

The missional church for frontier missions in black South African churches

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Introduction

South Africa is an incredible country known as the rainbow nation: 49.3 million people of diverse origins, cultures, languages (11 official languages) and beliefs. Two-thirds of South Africans call themselves 'Christian', although many churches combine Christian and ancestral worship. Many non-Christians also follow these traditional beliefs (the so-called African Independent Churches). There are a number of other significant religions in South Africa such as Islam, Hinduism and Judaism etc. It is said that South Africa is home to the largest mosque, Hindu temple, and Buddhist temple south of the equator.¹ God has called the church to be the '*salt and light*' in this darkness, and bring transformation both within South Africa and beyond. This calls for the frontier missional church.

Historical Background

In the past, the black South African churches were not involved in frontier missions. There are a number of reasons for this: inadequate teaching regarding the church's calling to bear witness to Christ, as well as a lack of empowerment. For many the notion that all Believers share an obligation to be missionaries of Christ, is quite novel. Generally, it appears that involvement in missional church was open only for specially elected individuals or clergy. The church in South Africa has frequently been confronted with tensions and temptations which frustrated and sometimes totally sabotaged her involvement in missions.

Bosch² mentions some of the issues worth taking note of: First, it was said that the church's own spiritual inadequacy, including uncertainty about the foundation, aim and method of her calling in the world had a paralyzing effect on her involvement in missionary enterprise. Second, there was the perennial problem of the relationship between church and the state. This problem repeated itself in a variety of forms. Third, another issue involves the church's attitude to social issues, which include slavery, the position of women, race relations, the attitude of Westerners towards people of the African continent, and the disparity between the rich and the poor. Fourth, there is the problem of the attitude regarding Christian mission to other religions.

Missional church in black South African context

Eventually church leaders realized that it was time for the church to stop mimicking the surrounding culture. It needed to create a community that behaved differently, demonstrating an alternative set of beliefs and values. Church leaders are not marketers and should avoid relying on programs to serve their members. The traditional ways of evaluating 'successful churches' such as: bigger buildings, more people, bigger budgets, larger ministerial staff, new and more programs to serve members – need to change although some of these things are essential for the church growth. The following are some of the questions that need to be asked:

- To what extent is our church a 'sent' community in which each believer is reaching out to their community?
- To what extent is our church impacting the community with the Christian message which challenges the values of our secular society?
- To what extent does our church act as a transformational agent in the world to the greater glory of God?

Elaborating on the missional aspect of the church, Wilbert Schenk identifies a very significant shift which is taking place in the global church. He calls it '*a shift from an acclesiocentric mission outlook, under which the church advanced itself toward other parts of the world, to a Theocentric vision of the missio Dei, within which the church is understood to be a called and sent people of God*'.³

My PhD thesis entitled: '*Developing a Sustainable Missionary Programme for Black South African Churches; An analysis of the role that churches in black community are playing in terms of their missionary obligation*' covers a more indepth study of black churches in South Africa. It has been published under the title: '*The template of the church in mission: the effectiveness of the church to her missional obligation*'. Email: info@vdm-publishing.com. The thesis sets out to test this notion, and researches missionary endeavours of twenty churches with approximately 400 respondents in the Gauteng region of South Africa.

This paper reflects briefly on how South African black churches are missional and how are they faring in frontier missions. It also provides classical examples of what black churches are doing

in the South African context. However, since writing my thesis, I have observed a tremendous improvement with regard to attitude of black churches towards their missional obligation. I have detailed these observations in a book entitled: 'The awakening giant: The African Church and its call to mission'. It will be published shortly. The evidence reflected in this paper is taken from my studies in the Gauteng region of South Africa as well as my observations and interactions with Christian leaders as well as missiological practitioners.

Frontier Mission in South African Black Churches

We will now examine the characteristics of the church in both South Africa as well as the African continent – a characteristic that is an essential mark of the true church. The church in Africa is a living river that cannot be stemmed. It is a dynamic church, geared towards fulfilling the Great Commission, a church that has accepted the spreading of the Gospel as its first priority. Africa is no more a *receiving* continent as some continue to suggest. It is a *sending* continent. The days of missionaries having exclusively white faces are fortunately well behind us. Besides the number of missionaries from South African churches working in neighboring countries, there are a vast number of unknown 'missionaries', both men and women working at community level in South Africa leading literally thousands to Christ each year. Protestant, Pentecostal/Charismatic, Independent ministries, sophisticated urban congregations as well as village churches, etc. are all involved in this work. However, those taking the lead in this area are the Charismatic, Pentecostal and new independent ministries which are being established within our communities in South Africa. Relevant case studies are included. Carrying out God's mission is our mandate, privilege and responsibility. A missional focus needs to take shape in South African churches. The church as the body of Christ in South Africa has the redemptive keys to unlock many unreached nations in Africa and beyond.

The vision for the frontier missions continues to be strong in South Africa, sending out disproportionately high numbers of missionaries. Mandryk provided us with the latest data in 2010: South Africa's commitment in the past was notable, with internationally known agencies such as Healthcare Christian Fellowship International with its worldwide ministry, Africa Evangelistic Bond, Dorothea Mission, Kingfisher Mobilization, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde

Kerk, African Enterprise, South African World Evangelization, World Thrust South Africa, World Mission Centre, and many more others. Local Apostolic Faith Mission and many black Charismatic churches and Independent ministries have new mission initiatives as they are geared into frontier missions. Operation Mobilization and Youth With A Mission have done much to train and send out young people including blacks from South Africa to the frontier missions.⁴ For example, Operation Mobilisation has been working in South Africa since 1986. Initially the focus has been on mobilising the church and training missionaries to go into the world but in recent years the work of OM has become even more diverse as they respond to the needs in South Africa. Today there are between 400 to 500 missionaries represented by OM South Africa either working locally or in foreign countries.⁵ Peter Tarantal dropped me the following note while I was writing this paper and said that:

A number of us were involved in a missions' weekend at a church in Hammanskraal this past weekend. This church has a membership of 3000. On Saturday morning, I spoke to a group of about 35 pastors from the area on how to mobilize their churches for missions. It starts with the vision of the leadership and then exposure. A number will come to the WENSA national leaders' consultation later this month, and they will send their people on a short term outreach and have pledged to send a few to the next OM training team. I came away inspired that we have moved from the motivation stage to practical implementation.

The World Evangelization Network of South Africa (WENSA) is a network of mission networks, focusing on different aspects of the Great Commission. This hub of mission vision is vital for the nation's outreach, both domestically and internationally. As local congregations increasingly engage directly in mission, mission agencies are adapting to this new reality.

There are approximately 2 000 South Africans serving abroad in frontier missions, and nearly as many serving within South Africa (500 cross-culturally). Since 1994, after the multi-party democratic elections in South Africa, the number of missionaries sent out from South Africa has grown by at least 800%. the process is slowing down now, but there is every reason to believe that it will pick up again, especially in the black community.⁶ Support remains a challenge due to economic limitations and the many needs of domestic missions. Particularly missionaries from the Colored, Asian and African communities have to adapt to this new reality.

The emergence of frontier missional outreaches from the 'black churches has not yet been realized. There is great potential, but there are enormous obstacles. Missionaries from this ethnic group have a hard enough time convincing church leadership of the validity of missions, let alone raising missionary support. I have experienced this first hand as I am one of them. The Mission Mobilizers Network like others such as: World Evangelization Network of South Africa, thePLAN, Operation Mobilization, Campus Crusade for Christ, World Mission Center, Capro Missions, Kingfisher Mobilizing Center, and many others, have a burden to make this a reality in the South African context. South Africa has been blessed by frontier mission on her doorstep, but the church has not maximized these opportunities.

Large numbers of people from neighboring countries have flowed into South Africa from places such as Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, and as far afield as Nigeria. I have observed the church from Ethiopia reach out to Ethiopians as well as South Africans in Johannesburg and as a result their church is growing exponentially. The same is true of people from Nigeria, DRC, Zimbabwe and other countries. They are reaching thousands of expats as well to South African nationals. In Cape Town there is an organization called Diaspora Hope that has a passion to serve foreigners. The team offers hospitality and helps foreigners feel more at home in South Africa and in Cape Town. They assist in practical ways, helping the immigrants become more independent, teaching them practical skills. The team's desire is to see these people empowered to contribute towards a better South Africa, and in the future make a difference in their own nation.⁷ There is an opportunity for South African churches to reach out to these people as part of their missional obligation.

National Prayer movement

The prayer movement is growing in South African churches across all Christian communities. Some of the more significant trends is an emphasis on prayer and fasting; a new and exciting link between prayer and evangelism; the so-called 24 hour prayer watches which takes different formats; prayer walking - including prayer journeys); and spiritual warfare combined with spiritual mapping. There is a national prayer network of more than 200 000 people, involving

more than 4 000 congregations across all denominations. At times up to 800 000 people have been mobilized for strategic prayer events.⁸

Domestic Ministries vs Frontier Missions

We need to explore the relationship between diversified domestic ministries in the South African black churches and the cause of frontier missions. The question is: Is domestic mission more important than frontier mission? John Piper provides us with a balanced method that has been adopted for the purpose of this paper. Please refer to website:⁹

Working definition for frontier missions and domestic ministry:

By *frontier missions* we mean the church's effort to penetrate an unreached people with the Gospel and establish an ongoing, indigenous church which will apply the love and justice of Christ to that culture. According to my research¹⁰ this aspect has been ignored for many years by the black churches in South Africa; some of the mitigating factors for this are indicated at the beginning of this paper. But a paradigm shift is taking place and the church is beginning to look outwardly, and there is evidence of the intention to take frontier mission seriously.

By *domestic ministries* we mean the diversified efforts of a local church to apply the love and justice of Christ within its own culture. The case studies below will illustrate this aspect. In our South African context, many people in our churches are pouring their energy into significant domestic ministries.

Piper¹¹ provides a balance between the two aspects and states succinctly that the ultimate goal of the church is not frontier missions per se. Instead, the ultimate goal of the church is to reflect and display the glory and worth of God. Mission is a means, not an end. Mission exists because worship and obedience do not. In the age to come there will be no missions. It is not our ultimate end: It is a means. But there are other means to that end as well. Indeed, there are as many different means as there are different people. If our hearts are gripped by the love of Christ, and our sense of justice is shaped by the will of God, there are innumerable ways to apply His love

and justice to our own sin-sick culture for His glory. These ways may not be frontier missions but are crucial in the ultimate goal of glorifying God. Some South African churches have been involved in this for many years despite the unfavorable economical situation we lived in as blacks.

Furthermore, according to my research findings in the domestic ministry area, the black South African churches has been plagued with the issues of: poverty, medical care, hunger, abortion, unwed mothers, runaway kids, pornography, family disintegration, child abuse, divorce, hygiene, education, drug abuse and alcoholism, the peace movement, moral abuses in the media, business and politics. Sadly, however, the churches researched showed a low level of involvement in socio-political issues. It is encouraging though to note that the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are gradually becoming more involved in the new South African dispensation which began in 1994. Conversely, it may be assumed that the low rating of churches being involved in socio-political issues, points to the majority of the churches being careful about the label 'political'. It is said that people with this perspective do not ascribe blame to the church, but perceive this view as unfortunate.¹²

Domestic ministries as a means to frontier missions

There are at least three senses in which domestic ministries are a bridge to frontier missions according to John Piper¹³

First, domestic ministries provide *authenticity and credibility* for the cause of frontier missions. In the same way, the engagement of the church in the transformation of its own domestic front may go a long way to creating some credibility for the messengers we send to the frontiers with a transforming Gospel. *If the Gospel makes no impact on our own culture, why should we try to send it to unreached cultures?*

The authenticity and credibility of the frontier missions' movement depends on many people in our churches devoting themselves joyfully and sacrificially to the array of domestic needs around us.

Second, domestic ministries provide much of the *personnel and training* for the frontier missions' movement. Domestic ministries are the place where converts are made, babes are nurtured, and the mature discover and strengthen their spiritual gifts etc.

Third, we must encourage our people to see their secular jobs as avenues for ministry. God has placed them as His representative and they have an opportunity to demonstrate the love and justice of Christ to people. These domestic ministries can become the *source of funds* for both domestic and frontier missions.

Addressing the needs of society

As I have mentioned above, some of our South African churches are doing fairly well in their domestic ministry, but the issue of addressing the ills of our society can be disastrous if we are not careful. In order for the church to be perceived as authentic and credible it must involve itself in people's lives , so that they will be attracted and willing to listen to the preaching of the Gospel. We need to be careful as there can be a danger if the church does not balance evangelism and social needs. Stott and others have helped the church to strike a balance between the two.

First, some regard social action as a means to evangelize. In this case evangelism and the winning of converts are the primary goals, but social action is a useful preliminary, an effective means to achieving these goals. This approach makes social work (like food, medicine or education) the sugar which coats the pill, the bait on the hook, in its best form, it gives to the Gospel a credibility it would otherwise lack. In either case the smell of hypocrisy hangs round our philanthropy, and we breed so-called 'rice Christians' and at the same time we become 'rice evangelists'.

The second way of relating evangelism and social action is preferable. It regards social action not as a means to evangelize but as a result of evangelism, or at least of the Gospel being proclaimed. In this case philanthropy is not artificially attached to evangelism, but naturally

evolves as an expression of it. One might almost say that social action is the ‘sacrament’ of evangelism, giving its message significant visibility.

The third way that I prefer is when social action is a partner of evangelism. As partners, the two work together and yet remain independent of each other.¹⁴ They are both expressions of unfeigned love, and must be evident in our endeavours as we bring about the transformation of the world into God’s Kingdom. Indeed, the church in South Africa should always strike a balance between word and deed taking her position as God’s agent to bring about social and political transformation in the world. The following case studies, show case black churches that reflect the characteristics of frontier missional churches in South Africa:

His Grace Tabernacle Ministry

The His Grace Tabernacle Ministry was launched in August 1999. The church is situated in the mid-lands of the Eastern Cape Province 200km north of East London. The founders pastor Sibusiso and Linda Khoza sensed the Lord’s directive to ‘build a prayerful family of reconciled worshippers, ready to serve, reaching out with the Gospel of the Kingdom and alleviating poverty’. The town is largely made up of government administrative offices, surrounded by largely rural and farming communities. The church began with 8 members and has grown to approximately 1 000 active worshippers on a Sunday. *They journey into domestic and frontier missions.*

After three years, the church undertook a prayer journey which led to the launch of their second church plant two years later in Aliwal North, 163km north of the mother church in Queenstown. The new church is growing steadily. They have also planted churches in Pietermaritzburg Kwazulu Natal region, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Kempton Park and campus churches in University of Free State, Western South University at Butterworth and Durban University.

In the future they are trusting God to plant churches in George, Sterkspruit etc. Their strategy is to strengthen 25 churches within the next two years and position them to plant three churches each by the year 2014 – that way they will meet their target of 100 by 2014/15.

The church is involved in many ministries and programs. They have a primary school, run soup kitchens, distribute food parcels, have regular evangelism outreach, offer care and encouragement to health workers and other government officials, they also appreciate and involve the elderly in ministry opportunities.

Atteridgeville Apostolic Faith Mission Revival Centre

Pastor Sam Ndala has been the presiding pastor for the past 35 years. He has planted six churches around Atteridgeville in Pretoria. The church has also been involved in mission work for the past twenty years. During this time he has planted and revived more than twenty churches in Mozambique. The church is missional in character and the leadership believes that every Christian is a missionary where God has placed them. More than thirty men and women have been equipped and released to full time ministry as pastors, missionaries and evangelists. Currently the church is financially supporting nine missionaries, two new church planters. There are three mission outreaches per year both nationally and outside to our neighboring countries. The church is also involved in Church building project in Mozambique where new churches are being planted. The mission's fund is collected on a monthly basis based on a 'faith' promise to support the missions endeavors of the church. Furthermore, our church has a vibrant youth mission programs, doing mission work locally and beyond the border, to as far as Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho. Other community involvement includes ministry to two orphanages, drug abuse, soup kitchen to the homeless, professional counseling, hospital visitation etc.

Grace Bible Church

Grace Bible church is situated in Soweto and is regarded as one of the fastest growing churches in the South African black context. It embraces the multisite church model. It consists of 11 satellite churches spread across Soweto, Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, Carltonville, North West and Limpopo. These satellite churches situated in Brakenhurst, Carletonville, Central Western Jabavu, Dobsonville, Moletsane, Naledi, Protea Glen, Orange Farm Ext. 2, Polokwane,

Sunninghill and Vryburg. They believe that a multisite approach allows them the greatest leverage of God's resources in fulfilling the missional church and their vision.

This is a fairly new concept and they define it as the multisite church that meets at multiple locations. Being a church, it has only one senior pastor, one spiritual leadership team and one management team with pastors attached to the satellite campuses. They regard a multisite congregation as a new ball game. Leadership must develop a big picture overview which encompasses the mother church as well as the satellite churches. The philosophy that underpins Grace Bible Church's approach to multisite churches is 'church at your doorstep'. The aim is to ensure that people have access to fellowship close to their homes. Distance should not restrict people from being part of Grace Bible Church.¹⁵ It would be interesting to ascertain where does this church stand in regard to the aspect of their frontier missions.

OC Africa, Church Planting Alliance of Southern Africa By Karl Teichert

The apostle Paul's passion is stated in Romans 15:20-21; "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; but as it is written, 'They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.'" Disciple-making churches are needed in every community that all might worship the King and grow in Him.

God is mobilizing black South Africans into His harvest field. Many are sharing the love of Christ and planting churches in Southern Africa. These missionaries are being sent out by local churches, networks, denominations and mission agencies from South Africa. Indigenous leaders are being developed for evangelism, church planting, pastoral ministry and missions.

Black South Africans are beginning to heed God's call to go to the ends of the earth. Many are involved in frontier missions through business, evangelism, church planting, training, and compassion ministry. This is being done through partnerships with other churches, networks, denominations and mission agencies. Some are going as short-term impact workers, but God is

raising up long-term frontier missionaries as well. The opportunities are great and there is tremendous potential among the black churches of South Africa. God is reviving a fresh vision among all South Africans to complete His Great Commission in this generation for His glory!

Conclusion

South Africa, and Africa, is in a unique position; we are on the last lap of the race for missions, and the baton is being handed over to Africans. Indeed, the black South African churches has a special responsibility to correct previous mistakes of the church nationally and lead it to victory in carrying out God's mandate domestically, and particularly in frontier missions. Tarantal correctly observed above that the church is now 'moving from the motivation stage to practical implementation'. The time has come where the followers of Christ (all designated as disciples) are to extend their mission to everyone, everywhere, as God's representatives. This is essentially done in Him, by Him, for Him and through Him. To God be the glory!

Endnotes

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9. John Piper, www.desiringgod.org, The tension between domestic ministries and frontier missions, February 11 1988.
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