

Partnership Coordinator for Africa
Visit to Namibia and South Africa
Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)
With President of Methodist Church in Ireland
Rev. David Turtle & family
3 – 26 July 2023



**Turtle Family and Dr. Andrew Ashdown with Staff of Seth Mokimi Theological Institute,
Pietermaritzburg**

Purpose of Visit:

- **To enable President of MCI to experience the life of the Global Methodist Church in Southern Africa.**
- **To meet with Church leaders in Southern Africa and build relationships.**
 - **To understand local context and current issues.**
 - **To visit partner churches and partner projects.**
- **To discuss and share vision for future partnership.**

Dr. Andrew Ashdown

Methodist Church in Namibia (MCSA)

3 – 9 July 2023

Methodist Church in Namibia. (MCSA). An Introduction.

Namibia is the second least populated country in the world and one of the largest countries in Africa. The Namibian Synod came into existence in the year 2020, exactly 200 years ago after Wesleyan Missionaries crossed the Namibian borders in 1820. William Shaw was the first missionary, followed 14 years later by the Albrecht brothers from the London Missionary Society). In 1825, Wesleyan missionaries William Threlfall and Evangelist Jager accompanied Jacob Links on an expedition that led to their deaths at the hand of their guide near Warmbad. These three men came to be known as the first martyrs of the Christian faith in Namibia. The Missionaries encountered conflict, difficulty with the terrain, financial problems and local opposition.

This history and the persons involved still hold high esteem in the Methodist memory in Southern Africa.

The work of the Methodist Church has faced similar challenges over the past 2 centuries. Nevertheless, the Church has recently made new attempts to expand the Methodist footprint in Namibia.

However, there are still obstacles that remain a challenge. The Synod is working on developing the sense of unity since Circuits are very wide-spread. Leadership capacity is in need of development. Due to financial limitations, there are only six ministers in the vast country. Evangelists, Local Preachers and Stewards are all needed but such leadership development takes a few years to produce results.

There are (6) Six Ordained ministers, two of whom are Superintendents. This includes the Bishop who also acts as the Superintendent in four Circuits. The other Superintendent covers one Circuit that is approximately 1000km away from where he is stationed. Four of the ministers are recently Ordained and have to attend a Connexional Training Course for Superintendents, before they can be appointed.

The Namibian Synod has a membership of approximately 4000 people, spread over five Circuits, namely, The Kavango, Coastal, Windhoek, Rehoboth, and The Kokerboom Circuits. Oranjemund is also a Circuit in the Synod when it is served by a Methodist Minister – it is in a United Church arrangement.



Namibia Bishop Christopher Gaya, President MCI David Turtle, Mission Director Colin Gertz

Osire Refugee Camp, Namibia.

It was inspiring to visit the Osire Refugee camp 225kms north of the capital Windhoek. In the camp, the Methodist Church has a ministry to asylum seekers and refugees from countries across Africa and further afield. Most of the refugees at Osire come from war zones in Angola and Congo.

The Methodist ministry in the camp was begun by the inspiring ministry of Rev. Everestu Kemaya, himself a refugee from Congo, who is now the Circuit minister for the Rundu Circuit in the north of the country, bordering Angola. And although there is no Minister currently serving the camp, the church is served by an Evangelist, Malanda Boniface Kassander, himself a refugee who lives in the camp.

We met in the simple mud-brick, tin-roofed building that serves as their Church and were joined by about 30 church members of all ages who proceeded to spend the next two hours singing, dancing and giving thanks to God for the gift of life and for what He provides.

The Methodist Church is committed to providing a ministry amongst the refugees, particularly pre-school education and providing basic needs. Of the three Kindergarten schools in the camp, two are Methodist. Each month the residents are given maize meal, beans, cooking oil, salt and sugar. Because of the shortage of wood in the area – it is a barren landscape - they are not allowed to collect wood outside the camp, so they are sometimes given wood and paraffin for cooking. Many grow their own vegetables both to feed themselves and to supplement their income.



Life in the refugee camp is not easy. It is possible to find work outside the camp but to do so requires a permit from the government. Moreover, the nearest town is a long way away; public transport is expensive and there is high unemployment in Namibia. Repatriation to their home countries is impossible for most residents due to political instability and violence in their countries of origin. Meanwhile, settlement in Europe or beyond is extremely difficult in the current political climate. Many are skilled but they do not have the money to buy the equipment that would enable them to work. Many would like to undertake Courses online, but there is little wifi availability and few people possess computers.

In spite of these many challenges, we were moved and inspired by the resilience, positivity, faith and determination of the residents we met. Most had been through horrific experiences in their lives and yet they were determined to build a better future for their families and make a positive contribution to wherever they might be able to settle. In the meantime, they are involved in contributing to the life of the Refugee Camp itself and to providing hope for their children. The Methodist Church seeks to be a partner in this endeavour and being life and light amidst troubled contexts.

Rundu Circuit. Northern Namibia.

It was a privilege to visit some of the churches in the Rundu Circuit which covers much of Northern Namibia. Rundu itself is situated on the Okavango River on the Angola border. The Circuit has 6 churches, two in Rundu, and four rural outstations up to 200kms from Rundu.

The Superintendent of the Circuit is Rev. Everestu Kameya who was himself a refugee from the DRC and lived in Osire Refugee Camp. He does not possess a car so uses a taxi to visit his far-flung societies. The World Mission Fund of MCB supplied his laptop and wifi and these have become essential tools for enabling him to do his work.

Kehemu church is the main church in Rundu and has 70 members (including children). It is a flourishing community with weekly youth group, women's manyana, bible studies led by committee members, a men's group and a prayer meeting.

Sauye Church is second church in Rundu. Until 1989, members worshipped under a tree. Now there are 200 members with 150 regularly attending worship. Next to the Church is Sauye garden –a small plot of land surrounded by a strong bamboo fence that has been lovingly transformed over the past 10 years by Bella into a 'Garden of Heaven' containing numerous fruit trees and vegetable plants which have provided an income, not just for Bella, but for the Church.

Thirty kilometres south of Rundu is the small village church of Ncumgora, typical of rural societies. It is a church with no walls...simply a corrugated iron roof with open sides. The members are trying hard to raise the funds to build walls but this is a challenge given the poverty of the area. Nevertheless, they have an admirable commitment and are making sacrificial efforts to achieve their goal. Other societies extend to 200kms from Rundu.

As in all our visits, we were warmly welcomed to these communities with singing, dancing and prayer. The primary challenges faced are:

- Accessibility – the spread-out nature of the Societies and the difficulty and cost of transport availability.
- Gathering sufficient income to run the churches and ministries.
- Shortage of ministers and evangelists.

There is therefore a great need for identifying and deploying more ministers to these isolated regions, and for establishing income-generation projects that serve the needs of local communities.



Tsumeb Church

Tsumeb is a pleasant former mining town on the edge of the Etosha Pan. There is a Methodist church in Tsumeb, but the building is now rented out to a Pentecostal Church and the manse was sold off.

Bishop Christopher is keen to reopen the Methodist Church here and find a Minister who will be based here and serve the Osire Refugee camp.

Main points from the Visit to Namibia.

The shortage of Ministers in Namibia is a key concern for the Methodist Church in Namibia. It was suggested that there could be space for an ordained Mission Partner to come from the UK to build up the congregation in Tsumeb and give confidence to the local Methodist community to inspire new vocations. This would be a missional initiative.

- Namibia is a Mission Context with only 6 ordained Ministers covering the whole country.
- Yet it is a dynamic Church with vision and energy, keen to serve its' people and communities.
- Pastoral Care and Church and Community Development are key missional priorities.
- Self-sustainability is a strategic priority, enabled through developing income-generating ministries that also serve the communities.
- Need for Ministers.
- Potential for Ordained Minister from UK to assist in Pastoral Ministry, Development of Young people's work and Community Development empowerment in Northern Namibia.
- Ministerial training needed in Namibia. Need to grow indigenous ministry.
- Importance of relationship with Methodist Church in Britain and Ireland. Importance of Exchange and learning from each other.



SOUTH AFRICA

Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)

10 – 26 July 2023

Purpose of visit:

- To acquaint MCI President with Methodist ministries in Johannesburg and KwaZuluNatal Province.
- To undertake a formal visit as Partnership Coordinator for Africa to MCSA Ministries in Johannesburg, KwaZuluNatal and Cape Province.

Ministries visited:

- MCSA Connexional Office in Johannesburg. Meeting with Connexional Staff.
- Open Schools Worldwide, Johannesburg.
- KwaZuluNatal Coastal District in Durban. (Bishop Linda Mandindi)
- Phakamisa Education and Skills Training Project, Pinetown.
- Methodist Central Mission. Durban City Centre.
- Flood Victims in Coastal District.
- KwaZuluNatal West District, Pietermaritzburg.
- Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary, Pietermaritzburg. (Meeting Staff and Students).
- Church Land Project, Pietermaritzburg.
- Camdeboo District. Great Karoo Region. (Western Cape Province, Bishop Louis Williams).
- Methodist Ministries in Cradock and Middelburg, Great Karoo.
- Cape of Good Hope District. (Bishop Yvette Moses).
- Somerset West and Bellville Circuits, Cape Town.



The Methodist Church in Southern Africa has membership in six countries, namely: Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Eswatini, Lesotho and Mozambique. In 2018, it embarked on a strategic plan of re-shaping Mission and expanding boundaries to include new mission possibilities. The region includes marginalised areas which face great social and resource challenges. The priorities of the MCSA include:

- Structural development to ensure sustainability and viability.
- Ensuring effective mission and ministry.
- Enhancing Contextually focussed ministry.
- Increasing the capacity of agency and lay leadership.

Connexional Meeting in Johannesburg.

We had a wonderful meeting with all the Connexional Staff of the MCSA in Johannesburg, including a session with current Presiding Bishop Purity Malinga, and incoming Presiding Bishop, Pumla Ndzimande, whose period of Office begins on 1st January 2024. Attending a Morning's Reflection with all the Connexional Staff during which David Turtle and I introduced ourselves, the main inspiring reflection was delivered by well-known South African theologian, Trevor Hudson who spoke about being a resurrection people. One memorable quote: "Remember that everywhere you go, every person you meet sits next to their own pool of tears."



L to R: MCSA Presiding Bishop Purity Malinga. Irish President David Turtle. MCB PC Andrew Ashdown, Trevor Hudson, In-coming MCSA Presiding Bishop, Pumla Ndzimande

Open Schools Worldwide.

Open Schools Worldwide offers education intervention for Age Appropriate Learning to 8500 children around the world. It offers education in rural areas for children whose parents work with online courses and focussing on marginalised regions and children.

Visit to KwaZulu Natal.

We visited several ministries in the Coastal District of KwaZulu Natal, including spending Sunday with the Wesley City Centre Church in Durban. The main issues and challenges faced by the Church in this area are as follows:

- Widespread Drug Addiction.
- Under-age pregnancies.
- Gender-based violence.
- Homelessness.
- Unemployment... need to provide skills' training opportunities.
- Health provision for all.
- Declining and ageing congregations.
- Racial integration.
- Resources to fund ministries and maintain structures.
- Impact of Climate change... Increase in floods/natural disasters.
- Potential of Online resources for Theological/Leadership Training etc.
- Ministry with Young People.

It was moving to visit just one of thousands of homes damaged or destroyed in floods last year in South Africa that killed many in South Africa and Mozambique. MCB contributed a grant towards the Church's response in providing immediate emergency aid, but the scale of the disaster was so great that many homes remain damaged or destroyed.



Flood Victims



Durban City Centre Church



Pietermaritzburg Circuit



Pietermaritzburg Youth Ministry

Seth Mokitimi Theological College, Pietermaritzburg.

We had an inspiring morning of sharing and dialogue with staff and students at the Seth Mokitimi Theological Seminary in Pietermaritzburg.

The website states: “Named after the first black President of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS) is the official theological school founded, owned and fully supported by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa which extends over six countries in the region, namely Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland. SMMS is also ecumenical in that it draws students from across the mainline churches. SMMS students hail from the various racial and ethnic backgrounds of southern Africa, with staff drawn from all over sub-Saharan Africa.

SMMS was mandated by the Methodist Church to “Form Transforming Leaders for Church and Nation“. Thus, the seminary understood from the start that its task was not merely to produce graduates with strong academic credentials in theology, but also to form individuals of spiritual maturity with impeccable personal values and virtues. As such, SMMS prides itself on its parallel and integrated Academic and Formation Programmes.

Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary “forms transforming leaders for church and nation” by providing the spiritual formation, academic, vocational and practical training required to develop skilled leaders of integrity, faithfulness and excellence. The academic faculty of the Seminary is passionately committed and qualified to develop the kind of transformational leaders the church and nation need. All are committed to teaching theology in an African context whilst retaining a sense of the international perspective – local and global worldviews – with an emphasis on empowering people for the development of our emerging society.”

The key messages that emerged from our visit to the Seminary are:

- The importance of emerging African and Black Theology.
- The importance of engagement between ‘western’ and contextual theology.
- The importance of global partnerships and learning from each other as a Global Church.
- The potential offered by technology and communications for increased international and ecumenical engagement and shared training/opportunities.
- The importance of Practical Theology and enabling training for local Ministers in context.



Camdeboo District. South Africa.

Whilst South Africa has a reputation for being amongst the more ‘developed’ countries in Africa, it is nevertheless a large country with vast expanses of wilderness areas where distance and geography combine to add to the economic and social challenges that the country faces, especially in the on-going post-Apartheid political landscape.

The Camdeboo District sums up this South African diversity. It encompasses the vast plains of the Great Karoo Desert and the fertile coastal plains and mountains of the Eastern Cape. Here, hundreds of kilometres of wilderness separate isolated towns where unemployment, drug use, alcoholism and gender-based violence are common. The Methodist Church was established in this region in the early 19th century, with British Methodist missionaries travelling by bullock-cart and on horseback into the interior to set up societies in remote communities. These have remained and continue to endeavour to serve their people.

Travelling with the Mission Director of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Rev. Musi Losaba, it was a privilege to spend 2 days with the Bishop of this District, Bishop Louis Williams, and to visit some of the ministries in his District.

The town of Middelburg in the Karoo Desert is a good example of the type of community in this region. The original Methodist Church was built in 1890 but is no longer used. Two newer churches serve the Methodist members who struggle to maintain ministry in the wider area which has a number of scattered Societies.



Rev Musi Losaba & Bp Louis Williams. Disadvantaged children project. Cradock, Camdeboo District.

Given the economic and social challenges the Church faces, not just in the locality but nationally, income-generation initiatives that serve the local community are seen as the key priorities for the future. In Middelburg, the Methodist community is seeking to establish the following:

- A wool project to manufacture wool sourced locally from the abundant flocks in the area.
- The conversion of old Methodist garages in the town into an Internet café to provide internet facilities for the community as well as IT training opportunities.
- A broiler and egg production project.
- A solar panel project to produce and sell electricity locally.

In the neighbouring town of Cradock (150kms away) where the bishop lives (still 400kms from another part of his District), we visited an inspiring school for disadvantaged children and children with different abilities. Children from the most marginalised slum areas are identified and supported from kindergarten age right through to University. We were shown around by a young woman who is in her second year at University who has been through the

school and local home from the age of 5 and is now a volunteer helper during the University holidays.

The Bishop identified Ministers' Training as a key priority for the District. And the Mission Director of MCSA identified training across the Connexion in how to grow Community Development initiatives, perhaps appointing Community Development Officers (Lay or Ordained) in each District, as a major need for the Church across the Connexion.

Food security and the Methodist Church in Africa. Cape Province.

Food security is one of the key global issues today. Famine, natural disasters, environmental degradation and water scarcity have all increased in recent years. Climate change is impacting everyone and especially the most vulnerable. Across Africa, the Church has numerous projects to enhance food security for families and local communities. In Kenya and Zimbabwe, Church-run Agricultural Institutes are leading the way in teaching villagers techniques for maximizing both livestock and food production.

In all 16 African countries with which the Methodist Church in Britain partners, agricultural training and the development of market gardens in church compounds and family plots are a key part of Church Strategic Plans for Mission and outreach.

A couple of initiatives in Cape Province, South Africa illustrate this well. In Heidelberg Circuit, West Somerset, Cape Town, the Minister, Rev. Ralph Afghan has established a small vegetable garden in an inner courtyard of the Church. Tended by members, vegetables are grown and can be picked free of charge by any families in particular need.



Seed Project. Somerset West.



Courtyard veg patch.



Church vegetable garden.

Not far away, in Otters Rd Circuit, Evangelist Terence has established a food sustainability project using a large section of the Church property to develop a large vegetable garden. The garden is not only supplying local people in need but is being used as a training project for members and young people in agriculture and food sustainability.

Nearby, a major wholesale Nursery of seedlings of vegetables and fruit trees has been established. The nursery supplies local businesses and families in order for them to increase their food production at home. Local people are invited to visit the Nursery to learn the techniques of plant production so that they can use them at home. The nursery therefore provides both an important service to the local community and is a significant income-generation project.

Such projects are replicated across the Continent and are a vital Church contribution to food security and sustainability in a fragile context.

Social Justice Ministry in Heidelberg Circuit, West Somerset, Cape Province.

In West Somerset, the Circuit Minister, Rev. Ralph Afghan leads a Ministry of service to the local community. Serving the many displaced and unemployed persons in his community, the Church offers a Counselling ministry and a weekly ministry of providing food parcels on the streets for those seeking work. It takes considerable work to organisation to acquire, sort and distribute the food each week and it was moving to go out with the Team to one of the four places where these food parcels were distributed in the local community. During this one morning, 355 food parcels were handed out.



Food Parcel Preparation and Distribution. West Somerset Circuit. Rev. Ralph Afghan. Cape Province.

In Bellville, we visited a ‘New Life Centre’ – a ‘home for pregnant females in crisis’. This is a place where young girls and women (the youngest pregnant girl present during our visit was 10 years old) are offered accommodation, support, counselling and guidance through their pregnancy and dealing with all the consequences. One of the causes of this widespread problem is the economic system that means that millions of fathers have to work away from home – often hundreds of miles from their homes. Families are therefore commonly left ‘fatherless’. This leaves women and girls profoundly vulnerable to exploitation.

These are just some of the ministries visited – there were quite a number of others. We also had the opportunity to enjoy hospitality from members of the Districts and spend time with hosts, as well as visit places of interest within the local contexts, such as the Etosha National Park and the Cape of Good Hope Peninsula. The whole visit provided moving insights into the local context and the challenges and opportunities of ministry in the region, as well as opportunity for reflection on what this means for strengthening and developing international partnership in the future.



Key points from the visit to South Africa.

- Importance of on-going partnership.
- Multiple challenges in a diverse 6-country region.
- Impact of Climate Change.
- Importance of Church addressing Social Injustice issues at all levels.
- Need for empowerment of people in under-resourced areas.
- Importance of Contextual training.
- **Potential for Ordained Mission Partner to assist in Community Development/Empowerment Ministry in Mission areas.**
- Importance of Cross-cultural/International Theological engagement.
- Need for greater international awareness of social, environmental and religious challenges facing the region and their relevance to the global context.



Looking south from Table Mountain to the Cape of Good Hope, the southernmost point on the African continent. Indian Ocean on the left. Atlantic Ocean on the right. Behind lies the whole Continent of Africa in all its diversity, and with all its' multiple challenges and opportunities.