

# BEING CHURCH

Learning from Methodist churches in South Africa

*A reflective tool for church leaders*



## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

**“I HAVE HAD MY OPINIONS AND VIEWS CHALLENGED AND CHANGED. I HAVE GOT NEW PASSIONS AND DESIRES FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD, THE CHURCH AND THOSE IT CAN REACH OUT TO.”**

The Methodist Church in Ireland very much believes that “God made us a family”. We are part of one world church and we have much to share with and learn from brothers and sisters around the globe.

2016 and 2017 saw much interaction between members of the Methodist Church in Ireland and of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, as well as with Christians involved in other independent mission work in South Africa. In August 2016, nine members of the Methodist Church in Ireland visited Methodist churches in South Africa. They represented the Irish Methodist departments of Home Mission, World Development & Relief (WDR) and World Mission Partnership, a Methodist City Mission and several local congregations. Their aim was to observe how churches in South Africa do church and how they, and other Christian organisations, engage with their communities. The commitment was to bring that learning back to Ireland and share it. Also, in 2017, a WDR media

team visited three of their partners in the same region; namely Open Schools Worldwide, Phakamisa (a programme of Pinetown Methodist Church) and Church Land Programme (CLP).

The purpose of this booklet is not for churches to copy what is being done in another culture and context. The entries are designed as a tool, helping churches and individuals reflect upon how they do church, wherever they are, and ask the honest question “Could we do it better or differently?”. In other words, using another context to question our own.

**You can decide how best to use this reflective tool but it could be used in the following ways:**

1. One session at a time over a series of church leadership meetings
2. As part of a church leaders or members retreat
3. For individual or group reflection

What follows is a series of observations of church and mission in South Africa. Each entry is accompanied by reflective questions, a Bible passage and occasional suggestions for further reading or resources. The entries are in the words of the Irish travellers.

For purposes of confidentiality, names are not given with every quote. We thank all those who welcomed those from Ireland and their openness in sharing about life and church.



MCI Connexional Group with Methodists in Pinetown



WDR Media Team with David and Nomusa of CLP

## METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

**MCSA has 500,000 members in twelve Districts and serves the people of Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland under the banner of 'A Christ-Healed Africa for the Healing of the Nations'. MCSA recently celebrated the 200th Anniversary since Reverend Barnabas Shaw landed at Cape Town on 14th April 1816.**

In South Africa, there are great social, economic and political challenges. Most ministerial candidates for MCSA are now black and integration challenges remain at local level between ethnic and language groups. A positive in South Africa is that, by and large, the churches are still trusted and 70-80% of the population has a Christian background. A united Christian prophetic and practical role has been and can again be a powerful transformative agent.

The laity is very important. Each District has a Lay Leader; the role including representation, advising the Bishop and District Executive, advocating for lay involvement, facilitating dialogue on mission and galvanising support for District projects. Local Preachers (lay) are the backbone of the church as the 800 (approximately) ministers cannot always

visit each congregation regularly. MCSA has an Order of Evangelism; a lay ministry of Bible Women and Evangelists called and equipped to assist in evangelism, pastoral care and church growth. MCSA does not have a Ministerial Session at its Conference (annual Synod). Just one Conference with a 50:50 ministerial:laity split.

The MCSA President serves a 5-year term and the Lay President serves a 3-year term. District Bishops, who may be separated from congregational work, serve a 5-year term. Their key role is being 'Mission Leaders' of their District.

Methodist churches the world over, hold annual 'Covenant Services' when members recommit to God and his mission on Earth. This is a big occasion in MCSA with some churches hiring stadia to mobilise the District in renewing the Covenant.

**“AND NOW  
GLORIOUS  
AND BLESSED  
GOD, FATHER,  
SON AND HOLY  
SPIRIT, YOU  
ARE MINE AND  
I AM YOURS.”**

*- Methodist Covenant*

Prayer at Phakamisa, Pinetown Methodist Church



## PRAYER

What we saw in South Africa was that prayer happens before, during and after everything. Prayer is frequent and fervent. It is also expectant. And when they pray, they pray in the confidence that God hears and answers their prayer. Healing is expected and when it does not seem to happen, the next time, prayer is still expectant. When we gathered for morning devotions with one of the WDR partner organisations, 'Phakamisa', the staff shared their innermost anxieties and fears and people prayed for them then and there. When we met with the grandmothers ('gogos') who were looking after orphaned children, they shared their troubles and their struggles and they were prayed for. Women in their eighties were willing to walk miles because their circumstances needed prayer. One woman at this prayer meeting shared:

**“AT HOME WE HAVE MANY PROBLEMS. BUT WHEN I GET OUT OF THE TAXI AT THE CROSSROADS, TO COME TO PHAKAMISA, ALL THE PROBLEMS DISAPPEAR.”**

When mission projects are birthed, when finances are needed, when miracles are required, the people pray. They take God seriously and they pray in the knowledge and the faith that God takes their prayers seriously.

The reality of corporate prayer life in many churches in Ireland can be that prayer meetings are one of the least attended activities. When we pray 'together', it is often one person standing at the front praying on our behalf.

**22** *“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered.*  
**23** *“Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. **24** Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. **25** And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” **Mark 11 v22-25***

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

Why might some people pray expectantly and others don't?

How would you describe your own or your church's approach to prayer?

If you wished participative prayer to be more central to the life of your church, how could this be facilitated?

### FURTHER RESOURCES/READING:

[www.24-7prayerireland.com/resources](http://www.24-7prayerireland.com/resources)  
*for individuals, groups and churches*

A single sewing machine at Pinetown Methodist Church



# MISSION

The first thing to say is that mission happens. Through prayer, people seek out God's purpose for their churches and then they pursue it. When barriers and obstacles are considered, people pray through those obstacles.

Mission activities usually begin small and involve one or two people. There seems to be little delay over "what will this look like in the long-term". People just do it and there seems to be little hang-up over 'change'. Maybe our western culture encourages us to desire things that are big and professional right from the start and if we can't do that, our tendency is not to do anything at all. Pinetown Methodist Church runs a sewing school that offers a two-year certificate or three-year diploma course in dress design and dressmaking. This year they have 35 students. 30 years ago they began with one sewing machine in the manse garage and a desire to make a difference no matter how small it might be at the start.

Walking around the Woza Moya, the beads and craft shop at Hillcrest Aids Centre, I saw a postcard that said, "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago, the second best time is now." Don't be afraid to take that first small step, even if it only benefits one or two people. People matter to God more than numbers. In South Africa it seems that initial low numbers are not a discouragement and there is persistence in spite of resistance.

**31** *He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.*

**32** *Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."*

**Matthew 13 v 31-32**

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What holds you back from 'just doing it' when it comes to mission and stepping out in faith?

Do you maximise what you have or dream of the 'ultimate'? Do you value the 'small'?

Where are the real opportunities for serving and loving people outside your church that can be embraced and developed?

## FURTHER RESOURCES/READING

God's Mission, Our Mission  
(Methodist Church in Ireland, 2014)

Imagine Church by Neil Hudson  
(IVP, 2012)

The Mission of God's People by  
Christopher Wright  
(Zondervan, 2010)

Christianity Rediscovered by  
Vincent Donovan  
(SCM Classics, 2012)

Nomusa Sokhela (CLP) and Nomusa Nxumalo in Siyanda informal settlement





## KNOWING THE COMMUNITY

On our first morning in South Africa we visited the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg. As we stood in the basement of this huge building being renovated, the dynamic superintendent shared with us his vision of opening a daycare centre in that basement for the mothers who worked as street vendors in the city centre. The mothers have to bring their small children with them onto the busy streets and pavements of Johannesburg. When asked how he knew about the needs of the people on the streets around the church, his answer was simple, obvious, revealing and very challenging: "Because I walk amongst them and talk with them." The church very much recognizes that it "stands in the mission field".

In the communities there seems to be an openness to God and the "spiritual realm". This gives a starting point for conversation. People seem to have a trust in the local church because congregations are already trying to improve the lot of the community. Also, in relation to WDR partner, Church Land Programme, a

community leader, Mrs Nomusa Nxumalo, said of it "It is important to say this of CLP; they are always with us in the community".

**"IT IS THE FISH WHO CHOOSES THE BAIT, NOT THE FISHERMAN. WE NEED TO ASK THE FISH WHAT THEY WOULD PREFER TO NIBBLE."**

Our mission field is also on our streets and in our neighbourhoods, but we will never know the needs unless we go and ask. As was stated by those at the Church Land Programme

**"MISSION IS NOT DONE TO PEOPLE BUT WITH THEM".**

**31** *The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.*

**32** *Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way." **Matthew 15 v31-32***

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What is your community's openness to and experience of God and how do you come to this conclusion?

Does your church offer what the community needs or what the church believes it needs?

How can your church gain the trust of its community and get to know it?

### FURTHER RESOURCES/READING

[www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/ready-steady-go/](http://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/ready-steady-go/) - *downloadable guide for starting a community project*

[www.thriveireland.org](http://www.thriveireland.org)  
or [info@thriveireland.org](mailto:info@thriveireland.org)  
- *guidance on churches engaging with communities*

Methodist outreach in Mooiplaas prioritises education amongst out-of-school children with Open Schools Worldwide



## PRIORITISING

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa bases its witness and worship upon five pillars of mission:

1. Justice and service
2. Spirituality
3. Education and Discipleship
4. Evangelism and Church Growth
5. Human Empowerment and Economic Development

It is these principles and aims that drive everything. Structures and systems do not derail this focus. Neither does the church budget. The budget prioritises these activities over all other things. Many of the churches seem to have ministers, youth workers, a caretaker and secretary on the payroll. How do they manage this?

Many of the structures and systems in our own churches have been handed down to us from previous generations, from a time when they may have worked and were relevant. But perhaps some of them no longer work or are no longer relevant. Out of some misplaced loyalty, these structures can hinder rather than facilitate the vision and the mission of churches.

In his book *“Understanding Voluntary Organisations”*, Charles Handy writes,

**“MANY VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS ARE LUMBERED WITH...STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS THAT WOULD NOT BE REINVENTED LIKE THAT IF THEY DID NOT ALREADY EXIST.”**

Our finances can also hinder our mission work. The ongoing costs of maintaining structures and buildings that are under-utilised can prevent funds from being freed up for a church's mission.

*14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying*

*to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4 v14-21*

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What does your church budget suggest are the priorities as a church?

What is your reference point to keep you focused on the church's priority areas? A mission statement?

Do you refer to it and does it represent what God would wish you to be doing?

What creative or brave things could be done to free up time, people and money for mission in your church?

Who can you work with outside the church that will help you do mission?

### FURTHER RESOURCES/READING

An interesting article on seven priorities of Jesus: [www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/theology/7-priorities-that-guided-jesus-decisions.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/theology/7-priorities-that-guided-jesus-decisions.html)

Mr Maxwell Thabede, Methodist leader at Roosboom



## LEADERSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP

A man called John told us the story of the beginnings of a church's response to HIV and AIDS in the area. 30 years ago, the minister of the Methodist church had a vision for its members to reach out with unconditional love to those who were affected by HIV and AIDS. This was a time when Apartheid was at its height, when black and white were systematically kept apart geographically, socially and emotionally. HIV and AIDS are most rampant amongst the black population in South Africa and the church would have been considered a traditionally white middle-class group. Even though this vision was of God, some people in the church didn't feel it was their place to get involved in a crisis that wasn't "their" crisis.

In spite of resistance, the minister believed in this vision and pursued it even though it meant opposition and some people leaving the church. John told us he was one of those opponents, and even though others chose to leave the church he remained and today he acknowledges that the leader was right to stand firm in what he was hearing God speak into their church. Thirty years on he can see how the church is fulfilling its mission through the AIDS Centre where he now works in his retirement.

Also, the ministry of the church does not fall on the shoulders of the minister solely. The ministry is shared. The minister is not expected to attend and lead everything. Others are trained and equipped to lead. One Superintendent shared how he insisted on everyone being in a small group. He took a map of his circuit and plotted where the congregations lived and formed small groups having first trained 'Class Leaders'. He gave each group (up to 10 people) tasks in their church that meant that they had to work together to perform them. Small groups meet on average two times a month.

**26** *They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. 28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan."* **30** *Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said,*

*"We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."*  
**Numbers 13 v26-30**

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What leadership characteristics are likely to grow God's Kingdom?

Visionary people often rock the boat as they think outside the box. How do you react to such people within your congregation? Are they listened to and followed or are they kept at a distance?

When and how are members able to talk to and listen to each other about their faith?

### FURTHER RESOURCES/READING

[www.arrowleadership.org](http://www.arrowleadership.org)  
*helping leaders to grow from the inside out*

Relational Leadership by Walter Wright  
(1VP, 2009)

Marie Roberts



## AGEING CONGREGATIONS

In South Africa, they have ageing congregations. They have many retired people sitting in their pews. The opportunity this presents is that they have people with the time, skills and life experience to be involved in mission projects that the younger members don't. In one church, retired teachers visit township schools to offer extra lessons to help the children learn better. One man oversees a garden centre that provides an income for a mission project. Marie Roberts (67) organizes food distribution from her church, having got support from local shops that would have thrown the food away. She organizes the collection, distribution, volunteers and finance. Marie said "I feel I am helping in some small way and also reduce food wastage".

Ask someone to describe their local congregation in Ireland and most will use a phrase similar to "we have an ageing congregation", a phrase often offered, and received, with a look of concern. In our churches we have managed to convince ourselves that we have two problems: we have ageing congregations and we are struggling to bring in younger people. But what if one of these is not a problem, but rather presents to us opportunities that we have failed to grasp?

An older and active member of one church in South Africa said "The teaching, preaching and worship is not the greatest. I could go to many other churches with larger congregations and where there is much more for me. But I wouldn't get the satisfaction I do here where I know that what we do goes back into the community". He obviously sees himself as someone who still has much to offer.

As a church, we have rightly invested a lot of time and resources in youth ministry. Should we invest equally in our older members? Is it time to shift our thinking? To realise that older members are not a burden but present opportunities for mission.

**12** The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; **13** planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. **14** They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, **15** proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him." **Psalm 92 v12-15**

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What are the ways in which the young, middle-aged and senior members are viewed differently in your congregation?

Are there good and not so good perceptions and attitudes?

In an ageing congregation, what are the opportunities for mission?

If older members are a resource, how can they be equipped and supported in mission?

### FURTHER RESOURCES/READING

*An interesting article at:*  
[www.shellpoint.org/villagechurch/papers/EmbracingtheAgeWave.pdf](http://www.shellpoint.org/villagechurch/papers/EmbracingtheAgeWave.pdf)

A hand 'cushion' and 'bell' drive the rhythm of worship





## WORSHIP

The worship in South Africa churches not only tries to have a balance of the traditional church music brought by missionaries and contemporary church styles but also the tribal traditions (where we were, it was largely the Zulu tradition). Each had their own joy and reverence, and each enabled different people to worship their God.

In his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren explains that worship is how we show God that we love him. One way we do this, particularly in our Methodist tradition, is through song. People are able to express their love to God through different styles of worship, different styles of singing. Congregations, such as the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg, have trebled their numbers by using a more Pentecostal form of worship whilst retaining a Methodist emphasis.

We should not, for our own selfish reasons, prevent others from expressing their love to God, whether it is insisting on only singing the old hymns or demanding that we drop them for a contemporary style of worship. Out of love for each other, we must explore ways where different styles of worship can be facilitated in our local churches.

**21** "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22** You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. **24** God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." **John 4 v21-24**

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Why can style of worship become a divisive issue in churches?

What effects can this have within the church and outside the church?

What is your desire for worship in the church? How can this be achieved in a Godly way?

### FURTHER RESOURCES/READING

*An interesting article at:*  
[www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/music-and-worship-style-wars-a-matter-of-taste](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/music-and-worship-style-wars-a-matter-of-taste)

Peer support and care



# HOSPITALITY AND PASTORAL CARE

Hospitality is warm and generous in South Africa. Never underestimate the power of good food. Scripture is littered with stories of people having meals together, of strangers being welcomed. This was our experience in South Africa. Around meals, we enjoyed conversation, openness and went deeper into relationships.

We can already see how this truth has been incorporated into programmes such as the Alpha Course and Christianity Explored. Hospitality should not be limited to a part of some programme we do, but rather it should be a natural – and important – part of our Christian identity. Someone once defined hospitality as “creating a space where someone feels comfortable enough to be themselves”.

In South Africa we saw people being able to be themselves in groups because of the relationships that had been developed. This meant that pastoral care was often carried out, not by trained staff, but by peers and friends. Tholuthando is Phakamisa’s ministry amongst those with and affected by HIV and AIDS. They meet, share, cry and pray in a safe place together. At Tholuthando, one lady shared

**“WHEN WE COME HERE WE WORK WITH EACH OTHER AND PRAY AND GIVE EACH OTHER WISDOM. WE CAN PHONE EACH OTHER ABOUT OUR PROBLEMS. THIS IS OUR HOME AND I GET HAPPY FROM IT”.**

A Pinetown Methodist small group in a home had the traditional Bible study but it was the honesty of the sharing and praying together that was significant. People made themselves vulnerable by being real about their thoughts and needs. One woman made a long journey by foot and bus just to catch the last five minutes of a prayer meeting because she relied upon those people and their prayers.

*1 Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. 2 The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. Acts 28 v2*

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What is hospitality, beyond ‘having someone round for a meal’?

How can your church be truly hospitable as opposed to just organizing an event?

How can you and your church develop peer pastoral care?

## FURTHER RESOURCES/READING

*An article on mobilising your church to be more hospitable:*

[www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42354&columnid=4545](http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42354&columnid=4545)

**This resource was produced by the following departments of the Methodist Church in Ireland**

**World Mission Partnership . . .**

enables Methodist people in Ireland and friends to join with partners around the world to proclaim Christ's love and his offer of salvation and to promote church growth. We do this by partnering through giving and receiving, teaching and learning, praying and being prayed for and serving and being served.

**Home Mission . . .**

exists to help Methodist congregations and individuals glorify God through worship and witness.

**World Development & Relief . . .**

enables organisations, beneficiaries and supporters to join together and transform materially poor communities. Each partner makes their own unique contribution. Development activities are long-term and sustainable, driven by and empowering for local people and tackle the root causes of poverty and injustice.



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