From operating in a "face to face" context to a complete shift of the digital/on-line world requires a complete paradigm shift. There was no time to prepare for the rapid changes, especially the shift into the 5th Industrial Revolution and overnight we all became a global village. This VUCCA context forces us to adapt or die and also required a very deliberate effort in determining one's Foundations / Revisiting the Ancient.

#### Transforming SELF

The Game Changer Leadership Approach – Leading from WITHIN is an approach that looks at transforming your SELF within a complex and rapidly changing environment so that you role-model while leading your TEAMS and impacting Society. This requires that you reflect on 5 components:

##### 1. VALUE/VALUES

Your VALUE determines your VALUES.

##### 2. WORLD VIEWS

How does your world view determine your perspective of life and interactions/ non interactions with people?

##### 3. CONSCIENCE / CONSCIOUSNESS

Is your conscience still moved and your social, moral and ethical consciousness still awake to the things that grip the Heart of our Father?

##### 4. CULTURAL FRAMES

How does your cultural views accelerate or hinder interactions with people and shape your perspectives of life?

## **5. DAILY ROUTINES/HABITS**

If you want to embed excellence as a character attribute then what you do on a daily basis determines how you develop your thoughts, habits, behaviour and actions. The book by Dr John Tibane “Master your THOUGHTS, Master your LIFE.”

## **TRANSFORMING SOCIETY**

This game changer leadership approach is a Shift from the Great Man Theory Approach (Top Down) that was used for centuries which centred around one person to a collaborative and co - constructive approach that focuses on the entire team. The distinction is a shift from a one-man approach to focus on a collaborative effort of a group of people (team) around a collective intention.

### **Pillars of a Collaborative Approach**

#### **1. Transformation**

This process begins with SELF Transformation given the VUCCA context and how role modelling catalyses TEAM and SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION.

#### **2. Collaboration**

This is a way of breaking the silo/fragmented approach and through coordination ensuring there is greater collaboration.

#### **3. Innovation**

The VUCCA context requires new ways of working e.g. We have been forced into the 5th Industrial Revolution and we have to adapt to the new Digital World.

#### **4. Ethics and Integrity**

Values form the basis of one’s character therefore it must be embedded at the personal level before it can be embraced at the Institutional level. It is important to do the best, offer excellence with the resources at our disposal.

#### **Impact**

As one embraces the Game Changer Leader approach of Leading from Within and thereby Transforming SELF and SOCIETY it will have an impact at the personal, organisational and societal levels. This approach shifts one from a place of certainty and stability into uncertainty and instability and will therefore keep one more rooted and grounded. As one assesses the foundations of one’s existence based on the 5 components of the inner world, it assists one to harness the eternal whilst navigating through the temporal (environment we live in).

#### **Conclusion**

I firmly believe if more and more Kingdom Leaders are able to embrace this Game Changer approach, we will indeed make this world a better place. The ultimate mandate for all of us on the earth is locked up in Matt 22:37 – 40 paraphrased – Love God and Love People. We must become symbols of FAITH, HOPE and LOVE but the greatest is LOVE in a broken world.

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## **Annexure 3**

### **Diversification Approach to Ministry as an Attempt to Meet the Challenges – Part 1**

By Busangokwakhe Dlamini, Director of Siyakhana – Ecumenical Community of the Paraclete

#### Defining the problem and task at hand

There is a story that when Christ had finished His work on earth and returned to heaven, the angel Gabriel met Him.

“Lord” said Gabriel, “is it permitted to ask what plans you have made for carrying on your work on earth?”

“I have chosen some men and women,” said Christ. “They will pass my message on till it reaches the whole world.”

“But,” said the angel, “supposing these few fail you – what other plans have you made?”

Christ smiled, “I have made no other plans,” He said. “I am relying on them.”

The story is taken from the writings of Bishop Trevor Rhodes. The story presents the problem faced in ministry, and task for those involved. This story presents a challenge. Naturally, the real starting point of this challenge, problem and task, as well as the entire ministry of Christ is the Incarnation.

'Challenge' is defined by the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, among others, as a "difficult job: (the situation of being faced with) something needing great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully and which therefore tests a person's ability." It could also be an "invitation to compete or take part."

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'challenge,' among others, as "an order given by a sentry to stop and explain who one is."

The story also presents diversification as crucial and essential in ministry: men and women, who are all different, have been chosen to pass the message.

'Diversification' is a noun derived from the verb 'diversify.' The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the verb as meaning/to mean "to become more varied or different." In business it means starting to make "new products or offering new services." The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary simply has "give variety to."

'Ministry' is not so clearly defined in dictionaries. According to the story, 'ministry' has to do with carrying on the work of Christ on earth, passing the message. Ministry could be perceived as the means through which the Gospel is proclaimed or communicated to a certain people.

'Perspective' is defined by the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, among others, as **1 "thought: a particular way of considering something;" 2 "get/keep something in perspective: to think about a situation or problem in a wise and reasonable way;" 3 put something in(to) perspective: to compare something to other things so that it can be accurately and fairly judged."**

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'perspective,' among others as "the art of drawing solid objects on a flat surface so as to give the right impression of their relative height, width, depth, distance, etc."

The term 'perspective' suggests that there is a certain point of view in the subject who is performing the viewing or feeling or helping. But it implies also that this subject is not completely described by this slant or point of view. The term 'perspective' enables one to think of the subject as having and exercising an attitude or point of view.

'Perspective' implies also a relation to an object. The point of view is directed somewhere in particular, in act, in attitude, in feeling. Used in this way, the term 'perspective' is relational.

The problem is the situation of ministry in Africa. The task at hand is to think about the ministry in Africa in a wise and reasonable way. This needs great mental effort in order to be done successfully.

Everyone is invited to take part in this difficult job called 'ministry' and which presents still a challenge and calls for great effort in order to be done successfully.

If it is everyone who is invited, and if the aim is to achieve success, there cannot be just one way of doing ministry. Each is to bring about difference and variety according to the ability, gifts, insights, and talents one is endowed with. It is only in this way that new products can come about or new services offered. And they will be diverse.

The conference organisers have issued an order to Africa(ns) to stop and explain who they are in ministry. They are to give the right impression of the depth, distance, height and width of their involvement and success in ministry in Africa.

Who are the Africans in ministry? Or who is Africa in ministry? Asked differently: what could be the challenges and the contribution of Africa(ns) in ministry?

Ministry takes place in the context of a Christian community, or as effort to build one. This calls for the need to look at the purpose served by such community.

#### The purpose of a Christian community

The purpose served can be seen in the first Christian communities (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37). They take their name from Christ, and so the Incarnated Son serves as model.

Jesus liked the company of the despised. The men and women chosen to pass the message, therefore, are among the despised. Gerald de Fleuriot (1981), writing on the Church and Human Relations in Industry, argues that it must have come as a shock to the proud and elegant Roman society that Jesus, the Christ, was the 'carpenter's son' and that he liked the company of despised common folk. De Fleuriot (1981) maintains that it was a great scandal to proclaim in the Roman society that love of the uncultured neighbour was more important than intellectual knowledge.

The purpose of a Christian community is to live a commitment to follow and imitate Christ in loving the despised common folk as he did.

Christianity is the religion of the scum of society. De Fleuriot (1981) asserts that the social strata reached by the preaching of the Apostles, and thus the early Christians, were humble people from a 'low' social class. This, asserts de Fleuriot, is affirmed by non-Christian writers. He cites Celsus (2<sup>nd</sup> century) who wrote: "Christianity is the religion of the scum of society" (1981:18). The word 'scum' suggests dirty, immoral, worst type of people that can be imagined. Christianity brought these together. The purpose of a Christian community is to bring together the humble people from a 'low' social class and awaken in them a sense of dignity and worth.

The purpose of a Christian community is to pass the message. According to the above story, the purpose of a Christian community has to do with carrying on the work of Christ on earth, passing the message. The message is that the scum of society is counted among the blessed and chosen to give their response to Christ. Their responses to the worldliness and problems of their time were articulated in the community of love which they established.

The early Christian community endeavoured to be inclusive. After Christ had risen and once the disciples had received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the early Christians endeavoured to live their commitment to Christ not only at Eucharist services but in every area of their lives. This was a community where "The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed." The purpose here was to leave no one alienated. This Christian community was to have everyone feeling included as an important member.

A new cause was adopted. Members of the earliest Christian community, at the moment the gospels were written, shared their possessions (Lk 12:33). This generosity on the part of the Christians (11:26) was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit. Their love for their brethren, and the cause they had adopted, was greater than their love of money and possessions. Their sharing testified that they considered men and women of higher value than earthly wealth. The poor were no longer slaves but free (cf. 1 Cor 7:23). The leaders sought to serve rather than to exercise power over others (Mt 20:25-28; 23:11; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 9:48; 22:25-27; Col 4:1). Those whose hearts were filled with the love of Christ followed the example of him who became poor, that they might be made rich (2 Cor 8:9). In this new cause wealth becomes a crime against life (Jas 2:2-6). The purpose was to witness to the value of life.

A new way of thinking was fostered. Solidarity manifested and marked that new thinking. Solidarity is a sense of belonging together, caring for each other, and so sharing with each other so that no one is in want. This was a call to a new way of thinking, recognizing all people as social beings with the rights and responsibilities of interdependent members of one body.

The community is for mutual correction. Solidarity is not absence of conflict. The new cause was sometimes forgotten or ignored. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for humiliating the poor when the community gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper. He reminded them that it is the body of the Lord they had to recognize when they assembled together (1 Cor 11:17-34).

The conflict between concern for the community and individual greed occurred from time to time. The need arose to examine the honesty of owning a large surplus of material goods while others lacked the necessities of life.

The community restored harmony. "Verses 42-46 characterise the earliest church as a cultic community" runs the comment in the African Bible. The portrait of the church emphasizes harmony and solidarity in the community expressed through concern for one another and generosity.

A new lifestyle was ushered. This communal lifestyle is treated with such importance by Luke that a little further on in Acts another six verses are devoted to it.

4:32-37

Property was sold to care for the poor. With "everything in common," the community fulfils an ideal of friendship expressed in sharing possessions.

This idealized portrait of community generosity and submission to apostolic authority is rendered concrete in the actions of a single property owner, Joseph the Levite.

Sharing became the norm. Luke stresses the togetherness of the first community. This communion among Christians goes beyond sharing the same faith and meeting in the same place. There are economic exigencies for the baptized persons, a solidarity with the needy in the community. Those who own property are expected to put it at the disposal of the community so that nobody will suffer want.

The needs of the group became paramount. The practice of the community of goods asserts in the Christian community the prophecy of Dt 15:4 is being fulfilled: "There will be no poor among you." Already in the gospel of Luke is found an emphasis on giving away one's belongings (Lk 3:11; 12:33; 14:33; 18:22). Some women among the disciples share their possessions for the needs of the group (Lk 8:3; cf. 19:8). But in Acts the vocabulary of 'poor' and 'rich' is no longer met. Acts 4:34 speaks of "those in want." Christians are to care for them so that in the church there no longer exist economic or social differences. Living in a hostile world Christians of the first century were mostly concerned about their fellow Christians in need.

Love of neighbour is the centre. There is a suggestion that it is not so much religion that was experienced and lived in the early Christian communities but spirituality. The suggestion is that, after receiving the Spirit, they lived a spirituality, and not necessarily a religion. The suggestion is that it is not so much religion that should be the main concern of any Christian community, but a spirituality of caring.

The community is for mutual correction and edification. Solidarity is not absence of conflict. The new cause was sometimes forgotten or ignored. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for humiliating the poor when the community gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper. He reminded them that it is the body of the Lord they had to recognize when they assembled together (1 Cor 11:17-34). The conflict between concern for the community and individual greed occurred from time to time. The need arose to examine the honesty of owning a large surplus of material goods while others lacked the necessities of life.

There came a time for deviation from the primary purpose. Howard Clinebell (1984) cites a parable by Theodore Wedel depicting the process of the evolving of such community into a club that saw the caring as unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal life of its members. There was a split as some members insisted upon the primary purpose. The split brought about a search of approaches to stay relevant to the primary purpose, namely, carrying on the work of Christ on earth, passing the message of love and caring.

#### Approaches that thwarted the purpose

Some approaches thwarted the purpose. De Flueriot (1981) outlines some of the approaches to ministry among the proletariat that did not work and thus led to de-christianisation after the year 1800. De-christianisation, in de Flueriot (1981), refers to the great numbers of mainly workers and their families leaving the Church between 1850 and 1860 in Europe. While de Flueriot (1981) demonstrates how the social question pulled apart the Church and the proletariat in some countries, his primary focus is South Africa, where he ministers. He compares the conditions in South Africa during the evangelisation era with those of Europe between 1850 and 1860.

Conversion meant a new class. To become a practising Christian was like entering a different world where one would have to adopt new attitudes to fashion, to manners, and to political views. Conversion really meant conversion to bourgeois standards.

And so, if one did 'convert,' one would be looked down upon in the new club and still face former friends as a traitor.

The spiritual teaching was abstract. It followed a language and an approach closer to the bourgeois, abstract culture. Very conceptual, it neglected the basics of people's culture, which is to learn through the discussion of situations, and through the analysis of daily realities.

Liturgy and worship were out of touch with people's sensitivities. Everything was foreign to their culture and way of life: music, hymns, and language.

The lifestyle was frightening. The activities and lifestyle of the church frightened people away from her midst. The Church appeared as yet another society competing and making alliance with the political powers of the time.

The clergy was close to the bourgeoisie. The image of the clergy was not very flattering in the eyes of the proletariat. Clergy was, in their eyes, preoccupied with money, automatically attached to services linked with the important moments of life, for which the proletariat had to pay: Baptism, Marriage, Funerals. They were accused of being close to the bourgeoisie, to come from their ranks, to have their lifestyle and to feel solidarity with them.

They ran offices like any government officials and were looked upon as mere functionaries. They were thought to be lazy and to be enjoying life.

New approaches to ministry are required if the Church is to mirror the first Christian communities.

#### Relevant approach

Studies pave the way. De Flueriot (1981) speaks of just one new relevant approach: Evangelisation. He states that this approach only came into existence after the First World War.

He also states that it was prompted by serious studies in many fields in the humanities and the social sciences which highlighted many concepts which had only received superficial attention in the past, and theology beginning to explore new areas. One such new area was theology of the laity.

Theology of the laity required a new orientation of the clergy. A new spirituality, as a result, began to mould the lay apostolate. Liturgical progress, worship, catechism, religious practices, could not be divorced from real everyday life of the people without becoming irrelevant. The new orientation of the clergy would require them to be more at the service of the people, to go to them, to have direct contact with them at their work places, and see the injustice they were subjected to day and day out.

Fighting injustice became an expression of faith. While de Flueriot (1981) speaks of just one new relevant approach, namely, Evangelisation, its fruits are many and varied. In the light of this new approach, injustice and poverty were now seen as permanent obstacles to evangelization. Christians would have to be actively involved in world affairs, expressing their faith in fighting injustice and poverty. While this may be deemed as not a direct work of evangelization, it is a necessary condition, without which, the Christian message can hardly be noticed or heard. This was also an attempt to bridge the gap between life and faith.

Ministry of Presence became the priority. This was required by an attempt to bridge the gap between life and faith. From the experiences and studies, the Church came to realize that it was not so much to maintain Christian habits and reflexes through the narrow vistas of Christian institutions that was required, but that the priority had to be, and could only be, to create a Christian presence in the world in order for the Church to carry out its only ministry and mission: Evangelisation.

The Church put some distance between herself and the Christians who were using her to boost their political games. The Church thus became animator of the whole of life, and not be a series of ritual gestures parallel to real life. The church that was born out of this is lay.

The above approach, and its variations, worked for the years 1900 onwards, and there is no reason it should not be working in the present conditions. It is the current experience of many pastors, however, that the South African population/proletariat is shying away from Churches and for a few who still come to Sunday Eucharistic celebration, the spiritual food they receive does not seem adequate to give them enough spiritual energy to face the hard working conditions that they experience. More relevant approaches need be looked at, peculiar to Africa de Flueriot (1981) seems to suggest.

There is a quest for adequacy. De Gruchy (1997) concurs with de Fleuriot (1981) in that there is need for more relevant approaches to ministry since a particular form of the church has evolved in Africa.

***More relevant approaches to Ministry in Africa to be continued in the next Newsletter***

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### **Annexure 4**

#### **Value, roles and contributions of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) to the church**

By Mary Klinkradt who currently runs a Disability Family Ministry, RISE, in association with Raising Hope South Africa.

Too often Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) are viewed in the light of the difficulties associated with their disabilities, difficulties that may lead to infrastructure redevelopment needs, perceived inabilities to communicate or actively engage with others, lack of understanding, or risk factors associated with their disabilities such as being prone to wander off if left alone.

This view has led to many PWDs and their families leaving the church, and even turning to other faiths which may be more accepting of their challenges. This paper will consider how the church can change the perception of PWDs so that their value, roles and contributions to the church and church community can be recognised, understood and embraced.

Several years ago, I was talking to a mom of a child with disabilities about the need for more inclusivity in church. Susan and her daughter, Zoe, now in her 20s, are passionate advocates for inclusion and acceptance of the disabled in all sectors of society. Zoe has cerebral palsy, uses a motorised wheelchair to get around, has a slight speech impediment, and needs support in most areas of independent and daily living. Susan was sharing how they no longer attended church. Not only was the building not accessible to the wheelchair, but people often stared at Zoe, or even got annoyed at her unusual speech. Yet this wasn't the most upsetting thing to them. That came when people, both in their church and strangers out and about on the streets, would approach them and start to pray. Often praying for healing. This made Zoe feel uncomfortable. People seldom asked her if they could pray for her, and then they would assume she wanted healing. Zoe didn't want healing, but nobody was asking her what she wanted.

This is one story, but there are many, too many, just like it. The church is neglecting to accept and embrace a valuable and significant group of individuals and families as they fail in their attempts of accessibility, inclusion and diversity. 2019 statistics released by the World Health Organisation<sup>1</sup> and the United Nations<sup>2</sup> estimate that 1.1 billion of the world's then 7.7 billion population were living with a disability. This is roughly 15% of the world's population.

Africans make up for 80 million of those people, with 5 million people with disabilities living in South Africa. Yet, these numbers can be seen as conservative, as they do not include those who have not yet received a diagnosis, some of whom never will, or those who do not classify themselves as disabled, examples of which may include the elderly who rely on walking frames for mobility or the person with high functioning autism who can navigate the world with minimal support so chooses not to identify as disabled<sup>3</sup>.

Before looking at where the church currently finds itself with inclusion, and how to bring about change, let us consider some of the terminology relevant to disability. What do we mean by disability? A condition is considered a disability when that condition is combined with social constructs and the physical environment, and this results in the person experiencing reduced independence and a perceived diminished experience of the world they live in<sup>4</sup>. In line with this definition, two people can be diagnosed with the same condition, and one may be considered disabled, while the other is not. Disability is an individual's experience of their world. This helps us to understand why an observer may view a person's condition as a disability, but the person with a disability may not experience it that way as they have been able to adapt their environment to change their experience in the world.

The phrase a Person with Disability (PWD) is a term that identifies a person as having a disability, but which does not specify the type of disability, thus being inclusive of all disabilities.

Mental disorders are often not considered a disability as the symptoms can often be relieved or reduced through medication, and mental health is seen as affecting the individual as opposed to being an integral part of the individual's identity. However, mental disorders affect emotional, psychological and social experiences, and in the definition of disability above, any mental disorder can become a disability when the person affected finds it challenging to navigate and integrate with the world around them.

It is important to consider three powerplay words in disability studies, those of diversity, accessibility, and inclusion. Understanding these three terms is key to understanding if the church environment we are in is meeting the needs of the disabled community, and to what degree it is successfully doing so. Diversity is a term often associated with the need to embrace different racial and ethnic groups<sup>6</sup>, but it does not stop there. Diversity, in its broadest sense, means to involve and include ALL of society, regardless of differences.

This means all races and ethnic groups, language groups and cultures, sexual orientations, social backgrounds, and ability levels. Diversity can be achieved by embracing everyone. Accessibility is then achieved by providing the necessary adjustments and adaptations to an environment, information or to services so that everyone is able to access them. So, we see that it is possible, by this understanding, to succeed in diversity but fail in accessibility. If we are successful in achieving both diversity and accessibility, the next step is to evaluate the level of inclusivity. Inclusion means that every person present has equal access and the equal opportunity for full participation in the environment they are in. This means again, that we can have accessibility, but fail to provide inclusivity to those in attendance.

With these definitions in mind, let us consider how people with disabilities currently experience the church in South Africa<sup>7</sup>.

In my conversations with people with disabilities the majority of people with disabilities and their families view churches as either completely or partially inaccessible from physical and practical perspectives, and lacking in inclusivity in activities, events, and services.

There is a general feeling that there is a lack of opportunity for people with disabilities to experience leadership in the church, from children with disabilities being involved in youth programs, through to adults with disabilities being given opportunities appropriate to their ability and function level. For those who have been involved in leadership, there is a common thread of being assigned roles that are based on assumptions and stereotypes of their disabilities, so the adult with Down syndrome is placed at door duty because “people with Down syndrome are friendly”, but what he really wants is to serve in the Sunday school. The teen with autism is not given the opportunity of youth leadership because “people with autism don’t connect well with others”. These assumptions are usually based on the deficits experienced through that disability, and seldom are the strengths or specific skills that a person has developed due to their disability taken into consideration when leadership opportunities are being reviewed. We need to ask the question – if we were to place those without a disability into roles in the church based only on assumptions and stereotypes, how would it feel? How would you feel if it was you? How would it be received?

Families with children with disabilities<sup>7</sup> report often feeling very isolated and excluded from church events. This is usually due to the extra support that their children require, poor planning of events to take into consideration the challenges these children and families face, such as physical accessibility, open areas or areas which are high risk for children without a fear of danger, such as the intellectually disabled or autistic children, or where events planned do not take into consideration the needs of the whole family that is attending.

The majority of the reasons provided for exclusion, at their core, are the result of a lack of knowledge around disabilities, accessibility needs, and strategies of inclusions, as well as a lack of commitment for long term change on the part of leadership. Many families have shared that a church will make accommodations for a single event, or for some of the programmes, however, the need is for inclusion across all aspects of the church, not just in children’s ministry, or in men’s ministry, or in one of the Sunday services. This also highlights a need that all disabilities should be accepted and accommodated. It is not unusual to see a congregant in her late 70’s being assisted with her wheelchair, or provided with extra large print for the worship or prayers, so why is it that it becomes difficult for the same church to accommodate a 5-year-old girl who is a wheelchair user with a visual impairment? Why is it seen as being a duty, the right thing to do, or natural to assist the elderly as they acquire disabilities such as hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, and even cognitive decline, yet it is seen as being too difficult to accommodate those same needs in a child, teen, or younger adult? What makes it acceptable to accommodate some disabilities and not others? Is our focus on access to God’s Kingdom for all, or only for some?

On a social level, the five core experiences of people with disabilities in the church<sup>7</sup> are negative attitudes towards the individual or their needs, often related to the changes and adjustments that are required so that the person with disabilities can experience accessibility and inclusion, and the costs associated with making those changes. One parent shared a story of how a church leader told them their child could not attend certain events as they felt he posed a risk to the other children there. At the time this child was in a wheelchair due to his physical condition. One wonders what risk it was they thought he posed.

Another challenge experienced is that of isolation due to the lack of community and connection that people with disabilities feel within the church. The isolation is a result of events and activities being inaccessible or not inclusive, which prevents access to the community connections that form during social events. This isolation is compounded when well-intentioned people insist on praying for the disabled. These prayers often include forgiveness of sins, breaking of curses, and prayers for healing, and are not always requested by the person with the disability. There seems to be a general perception that it is ok to pray for a person with disabilities for what the pray-er feels is the problem, often without asking for permission to pray, or even if the person wants prayer.

There are many disabled people who do not wish to be healed, and who are confident and comfortable with their disability, and receiving unasked for prayer for unwanted needs highlights the needs of society to have them conform to world views of what a person should look, feel, or think like. This subtle form of judgement is part of the view that people with disabilities are broken, inadequate, or not as good as those without disabilities, which is often subtly extended to include the ideology that people with disabilities are, therefore, less valuable. Being perceived as less valuable than those without disabilities and being assumed incompetent simply for having a disability accumulates into the dangerous perception that these valuable people are less able to contribute to the church and to serve in it.

Consider the example of the experience of a person with a physical disability, a wheelchair user with no movement in his legs. Being a wheelchair user may limit some accessibility if the environment has not been adequately modified. However, common assumptions that may be made in association due to being a wheelchair user include:

- People assume the person is hearing impaired and may shout at him instead of engaging in normal conversation
- People assume the person has an intellectual disability and thus they speak as if engaging with a young child
- Some do not try to communicate with the person at all, and instead they ask those who are with the person, such as their sibling, partner, or carer the things they should be asking the wheelchair user. Questions such as: What is your name? or Is this the first time you are joining us?

Once these assumptions have been made and not clarified, this limits the way others view the contributions this person can make to the church. The person may be excluded from welcoming people due to being unable to stand, and the assumptions of hearing impairments and intellectual disability. The person may be excluded from the worship team, due to inaccessibility and the assumption that a person with a disability cannot be musical.

Outreaches and missions are excluded due to transport inaccessibility, building accessibility concerns, and the fear (by the leaders) of what possible situations may arise due to the nature of the wheelchair user's disability. Serving tea is not an option due to imagined or real challenges in the kitchen area, and they are not considered to assist with sound desk and visual support as the team think movement difficulties will be too much of a challenge. Being a wheelchair user excludes them from assisting with serving communion, and they are excluded from leadership in youth, on committees, or of small groups as there are concerns that they will not be able to manage the groups. The wheelchair user begins to question if they should be at church, if they are welcome in church, and why the church is echoing the exclusionary, rejecting and judgemental attitudes that are faced in the world every time a person with a disability goes to work, goes shopping, attends a public event or even a sports match.

Many of these experiences and attitudes that have been identified are entrenched within the fabric of our society, culture, and faith organisations. The rise of disability advocacy and disability studies has resulted in legislation and requirements for businesses, educational institutions and even sporting codes to address their stance on diversity, accessibility and inclusion. Despite these movements forward, the experiences of people with disabilities within the church has not changed significantly, yet the need for access and inclusion remains. This begs the question: what needs to happen to change current perceptions towards people with disabilities in order to allow for the church to become a more open, accessible and inclusive environment for all? Before considering this question, it is important to ask WHY? Why do we need to make these changes?

Perhaps, as always, the key is to go back to basics – biblical teaching includes direction and lessons for how the church needs to consider the disabled population.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 Paul talks of the Body of Christ, clarifying that it is made up of many parts, and when these parts are recognised, and are in the role where they need to be, everything within the body or church works smoothly and efficiently, with all roles being fulfilled. However, when the Body of Christ is missing a part, or neglecting an individual or even group of people, then it is unable to operate in fullness. How many of our churches are currently incomplete bodies of Christ because the disabled population are being neglected or excluded? What is the church missing out on because the key role players necessary are absent? Paul goes on to say, that the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. Is this what is playing out in the church?

Do we consider the unpresentable and treat them with special modesty?

If God sees those who are less worthy as needing special treatment and acknowledgement, if He sees those who lack honour as being worthy of more, and if He directs us that there should be no division in the body, but that every part (or person) should have equal concern and respect for the others, should this not be the way the church carries out its mission? Can the church really call itself the body of Christ when it is incomplete, missing all the components deemed less valuable, less honourable, or less worthy? It is a question that needs to be considered, explored, and considered again, and if there is any uncertainty as to how God can use and support a person with disability, we just need to reflect on the story of Moses. Moses was given a task that would challenge even the most eloquent of speakers, and yet God chose him, the man with a speech impediment. And when Moses raised concerns God offered him a support option, or a concession as such, in the form of Aaron. Moses was given a task that would challenge even the most eloquent of speakers, and yet God chose him, the man with a speech impediment. And when Moses raised concerns God offered him a support option, or a concession as such, in the form of Aaron. Aaron could go along with Moses to assist him. God did not first choose Aaron, the one who could speak clearly and concisely, but he chose to use him to assist Moses so that Moses could achieve his calling.

We too need to consider if we are allowing those with disabilities to carry out their calling by offering them support, or are we denying them the chance of even trying to live out their calling because we cannot see beyond what we perceived to be failings, flaws, or incompleteness?

And if we are not allowing the disabled in our communities to take their rightful places in the body of Christ, how many others, those who would stand in as Aaron did, those who are there to support and assist the disabled, how many of them are being denied the opportunity to serve and to carry out their calling?

Reaching out and including those with disabilities starts with an awareness and understanding of what the disabilities entail<sup>7</sup>. Understanding this helps with the recognition of both deficits and strengths. It is imperative that leaders, congregations and communities are made aware of disabilities, starting small with those disabilities that are directly relevant to their own church family. If there is a person with Down syndrome in the community, then the community needs to gain an understanding of how to best support them, grow them, and encourage them to be active and valued members in the church. Part of this awareness and education is actively dispelling cultural and biblical myths and misrepresentations. This includes beliefs that disability is a curse, that it has been caused by rejection of the ancestors or by not completing relevant traditions and ceremonies, that disability is the result of generational or individual sin, or that the parents of the child with a disability have neglected their faith or not spent enough time in prayer. In John 9:1-3 we read about the man born blind and Jesus' response to the disciples' questions as to why he was born this way: That God's glory may be revealed through him.

I challenge you to change your perceptions to the disabled – and to see them not as a burden, but as a unique channel for God's glory to be displayed through.

In changing this way of thinking, it is necessary to ensure that there is support for the church. This support may be external – knowledge gained through outside sources, speakers and so forth, but it also needs to come from within. Having a group of people driving change, embracing new attitudes, and promoting inclusion from within the church is far more effective than only hearing an outsider's message. To effectively embrace this change from within it is essential to start with connection – connection is the key to inclusion, and comes in many forms such as a genuine conversation, a hug (for those who like hugs and where it is appropriate), a follow up to a previous discussion.

Connection on a personal level defies disability – it shakes off the labels that have been placed over a person and breaks through to their humanity and individual personality. Without connection, the disability remains a barrier, but once connection is made, a person can be seen for who they truly are, and their potential can be harnessed and developed within their environment, and a culture of belonging can start to take shape. Belonging is a powerful experience – ask anyone who has felt unwelcome, experienced being an outsider, or been excluded from an event. To fully embrace diversity and inclusion, start with a culture of belonging – creating a space where everyone feels welcome. People feel welcome when connection is experienced. Connection occurs when we are able to shed our preconceptions because we can understand the challenges and experiences faced by another. So how do we understand these challenges?

We educate the church and encourage and embrace open conversation and engagement with people with disabilities about their experiences and their needs. A person who has full mobility cannot understand the challenges and experiences of a person with reduced mobility, and a blind person cannot shed light on the experiences of a person with intellectual disability. Open conversation, however, with those individuals, that is what will lead to the practical, realistic and purposeful changes that lead to inclusion.

Many an organisation has added ramps to their buildings in order to be able to call themselves accessible. This helps the person in a wheelchair, but if the person utilising their services is blind and cannot read the signage, the organisation remains inaccessible.

So, from a practical and realistic expectation, what shifts need to take place to make the church more inclusive?

- Church communities need to be more open to getting people with disabilities involved – boldly invite them to events and to leadership. Encourage them to take up their designated roles in the body of Christ as they see led.
- There needs to be a change from seeing problems to acknowledging and recognising challenges as they impact an individual, while also recognising the strengths and unique skills that they are able to bring to the community due to the nature of their disability and their lived experiences.
- An important shift is that of changing from treating people as their disability to treating them as a person, with the disability being an interesting side. Just because a person wears shoes, we do not treat them as a shoe, although we may acknowledge their shoes in conversation due to the colour, style, or perhaps even challenges they present. In the same way, it is imperative to treat a person with a disability as a person – engage, connect, offer them tea or coffee, ask about their week, as opposed to only discussing their disability and things related to their disability.

- There needs to be intentionality in creating awareness in the church for the needs and disabilities within the local church community. Awareness breaks down barriers when it demystifies disabilities and opens doors to conversation.
- There needs to be opportunity for people with disabilities to explore roles of leadership in the church that would be available to them if they did not have a disability. For example, a teen with cerebral palsy should not be automatically excluded from being a youth leader if that is a role that is open to teens without disabilities. Rather, the support structures and accommodations that need to be put in place to support the person with disabilities to be effective should be explored and provided.
- Where a church offers a ministry specifically targeted at people with disabilities or families with members with disabilities, it is vital that those leading this ministry have first-hand experience of working with the disabled or living with a person with disabilities. It is also important that they have a broad knowledge of a variety of disabilities so that everyone can be accommodated. They do not need to be specialists, but have a basic understanding and open communication with the individuals and families they serve. This will allow them to be able to effectively and inclusively support those who attend the ministry.

If, at this point, we reflect back to our wheelchair user, it is possible to see that his experience of church and church community can be completely reframed if the leadership and community are intentional in how they understand his disability and approach inclusion and diversity.

Ultimately, shifting perceptions around views and approaches to people with disability should result in every person in the church experiencing a sense of belonging in their church community. It should result in embracing diversity at all levels of leadership, across all ministries, and in all facets of church life. It should lead to recognising and embracing the value and contributions that every person in the church has to offer the community, and ultimately, it should provide inclusive access to God's kingdom for ALL his children.

At a recent church family camp, a teen with Down syndrome and autism was sitting apart from the other youngsters one evening. It had been a long day and he was overwhelmed and tired. As he was observing events from a distance, flapping his hands with excitement, two young children about seven years younger than him, came up to him and asked him if he wanted to join the rest of the group with them. He just shook his head.

Instead of walking away, these two asked if they could sit with him, and when he nodded, they simply sat alongside him. They supported him and allowed him to feel included when everything else was overwhelming for him. This is a beautiful example of absolute inclusion. Meeting a person where they are and stepping alongside them.

This is where we, as the church, want to be meeting people.

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## Annexure 5

Prof Johannes Knoetze (Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria) was another one of our ACRP Conference presenters and his article can be found by following the link to where his article was published on HTS:

Knoetze, J.J., 2022, 'Online theological education within the South African context', HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies 78(4), a7232. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7232>

Once you follow the link, an abstract will be shown. You can view the full text by clicking on one of the options (HTML, EPUB, XML or PDF)