

CONGREGATIONAL WITNESS



Dear sisters and brothers

In the minds of many believers, the word 'witness' became associated with someone speaking about something they have experienced or seen in front of an audience.

As churches shifted their way of talking about mission work ("sendingwerk") to the language of witness, they envisioned more than words or someone speaking from the frontline. The original (Greek) word conveyed a richer deeper meaning of living the message - even to the point of paying the ultimate price (martyrdom) for the sake of the truth of the gospel.

In our current times, living God's truth can also be called embodiment, and it happens in relationships and in communion.

This edition of the Congregational Witness newsletter contains something of this living God's truth, embodiment, and communion.



We experience this in accompaniment, empowerment, grappling with Scriptures in communion, struggling to overcome our divisions towards a credible and lasting unity. The stories are coming from our discernments, engagements, our frailty in failing and struggling, but also our victories.

May you also discover your call, in witnessing, in living, in vulnerability, in God's call for his congregations, ministry leaders and church at large.

*Prof. Reggie Nel
Scribe: URCSA Cape Regional Synod Core Ministry for
Congregational Ministries*

THE ACCOMPANIMENT AND SUPPORT OF CONGREGATIONS AND PRESBYTERIES

1. SUPPORT OF PRESBYTERIES:

1.1 PRESBYTERY OF WELLINGTON



On 3 September our Minister in Synodical Service (MSS) for Congregational Witness, Rev. Stephen Pedro, visited and joined the annual meeting of the Presbytery of Wellington.

He was invited to present an information session on the challenge of "vacant" congregations, what the synod does, and how presbyteries can address this issue.

During the session, Rev. Pedro also informed the presbytery about the process the synod is facilitating to support our more than 15 licenced candidates (proponents) for the ministry who are waiting to be called, and the programme to put them in congregations for short periods of time.

Stephen also gave more information about the option of combination between congregations to enable our smaller congregations to have the service of a pastor on a full or part-time basis again.

According to the outgoing presbytery chairperson, Rev. Roger Groenewaldt, the clergy expressed appreciation for the informational session and are excited for follow-up workshop and advancing the process.





1.2 WESLAND UNITED PRESBYTERY

Part of Rev. Stephen Pedro's focuses is to support presbyteries with their programmes and processes, to inform them about synodical decisions and priorities, and to facilitate, identify and support collaboration opportunities between the synodical ministries and presbyteries.

From 18 to 19 September, Rev. Pedro visited the *Wesland Verenigende Ring* (WVR) for this purpose. The WVR is a joint presbytery of URCSA and DRC presbyteries in the West Coast and Swatland, which was founded on 14 May 2003.

"What stood out for me was the congregations' empathy for each other's ministries and stories, as well as the fruit of many years of building relationships, growing together and embracing each other, '...even when it was sometimes difficult...' as one colleague shared with me during tea break," says Rev. Pedro.

"Another gem was the confirmation of the gift we have in the church context and how we as presbyteries and synods can support our pastors and congregations to overcome challenges, such as the COVID pandemic, and be healthy, thriving missional congregations."

Four opportunities of collaboration that were highlighted during this event were:

- The missional transformation of congregations;
- Congregations with "vacant" positions for pastors;
- The Interim Order and unity processes between congregations;
- Contextual Bible Reading (CBR) and Boys2Men camps (B2M) to empower our youth.



BUILDING OF CAPACITY

1. TRAINING OF FACILITATORS

1.2 FOLLOW-UP TRAINING: PROPONENTS

On 14 September, we had a follow-up training session with some of our licensed candidates for the ministry (proponents) at Communitas.

We focused on the facilitation of the introduction of Contextual Bible Reading (CBR) to our URCSA Cape presbyteries. We also focused on the assessment phase of the accompaniment process for congregations.

During the assessment phase, we assist congregational leaders to understand the culture of the congregation and introduce the missional board game to assist them to see how missionally-focused they are in the ministry (service and witness) of the congregation.



PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

1. CONTEXTUAL BIBLE READING

1.1. INTRODUCTION OF CBR TO PRESBYTERIES



PRESBYTERY OF CARNARVON

*CBR Roll out: Our
Proponents join the fray*

Contextual Bible Reading is a method to read the Bible in community, from our context, together grappling with our communal challenges with our Bibles in hand, searching for transformational and theological answers, and putting together an action plan grounded in the Biblical text to address the identified challenge. On 16 September, two of our licensed candidates for the ministry (proponents), Rachel Linderoth and Michael Wildeman, visited the Presbytery of Carnarvon to introduce this way of reading the Bible to them.

Part of our adjusted strategy is to introduce CBR to the 29 presbyteries of our URCSA Cape Regional Synod first. Because of the COVID pandemic, the roll-out of CBR was disrupted, and we could only introduce CBR to a few presbyteries and congregations. Because of this, we decided to focus on the 29 presbyteries first. We've divided the presbyteries into two areas. There are 18 presbyteries in the Western Cape and Northern Cape part of the Synod, and 11 presbyteries in the Eastern Cape, Southern Cape, and Northern Cape.

Because it was also a race against time, we decided to draw upon the expertise, time and availability of our licensed candidates for the ministry (proponents) to assist the manager of the CBR project, Rev. Stephen Pedro, with the introduction phase of CBR.

"It was really exciting to get to know this part of our synod and experience the eagerness and willingness of the leaders of congregations to learn and to serve", said Prop. Linderoth.

Although our time was limited, we could sense that the group enjoyed the Contextual Bible Reading. The chairperson, Rev. Mornè Deelman, asked that we should have a follow-up day workshop to solely focus on CBR.

Prop. Michael Wildeman says: "To introduce CBR to the Presbytery of Carnarvon was so refreshing and educational. The mature manner in which the delegates accepted this challenge was overwhelming. They gradually understood the challenge at hand and in a short space of time their confidence grew, and they became comfortable in grasping the essence of CBR."

We once again call upon presbyteries to invite us to introduce CBR to our congregational leaders, so that the training of how to facilitate a CBR can start and leaders can gain confidence in doing a CBR so that congregations and members can start reaping the fruits of this transformational tool.

2 SUPPORT AND PLACEMENT OF OUR PROPONENTS

2.1 FOLLOW-UP VISIT TO KLEINMOND

On Sunday 11 September, Rev. Stephen Pedro, had a follow-up visit and conversation with the church council of URC Kleinmond. They requested that he should come and share more information about the process of putting a licensed candidate (proponent) in service for a short period.

Rev. Pedro first addressed the congregation during the service after which he met with the church council. The relieving minister, Rev. Gerome Haupt, was also present. According to Rev. Haupt, the meeting was very informative and helpful and will enable them to make a decision shortly.

The Presbytery of Caledon is part of the United Presbytery of Caledon. The URCSA part of the united presbytery has eleven congregations and Rev. Haupt (Caledon) and Rev. Marli Liebenberg (Bredasdorp) are the only two full-time ministers. Of the eleven congregations, seven have vacancies for pastors.

Several retired pastors from both the DRC and URC now reside within the resort/borders of the presbytery and assist with preaching and other pastoral duties, but it is vital that a few pastors are called and installed as ministers as quickly as possible. For our denomination and church affiliation (*kerkverband*) to be healthy, operationally sound, and able to make an impact within our local communities, we need well-trained pastors and congregational guides at the local congregational level, especially to build missional leaders for the missional church of the next century.

Again, we encourage congregations (who can) not to delay or postpone the calling of a pastor. Step out in faith and trust God to provide for the congregation.



BUILDING OF NETWORKS AND SUPPORT OF PARTNER MINISTRIES

1. UNITY CONVERSATIONS AND PROCESSES

1.1 SUPPORT CONVERSATION BETWEEN URC GOODWOOD, URC UITSIG AND DRC MONTE VISTA



"The building of networks between congregations and the support of unity processes between URCSA and DRC congregations are very important for us at Witness Ministry," says Rev. Stephen Pedro, manager of Witness Ministry and task team manager of Congregational Witness.

"On Sunday, 11 September, I had the privilege to join a meaningful and special meeting at URCSA Goodwood in Elsie's River. URCSA Goodwood, DRC Monte Vista, and URCSA Uitsig had a follow-up gathering and conversation."

The special thing about this meeting is that it is a continuation of the outreach and process Rev. Pedro initiated with Rev. André Reyneke of DRC Monte Vista when he was pastor of URCSA Goodwood and relieving pastor of URCSA Uitsig. A group of members from all three congregations met to build relationships and discuss the Word and the church's ministry.

Co-pastor of DRC Monte Vista, Rev. Jaco van Dyk, facilitated the meeting at URCSA Elsie's River. They focused on the impact of the COVID pandemic on their respective congregations and personal lives and how they see the ministry of the church post-COVID.

"It was an honour to be part of such a blessed and special conversation," says Rev. Pedro. "We pray God's blessings upon the process and follow-up meetings and conversation between these congregations, and believe that this small outreach and activity will surely build towards the greater unification process between our churches."



1.2 WITNESS REGIONAL CONFERENCE - PART 1

On the 21st of September 2022 Witness Ministry, of our three partner churches, facilitated the first regional conference with representatives of the witness ministries of congregations. It took place at the DRC congregation ("Moedergemeente") in George.

Witness Ministry decided at the beginning of this year that the conference part of its annual general meeting will be held in the form of regional conferences. This is to reach the witness ministries on a congregational level, to establish what their needs are and how we can support them and assist with addressing their needs and goals.

Part of the purpose of these conferences is to share the current and new focuses of Witness Ministry on a synodical level. This is to establish whether these focus areas are in line with the focuses of witness ministries on a congregational level and, if not, how we can address this and bring our different focus areas in alignment.

The representatives of congregations present had an opportunity to share with the ministers in synodical service of witness ministry and with each other what they focus on as witness ministries. This feedback session was inspiring and heart-warming to hear about the various ways congregations part take in acts and practices of service and witness in their congregations and communities.

What also became clear is that we still need to do more work to help each other with a clear theological/biblical understanding of what witness ministry is all about and that it is not the work or calling of a commission of the church council or a small group of members in a congregation, but that it lies at the heart of the "missio Dei", God's mission, and therefore at the heart of the ministry of the congregation, and thus every member's calling.

Our next two regional conferences will take place with the presbyteries of the Namaqualand and Northern Cape areas of our synods from 28-30 October 2022 and with the presbyteries of the Eastern Cape area of URCSA Cape, during November 2022.

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