

MINISTERING TO SOUTH AFRICANS

Report to Classis Queensland

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CRCA MINISTRY FORMATION

"A Church Reforming To Reach the Lost for Christ"

www.ministryformation.com.au

At the Classis meeting, held on 31st May 2008, “It was stated that we in the CRC need equipping on how to deal with South Africans”¹, and I “... was asked to develop something for the next meeting, in terms of collaboration, and how to enfold and embody people from other cultures and countries of Reformed persuasion.”

I initiated a discussion group with former South African pastors currently ministering in Queensland², in order to discuss this issue. The following interesting inputs have been made:

A Profile of “South Africans”

Most ‘South Africans’ attending Reformed churches, are ‘Afrikaners’³. English speaking South Africans are mostly from Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist and Charismatic background⁴.



Being an ‘Afrikaner’ is not the same as being an African or a South African. An Afrikaner has a unique national and social identity. The blood of many European

nations flow through the veins of Afrikaners. They were born in South Africa, and have lived there for many generations. They have their own culture. They love their language (Afrikaans) which originated from a number of European languages, and have been enriched by some African languages and even Malaysian. They share a common history that covers almost 400 years. The intrigues of war and conflict run through this history and brought Afrikaners always closer together as a nation. The emotional wounds caused by the Anglo-Boer war left an unfortunate scar on the relations between Afrikaans and English speaking South Africans. At some stage of their

history, English was seen as the language of the oppressor. Not many years later Afrikaans was called the language of the oppressor... and currently Afrikaners perceive themselves to be the oppressed. Some may blame the Afrikaner to be an ‘oppressed’ person

with the (paternalistic, arrogant) mindset of an ‘oppressor’.

Although Afrikaners share a common history, they are uncertain of their destiny as a nation, mainly due to the interplay of political, socio-economical and security problems within South Africa. Afrikaners in Australia, therefore, find themselves in a new country with new challenges, culture and community life of which they are a part. The church (CRCA) should see this uncertainty as an opportunity to play a constructive role in their lives.

Each Afrikaner is also a unique individual, with his own personal story. Many of

¹ Minutes Classis 31 May 2008

² The discussion group consisted of the following persons: Rev. Joe Vermeulen, Rev. Gerhard Oberholzer, KJ Tromp, Rev. Danie Venter, Dr. Jan Grey and myself. Unfortunately Rev. Werner Viljoen could not attend.

³ Most Afrikaner migrants used to attend different Reformed denominations back in South Africa: Dutch Reformed, Hervormd, Gereformeerd, Pinkster Protestant, Afrikaans Protestant, Evangelies Gereformeerd. A growing number of Afrikaners started moving over to the charismatic churches in the last number of years.

⁴ These people are less of a concern, because they will feel more at home in their churches of origin.

these stories are stained with personal and family trauma, caused by crime and violence. They consequently tend to fear the unknown, and to experience feelings of uncertainty, deprivation, of being threatened and unsafe, anxiety, anger, hopelessness and despair. When they get a chance to start a new life in a foreign country, they tend to carry a mixture of these emotions along with them, blended with hope and new dreams for themselves, but specially for their children.

Most Afrikaners perceive themselves to be Christians but don't necessarily understand that most Christians are not Afrikaners. The Christian 'religion' used to be seen as part of the Afrikaner culture, but Christ has not necessarily been the Lord of their lives.

Afrikaners are bilingual (Afrikaans and English), and are used to live in 2 or more languages, switching over from one language to another, depending on who are addressing them and to whom they are speaking. They can function bilingually, and should, therefore, be ministered to bilingually if at all possible⁵.

Afrikaners in Australia

On top of the distress Afrikaners undergo, those ones who are fortunate enough to be able to emigrate to 'safety' and

⁵ The ideal is, at least in the first couple of years since their arrival in Australia, to minister pastorally to them in Afrikaans, and to engage them gradually into worshipping and outreach, together with Christians from different cultural backgrounds, in English.

'opportunity', may also feel guilty of leaving their family and friends behind, to fend for themselves, and undergo the stress associated with re-adjustment to a new life.

The Afrikaner in Australia, attending CRCA churches, therefore are undergoing change in almost every facet of their being, and to them every quest for change is also a quest for stability.

Therefore, the more they change, the more they tend to stay the same. Afrikaners in Australia have gone away from who they are in order to stay who they are⁶.

The Afrikaner (immigrant) in Australia, has the mindset of an opportunist (including that of a migrant, pioneer, survivor, globalizer, refugee) with the heartbeat of Africa in his veins.

They bring their life savings, pension (super) money, etc. along, if they were lucky enough to sell their farms, businesses, houses, and have to re-invest it wisely within an unfamiliar economical context. Some are successful, and others not. While busy trying to re-establish themselves financially, many find it difficult to tithe the way the church may expect them to.

⁶ The church has to understand this natural tendency, and see it as an opportunity to enrich their lives by facilitating their growth towards other cultures around them. This is a 'two way street' as far as Christians of other cultures are concerned. The secret of Christian ministry is probably to be found in encounters with Christ and with each other in Christ.



The Challenge

We are expecting a 'Tsunami' of Afrikaners emigrating to Australia during the next couple of years. We have one chance to reach out to them and make them feel at home in the CRCA, and that is now!

We have to choose whether we want to actively integrate them into the CRCA or not. This is an active historical choice the CRCA has to make. We have to make this decision on local church level, Classis level, and Synodical level.

If we do not take active steps in this regard immediately, Afrikaners will start their own reformed denomination⁷, literally on the doorstep of our local Christian Reformed Churches. Such a denomination will eventually develop into another English (or dual) medium reformed denomination alongside the CRCA⁸.

This development will only enhance confusion among our current Afrikaner members⁹, upsetting our local churches, as well as among new Afrikaner migrants.

⁷ Initiatives to start a new Afrikaans Christian Church all over Australia, based on the same confessions of faith as the CRCA, are encouraged with advice and finances from within influential circles within the large reformed denominations in South Africa. The Uniting Churches of Australia seems also to be encouraging the establishment of Afrikaans churches and their affiliation with the Uniting Churches.

⁸ They will have to have English Sunday school for their children, followed by English worship services to accommodate their children and their friends and Australian spouses. The first Afrikaans churches of this nature has already been established successfully in New Zealand, Perth and on the Gold Coast.

⁹ Afrikaners already form large percentages of the membership of many of our Christian Reformed Churches in Australia.

1. It will also cause confusion and disunity within our reformed community, which we can no longer afford, and which will again be a negative signal of disunity to the 'lost' we were called to reach out to.
2. It will hurt the CRCA. We as reformed people need to work as one team for the sake of the kingdom of God! Specially within a multicultural society like Australia, we have to bridge the cultural divide for the sake of the enhancement of the body of Christ. We owe it to our God, ourselves, but also to those who have to learn from us what the body of Christ is all about.

If the CRCA chooses to actively integrate Afrikaans migrants into the CRCA, we will have to:

1. Allow and welcome the planting of multilingual CRCA churches (in this case with Afrikaans as one of the main mediums of communication).
2. Actively invite existing Afrikaans churches within Australia, sharing our confessions of faith, into the CRCA.
3. Actively reach out and minister to reformed oriented Afrikaans immigrants in our communities.

How to minister to 'Afrikaners'

The same generic principles for ministering to people across the world, are obviously also applicable to Afrikaners. Here are some of them that may be helpful:

1. People (also from different nationalities) tend to think they understand each other, while they actually don't... and they sometimes don't understand that they don't understand... therefore communication becomes of paramount importance. Cross-cultural communication may need to be facilitated by 'bridge persons' who know both cultures fairly well.
2. People tend to like people who like them, and to dislike people who dislike them. Unfortunately people also tend to like people who are like them, and to dislike people who are different. Christians who are culturally different, can only really be united in Christ. Unless we are successful in this regard, we will not reach the lost for Christ, within a multicultural society. Emphasis should therefore be put on cross cultural relationship building. This can only happen if people share a particular goal (church mission), spend quantity time together, and experience quality moments together.

The road to a person's heart, goes through his needs. A 'Matthew 25:35,36-approach'¹⁰ to outreach is non-negotiable in ministry!

¹⁰ "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:35,36).

⁵Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. ⁶I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—
⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Isaiah 43:5-7



3. Cell Based Ministry lends itself for ministry that needs to develop these outcomes.

I hope and pray that this report will be received by Classis in a positive spirit, for the glory of our Lord Christ Jesus, and for the advancement of His Kingdom!