

# Mission and Discipleship Committee

## Thekwini Consultation

**11-13 August 2014**

The Thekwini Presbytery is based in and around the Durban area in Kwa-Zulu Natal. There are currently 27 congregations within the Presbytery which stretches from Richards Bay in the North, Port Shepstone in the South and out to Hammarsdale in the West. There are some outstations that have been planted by the Drakensburg Presbytery within the Thekwini boundaries, and there is a current debate as to which Presbytery they report to. The Consultation Committee consisted of the Rev Theo Groeneveld, Mrs Mmakobo Mosotho and the Rev Jackie Barker

### **Monday Morning Coffee**

After arriving in the early morning of Monday 11 Aug, the visitation team met with some of the ministers of the presbytery. We were privileged to have two probationers from Scotland with us and their perspectives were valuable. The discussion centred around the starting of new work and planting of congregations. It was noted that the traditional model of starting a preaching station and buying land was not feasible - new models of ministry are needed. We discussed the re-planting of congregations: recognising that one mode of operation had come to an end, but that there may well be an opportunity to re-purpose and re-direct ministry in a given location to recognise a changed context and flock. They expressed concern that, of 27 congregations, more than 50% were vacant and not viable for traditional ministry. A number of congregations

were situated in well-populated areas, but had dwindled in attendance in spite of good opportunities for growth and sustainability. Lack of good leadership was an ongoing challenge and finances seemed to be the driving and limiting factor in the presbytery's decisions. Interim Moderators were also guilty of not filling vacancies. The

two probationers from Scotland described the three tiers of pastoral ministry that existed in Scotland: Firstly: Ordained and Trained ministers of word and sacrament (paid from a centralised stipend system, eliminating the problem of differing congregational incomes). Secondly: Ordained Local Ministers who were non-stipendiary, but had been trained by distance learning and allowed to dispense the sacrament in their local setting. Thirdly:



Deacons who are non-stipendiary, but could also be paid by the church or denomination to assist with pastoral visiting or admin, but don't dispense the sacraments. A discussion around "Fresh Expressions" took place and there was particular interest in the concepts of "mixed economy" and "celebrating what God is already doing." Some ideas around church plants and re-plants were discussed. It was a positive meeting and some good ideas were tabled.

### **Stella Preschool:**

Together with this same group of ministers, we went from coffee to see the Stella Preschool. The school started many years ago. Initially a separate building was erected next to the church building. Due to the merging of Stella, Berea and Frere road congregations, there is no congregation currently using the church property. The preschool is thus occupying the entire church premises now.



The school establishment has 13 members of staff (5 teaching, 2 admin staff, 1 cleaner, 2 cooks, 1 driver, a gardener and after care minder). It has 97 children aged between 3 and 6 enrolled and they come specifically from the poorer areas and the flats nearby.

The relationship between the school and the church is not clear.

### **African Enterprise**

The Visitation Team spent Monday afternoon in Pietermaritzburg at the central offices of African Enterprise. After a brief tour of the grounds, we talked about the work of the Mission organisation over a cup of coffee. Those working there were incredibly busy as a large scale outreach is planned for Tuks University in Pretoria at the end of the month. We heard about the difficulties they were experiencing in trying to secure venues and in general the lack of support from the University as well as other parties. This Mission will host workshops, talks and crusades in large venues, some of which are unfortunately not on University property.

The work of A.E. is in the areas of Evangelism, Reconciliation, Leadership development and Aid and relief work. They also train up and use a youth evangelism team known as the Foxfires. Their work extends into 10 different African countries where they use local leadership, churches and evangelists to reach out.

In terms of the UPCSA, one of the exciting programs AE offers is to come into a community for a weekend and run training and outreaches, and help the local church to evaluate their strengths, weaknesses and needs within the community. This partnership between a local congregation and the mission workers has shown to bear incredible fruit.



### **Westville Church**

On Tuesday morning we began with Niek Wit at his congregation's church premises in Westville. The congregation of Durban Westville met in a school hall for many years and have resisted purchasing land and building a sanctuary because of the huge costs involved. A few years previously the Dutch Reformed Church in Westville approached them with the idea of sharing premises and they have been doing this for about 5 years. Both congregations made compromises: the DRC now meet earlier and the Presbyterians meet later and they have tweaked the buildings so that the more traditional style of the DRC congregation and the more contemporary style of the Presbyterians can be accommodated. There is a dynamic team (minister, program co-ordinator, youth ministries worker and secretary) who serve the church and they are doing good work in drawing the children of the community in.

### **Inkanyezi Pre-school – Jamaica**

Niek then took the team into the local township to see the work they are doing there with the children at Inkanyezi. This preschool was born out of members from Westville Presbyterian church who went out into the informal settlement (Jamaica) and met with some women. These casual meetings became more regular and the Westville women started to bring sandwiches and share Bible stories with the fellow sisters and children. The

women started to talk about the needs of the community. This led to a Preschool been started with a volunteer staff in 2002.

Inkanyezi preschool now has 5 staff members appointed and receiving salaries, and supports 64 children from 3-5 years of age. The community is involved in the vegetable garden that has been started there and children get daily food from the garden. They also keep chickens which lay eggs. These eggs are collected on daily basis.



In partnership with the local Rotary Club and “Save the children”, the centre is now becoming a hub, with activities like a Toy Library, Training/workshop for ECD Practitioners, and also renders after care services.

The school is growing from strength to strength under the pastoral care and leadership of Niek and Heidi Wit. They and the congregation are both committed and hands on in the schools development.

## Shongweni Preschool



From here we travelled to Hillcrest and Brian Smith took the team to Luthando, an informal settlement, to a project that the Hillcrest congregation has been involved in. The Preschool is newly established, has 70 children and 5 staff members. The school is situated in rural area marked by poverty. The church has erected a building for the school, pays



the salaries of the staff and helps to provide food for the children. It was noticed that training children in cognitive development is lacking among the staff.

In the same community the church also identified a young mother who has twins, one of whom is a child with CP disability. The condition of their house was not suitable, resulting in the children being put at risk. The church thus raised funds, demolished the dangerous house in which they were staying, and build a modern house with the basic needs for mother and children.

On the day of our visit (which was not announced), we found a proud happy mother. The mother was playing with her child in a clean and healthy home. It was a joy to see the church bringing transformation to the community.

### **Hillcrest Church:**

After visiting the crèche that the congregation are supporting, we toured the Hillcrest facilities and shared with the minister about the changes in the building, programme, marketing and focus of the congregation that have led to the current growth that the congregation is experiencing. The minister shared about the value of exposure to outside ideas and mentoring and the importance of creating a conducive environment to draw families in.

### **Thekwini Presbytery meeting:**

The team made a presentation to the whole presbytery at their monthly meeting, highlighting the five key focal areas of the committee's work and using the website to demonstrate this. It explained the upcoming OSLM and promoted the Mission Shaped Ministries Course being promoted by Fresh Expressions. We were blessed to have the PAT students in attendance, as they were on their second training course in Durban, as well as the Fellowship of Vocation Students. The presentation was received very positively. After the meeting, numerous ministers and elders engaged the team with questions on resources, grants and how to utilise the OSLM.

### **Conclusion**

The team felt that, while time was limited, this was a very positive consultation and that God is doing incredible work through many of the congregations within this Presbytery. It would seem that there is a movement into outreach, especially in terms of meeting educational and developmental needs of children as a means of church growth. These outreaches have huge potential in terms of planting or replanting congregations, as well as simply reaching out into the local community. The Presbytery meeting as well as the meeting with the ministers on the Monday morning were fruitful, and we pray that it leads to further development in relationships as well as in church growth.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*