During the COVID-19 pandemic period, we have learned that we need to wait for God’s response through His people by using God’s creation. We now chorus with Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, we were crushed and overwhelmed by this pandemic beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. We expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. Therefore, the Executive of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa has taken note of the developments regarding the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. We share the trauma and grief of families in SA and globally who have lost loved ones due to COVID19;
2. We commend all families to the comfort and care of God’s Spirit who dwells in us and prays that all will be strengthened;
3. We are encouraged that SA has received its first batch of vaccines and has earmarked it for our dedicated and courageous frontline staff, and in a second phase for people over 60 years of age;
4. However, we are alarmed that South Africa seems to be almost last to have received the vaccines, although some vaccines have been tested in South Africa. Simultaneously, the developing world has to wait while rich countries are securing inordinate amounts while the rest of the world must wait. This is not only a tragedy but also morally scandalous;
5. We call on the developed world to exercise their conscience and treat the needs of people equally;
6. We encourage our members to accept and embrace the outstanding work of medical scientists globally – producing effective vaccines in record time and mass producing it to make it cost-effective for poor countries, and we view this research as a testament to the gifts that God has given humankind;
7. We call on all our congregants to resist false information and seek only reputable sources of information about the vaccines when making a decision to be vaccinated;
8. We are deeply saddened and aggrieved that at this time of a major health crisis, so many of our citizens have abused the procurement system and enriched themselves criminally at the expense of human lives. It is clear that the lack of transparency and accountability from government and the private sector encourages gross corruption and criminality;
9. The pandemic teaches us that South Africa has to address the democratic deficit and citizens have to demand far greater levels of accountability from everyone in public office;
10. We thank the Lord that the arrival of vaccines gives hope for the control and ultimate defeat of the pandemic.
11. We commend the communities of faith for encouraging their members and society to exercise the virtues of diligence, caution and respect for life and thereby contributed significantly to the containment of the virus.

WHAT URCSA SAYS ABOUT VACCINES
EDITORIAL

It is the year 2021. It is the year in which we shall hopefully move into post-lockdown mode. 2021 is also the year of the General Synod. And most of the activities of the URCSA NEWS Editorial Team will centre around the coming Synod.

I would therefore like to introduce you to them. They are

Prof Rev Christina Landman (Editor)
Rev Lysander Prins (SMCPA Chairperson)
Rev Hendry Tromp (SMCPA Member)
Ms Kefiloe Fokase (Journalist)
Rev Katleho Mokoena (Layout Editor)

We would like to urge you to send news about your congregation, specialized ministries, and regional synods to landmc@unisa.ac.za.

May this be a year of exceptional blessings!

Get to know Desiree Brown our General Secretary

PART ONE

Childhood

I was born in Kimberley, which is the capital of the Northern Cape Province. Being the first grandchild born to the Appollis family, I lived with my loving grandparents where I was raised with a good work ethic and family values as well as a clear distinction between right and wrong. We lived approximately 400 metres away from the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Florianville Kimberley, where we attended church services as a family. For as long as I can remember we attended church services, however, I have learnt early in my life that attending church services does not mean you have a relationship with God, and until you abandon the need to appear spiritual, you are not spiritual.

As a child I did not study scripture, but I always had an inborn hunger for the word of God. As a teenager, my walk with God has been a season to season kind of thing where God been working on layer to layer and there were times that I doubted the promises of God, until the day there was a clear voice in my ear “I will be your father, your provider and your friend”

I accepted the Lord as my personal saviour at the age of sixteen, and since that day I had the Joy and peace of the Lord in my heart. I started serving on the church council as a deacon at the age of 23 and it has been amazing how the Grace of God has helped me in my weakness. I have learnt that a blessed life is not produced by a perfect situation – A blessed life is a crushed life.

Career

I started a career at the bank where I rose through the ranks and because of seniority was promoted to a Managerial position. It was only then that I decided to further my studies though Unisa and the Free State University. I enjoyed working as a banker for 40 years and have always asked God to make me bloom wherever I am planted. It was only when I reached the height of my career as a Hybrid Bank Manager, that I came to realize that I wanted more to life than a successful career. I realized there was a course bigger than myself, something more eternal.

I wanted to figure out my calling and find a more meaningful and significant life, and give back what I have learnt in the process. because my life is a history of answered prayers.

I retired from the bank at an age of 55 and my career at the bank has helped me to understand how people think especially in relation to finances and how the world operates, so God can use me to His Glory and to increase His Kingdom on earth.

We have all been shaped through our experiences in life, most of which was beyond our control and God allowed it for His purpose of moulding us.
DIE EVANGELIE VAN LUKAS HET N SPESIALE KENMERK. LUKAS FOKUS OP JESUS SE BESONDERE HART VIR DIE ARMES, DIE ONDERDRUKTES, DIE MARGINALISEERDES, EN HULLE WAT DEUR DIE GEMEENSAP VERSTOOT WORD.

**Jesus word geken as die een wat hom vereenenselwig by die “ander”.** Saggeus was deel van daardie “ander” mense, dalk nie een wat nie wat nie een wat werkloos was nie, maar beslis een wat nie deur die self-regverdigende Jode aanvaar was nie. Al was hy gesien as deel van die “verdrukkers”, naamlik die Romeine, in wie se diens hy as tollenaar gewerk het, was hy ook verwerp, en onderdruk deur die wat hulle oordeel alreeds oor hom uitgespreek het. Die wat hom gesien het as die “sondaar” aan wie se tafel Jesus weer gaan sit. Hy het nie nodig om verstaan te word nie, hy het ook nie nodig om gehoor te word nie, want ons het alreeds die oordeel gefel: “Hy verdien nie om aan een tafel met Jesus, te sit nie!” Sa die dierbares, Saggeus het nie net geld gesteel nie, maar ook verwerp, onderdruk deur sy eie mense. Dit het tyd geword dat ons mekaar se stories begin hoor... dan sal ons verstaan en begryp... die pad is nie n maklike pad nie.

**Teryl almal se oë op Jesus is... vestig Jesus hulle oë ook op Saggeus...Hulle moes in die rigting kyk wat hulle nie wou kyk nie.**

Hulle moes praat oor iemand waaroor hulle nie wou praat nie, want hy het hulle seergemaak... hy is nie in hulle gesprekke nie. Die Skrif wil ook nie vir Saggeus goed praat nie, die teks beeld Saggeus uit as die een wat mense bedrieg het, mense se geld beroof het, mense seer gemaakt het, wat nie goeie mensverhoudings gehad het nie. En so kan ons aangaan en dalk se hy moes nie eens sy verskyning in die bybel gemaakt het nie, want hy is dit nie waardevol nie. Liewe Broers en Susters, Saggeus was n sondaar, n persoon wat mense bedrieg het, iemand wat sy naaste seergemaak het. Jesus het nooit hom veroordeel nie, maar vir hom ruimte gemaak. Jesus roep vir Saggeus te midde van alm, en toon aan hom belangstelling. Jesus gee sy menswaardigheid terug in die publiek, waar dit van hom afweggeneem was. Toe Jesus gasvryheid teenoor Saggeus bewys het Saggeus, in antwoord op Jesus se gesindheid, besluit om sy lewe te verander. Om die mense wat hy seergemaakt het, beroof het, afgepers het, mee reg te maak.

Ons ervaar hierdie spesifieke omstandighede ook in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is in ons gemeentes vandag. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimte maak vir die ander persoon in ons gemeentes van dan. Hulle is nie deur Jesus seer gemaakt nie, maar vir hom ruimt...
URCSA NEWS het ds Farren Watt van VGK Lambertsbaai aan die Weskus oor haarself uitgevra

Ek is Farren Andrea Watt. Gebore in Springbok op 8 Februarie 1995. Ek het in 2013 matrikuleer by Hoërskool Namakwaland en het direk na skool my studies begin aan die Universiteit van Stellenbosch in 2014. My kinder- en jeugjare was gevul met baie naskoolse aktiwiteite en die CYM. My eerste jaar op universiteit wat vir my ‘n groot uitdaging. ‘n Vaal dogtertjie wat net die platteland ken, was skielik blootgeseël aan ‘n hele nuwe wêreld. Teen my tweedejaar het ek my voete gevind in Stellenbosch asook my studies. Studentelewe in Stellenbosch het ‘n groot aandeel in die volwassene wat ek vandag is.

Die lekkerste van Dominee wees, is die mense. Nie net my gemeentelede nie maar die gemeenskap waarin ek werk. Die verhoudings wat ek opgebou het en steeds elke dag bou, koester ek baie. As Dominee leer ek nog elke dag hoe om met mense te werk van alle ouderdomme en verskillende omstandighede. Dit is vir my een van die lekkerste dinge van predikant wees. En natuurlik al die heerlike beskuit wat ek weekliks kry! Haha

Ons gemeenskappe moet nog gewoond raak aan die idee dat ‘n vrou op die preekstoel staan. Daarom kom die bediening met soveel uitdaginge vir ‘n vrou. Ek persoonlik sukkel van dag nog met verskeie uitdaginge juist oor die mens wat ek is. Ons is nie gewoond om rooilippe en pinkhakskoene op die kansel te sien nie. Ek dink een van die grootste uitdaginge was dat my gemeente my as mens, net soos ek is, moet aanvaar. Dat my gemeente gewoond moet raak aan wie ek is en hoe ek bediening doen. Ek moet ook leer om nie so vining met my gemeente te wees met dinge wat ek wil bereik. Ek moes ook geduldig raak met veranderinge om my bejaarde lidmate te akkommodeer. Die bediening is maar een van daai beroepe waar daar altyd uitdaginge sal wees, ons leer maar hoe om dit te hanteer.

Ek hoop om meer te groei in die bediening en die doelwitte, wat ek vir myself gestel het vir die bediening, te bereik in die gemeente wat ek nou is, VGK Lambertsbaai. My droom is om meer te doen in die breër VGK en wanneer die tyd reg is, sal ek daarvoor strewe.
The congregation of Akasia was established five years ago and rapidly grew. At the end of December 2020 a fire mysteriously broke out in the multi-million rand church building, but that made the congregation only stronger.

**URCSA Akasia. A congregation of style, a congregation of choice.**

The congregation of Akasia was established five years ago and rapidly grew. At the end of December 2020 a fire mysteriously broke out in the multi-million rand church building, but that made the congregation only stronger.

**URCSA Akasia is a Congregation based in Akasia, North of Pretoria. The Congregation was founded when members staying around The Orchards, Chantell, Amandasig, Pretoria North, Theresa Park and surrounding suburbs decided to meet together and worship God closer to their homes. On the 12th of August 2017, URCSA Akasia was established and by God’s Grace, the congregation grew rapidly as many members staying in the area became aware of the worship centre close to them.**

On the 12th of August 2017, Akasia Congregation called its first Minister of the word: Dr Rev. EM Monhla. Under his leadership, the church membership grew so quickly that the Church Council saw it befitting to call a second Minister of the Word, Dr Rev. AE Shibalo on the 24th March 2018. As it stands, the URCSA Akasia Congregation boasts membership of over 405 and the number is growing tremendously. In the year 2019, leadership of the church decided to buy a Church Building to accommodate the growing number of members, amounting to R7.5M.

Although it might seem as if Akasia’s story is a fairy tale of “And They Lived Happily Ever After”, that was not the case. As in March 2020, the whole world, including South Africa, was hit by COVID-19 Pandemic, which saw a total lockdown of the Church and gatherings. The lockdown affected the congregation’s revenue and posed a challenge for the congregation to keep being a provider of spiritual food and hope to its members during the gloomy period of COVID-19.

The church leadership assembled a Media Team that was going to ensure that Daily Sermons were shared by Ministers of the Word across all media platforms (e.g. Face- book, YouTube and WhatsApp), preaching and giving members hope during the lockdown period, with Sunday sermons that were streamed live on Facebook and YouTube, to cater for all other URCSA members at large. As the restrictions later eased down, URC- SA Akasia congregation opened its doors for worship during the month of September 2020.

Sadly so, on the 12th of December 2020, the congregation met its testing moment. Faith of fellow members was shaken by the tragedy that was caused by fire in the early hours of the said day. The church offices and hall were gutted by fire. The shocking tragedy forced the congregation to close down its church doors for members to come to church for services. That’s because it was not safe to congregate at the church anymore. Again, the congregation had to come up with a plan of where and how to congregate, to be able to fellowship together.

As it is currently, URCSA Akasia Congregation is worshipping under the trees and shade of the church, while the church is slowly being rebuilt. The cause of fire still remains unknown or mysterious.

One can conclude that, challenges will always be there but what is vital is how con- gregation leadership responds to both these challenging and encouraging issues.

That’s why today it still remains URCSA AKASIA, “The Congregation of Choice, Congregation of style”.

You can visit the congregation at Plot 82, Cnr Thelma and Main Street, Heatherdale, Akas- sia. Church Services are conducted every Sunday at 09H00 or Follow us on aforementioned Social Media Platforms.

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**Is Karl Barth still Relevant for Africa Today?**

**Prof Rothney Tshaka**

One of the questions I am always asked as an African who had developed interest in the theology of Karl Barth, is what is the relevance for his theology for the African context? I have over the years changed my response to this question. From initially thinking that the question is shortsighted, to admitting much later in my theological reflections how urgent the question is for the African context, as I reflected on God in my context in Africa.

While Karl Barth’s magnum opus can be a threatening sight, it is informed by context. I was able to develop an interest in Barth after I had stumbled on the work by his erstwhile assist, Eberhard Busch. By constructing for us a Barth from letters and autobiographical texts, I was able to see the context out of which each of his Church Dogmatics volumes originated.

It must be remembered however, that the coloni- zation of Africa also meant an evisceration of all cultural understandings as well as all conceptions of the divine. It is in my view rather sad, because had the interaction between the west and Africa happened differently from the agenda of pillaging her, perhaps we would have had a richer experi- ence of influencing the reformed faith as we know it today. Be that as it may, the reformed faith cannot be an extension of eurocentrism if it is to sur- vive in Africa today.

The false perception of Africa as lacking in her comprehension of the divine must indeed be de- bunked by a means of Africans intentionally drawing knowledge from their own wells. A change in the focus of theology in Africa is not meant to sug- gest a discontinuation with theological reflections from the west. In fact, I am encouraged by Karl Barth’s own views regarding the context out of which his theology emanated. When asked by his students from the East if they could use his theology in their contexts, Barth made it quite clear that such a consumption of his theology with no regard for the particular context from which it originated, would do an injustice to his reflections on God in his western context. This for me was the sole factor for continuing to read his theology, mindful of its own particular context, as I reflected on God in my context in Africa.
The Spirit and New Life:

**Ezekiel 37:1(-14)**

It seems like forever since Covid-19 has made its grave appearance and has clawed its ugly clutches into human lives. And still the pandemic continues to cast its dreadful shadows everywhere. Sickness and death, restrictions and retrenchments, anxiety and distress have brought some to anger and uproar and others to a point of utter despair. Hopefully a majority of people found comfort and restored serenity in rediscovering God’s Word, His promises and the truth thereof. One such testimony of God’s restorative powers is found in Ezekiel 37:1-14.

The eminence of God’s Spirit is evident from the onset of this encounter. “[B]y the Spirit of the Lord” the prophet finds himself in a valley with “a great many bones [ ] that were very dry”. Asked by God, Can these bones live? Ezekiel seems shy of the conviction that the bones (of people who have been dead for a very long time) can indeed be revived. He answers neither Yes or No but rather leaves the plausibility – and its responsibility – with God. Surprisingly, God then assigns the prophet to the task of restoring life to the bones; and indeed, as Ezekiel utters the word of God, he became a witness to the restoration.

The bones moved together, sinews and flesh came on them and they were covered with skin. Still, the previously dry bones were just a corpse – as “there was no breath in them”. Again God calls Ezekiel to prophesy and as he obediently complies “the breath came into them, and they lived”. The corpse were now transformed into “an exceeding great army”. God then relates to Ezekiel that what he witnessed was God’s plan to restore His downtrodden people. God himself, through His Word and His life-giving Spirit will restore them to become more than what they were before – perhaps more so in their relationship with God as they will have his spirit within them. They will be spiritually revived in knowing that it was God who spoke and performed their revival (v.14).

God affirms to – and ultimately through = Ezekiel that i) restoration is not only probable but possible. That which is seemingly dead can be restored and He, the Sovereign Lord, can do it. ii) There can be no life without His Word and the vocation of His Spirit. His Word brings things into existence and His Spirit brings them to life. Without God’s Spirit there can be no life. iii) Ezekiel was rendered the opportunity to become an active participant in God’s restoring work. Likewise – as Covid-19 continues to loom and bring people to shadowed valleys of death and despair – God is calling people to speak his Word and to implore His Life-Giving Spirit so that life and relationship with the living and Life-Giving God may be restored. God calls people to not merely witness but to actively participate with the Spirit in His re-creational work.

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**The Spirit and true community:**

**1 Cor. 12:13, Eph. 4:3-4**

The believers in Corinth and Ephesus are faced with issues that are threatening the unity of their faith and, thus, their very existence as church. Paul, however, discerns the major threat to their being as a result of their personal conduct. For the crisis to be countered, he places strong emphasis on their understanding of their new identity in Christ and their consequent praxis. Moreover, he implores them to distinguish between their past and their expected present character and conduct. The strife and ignorance which they displayed as unbelievers are no longer befitting for them as followers of Jesus Christ.

As the one body of Christ they no longer belong to themselves but to Christ who in turn belongs to God. Their conduct, therefore, should likewise be according to the will of God and not their own. The unity of their faith and body is further upheld by their communal sharing and caring. The plight and suffering of one member should be the plight and suffering of all; the honour and victory of one, must be the honour and victory of all.

In all this transition of coming and being and working together, Paul accentuates the prominence of the presence and profession of the Spirit of God. The same God who has called the believers from the old to the new is at work in the one body of believers through the manifestations of the same Holy Spirit. *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body* (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4). It is this Spirit – God’s Spirit who knows and searches all things – that sanctifies and justifies, unites and teaches, liberates and strengthens, enables and empowers the believers to be and to do according to God’s will.

Today the world, Christians live in and are very much a part of, faces many grim challenges brought about by the presence of the Corona-virus. Uncertainties pertaining to the nature and duration of the virus and its variants; and now also to the safety of vaccines continue to grow. Subsequently the restrictions and its fluctuations add to the already existing anxiety and anguish; the antagonism and aggravation of people. The dire consequences of the pandemic has proven to be a particular threat to the unity and the very existence of the church. Threats to the existence of the body of Christ is, notwithstanding, no new phenomenon and should, therefore, come as no surprise to Christians today.

The question, however, is whether the threats from outside are indeed more harmful to the church and her (well)-being than that of her own display of character and conduct.

If anything, Covid-19 presents believers with the opportunity to, now more than ever, disclose the powerful, transforming work of the Spirit of God in finding new, creative and hopeful ways to share and care for each other and for others. In many instances we have; and by the grace of God we will continue to find even more meaningful ways of having true, godly fellowship.

For more sermons visit: https://urcsa.net/
When I look back on my life, many women with the variant of the name Anne, Anna, Ann, Johanna, played a pivotal role in my life.

Anna was the name of my paternal grandmother, Johanna was the name of my mother, Mary-Anne was the name of my sister and two dear friends with the same name, Anne played pivotal roles in my life and in my way of seeing and of being.

In March 2011, we moved back to South Africa after 8 wonderful years in the USA. I have no regrets for leaving; the Lord blessed us abundantly and I truly experienced the notion of “paying forward” there. Helping others without expecting anything back and hope that they will help others when they are on their feet again or are able.

When we left the USA, we had the burning desire to create a safe space for children. They would come and do their homework after school, have a meal and relax before they go to their homes. Our dream was to open a home where latchkey kids would come directly from school, get a meal, play or relax, before tackling their homework and go home. We even envisaged two or more rooms where those who need to sleep over can stay longer, while putting their lives together. This dream never materializes, but our focus shifted and we are helping more underprivileged families with food.

Our focus is to assist in getting each child a good meal or with a loaf of bread. I believe that if there is bread in the house, there is food.

Anne’s promise foundation is not named after my sister. I coined the name in 2011 when we came to work in the UAE. My husband and I decided to distribute our month tithe, and got involved in many-a-project that uplift and help the less fortunate learners at home; from sponsoring 100 kids to start their own cell phone business, helping people with food, offering study assistance, gave money towards food kitchens, literally helping strangers. We live by the word: “God blessed us, to be a blessing to others”.

Since March 2020, we have fed many mouths. Our aim is not to assist with rent, restoration of homes, paying off bills but it happened that now during Covid19 we assisted 2 families with their rental payments for 3 months and fixed the roofs of two families in KZN. We read about their dire situation on FB and reached out to them.

In honor of all the Annes in my life, we will keep on sharing our blessings with others.

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URCSA Middelburg

As URCSA Middelburg, we started a community reach out project were we gave members of the church and that of the community food parcels from when COVID-19 lockdown started, so far we have handed out more than 600 food parcels, and from the beginning of 2021 we started with school shoes drive and 85 school kids have been reached.

The initiators of this projects were Mr Vusi George Mahlangu and Rev PP Molehe. The project was supported by URCSA Middelburg and the local businesses around the town.

By Mrs. QV Molehe

Anne’s Promise

– by Francis Fourie (The late Prof Rev Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel’s sister)

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Ministry Student Mr Zanele Arlington Jiane has recently published a book

And this is what he had to say about the book:

As Christians we always fall short, I have sought to chart some key conversations from the New Testament and a few from the Old Testament to show how Jesus, the Apostles and the Old Testament saints dealt with common and hidden problems in their conversations, to minimize confusion and to improve our conversations today.

Modern communication, improved with ancient wisdom – What if there was a better way to communicate with the people around us? And what if Jesus could show us the way? The answers are simple: Jesus has already given them in His examples.

Our days are filled with communication. Talking, listening and understanding are the core of the human experience. Whether we are at work, with our families or the people of our community therefore the way we converse with those around us shapes our experiences, for better or worse.

Jesus leaves us with a thoughtful question: “Conversations shape our lives. But how do you shape conversations?”

For copies contact him on 081 306 4009

The late Prof Rev Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel and sister Francis Fourie
URCSA Melodi ya Tshwane and COVID-19
by Fokase Fokase

In the heart of the central business district of Pretoria, there is a church building in Bosman street called Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa Melodi ya Tshwane. Melodi ya Tshwane bears a rich historical narrative, which intensively led to unification processes. The unification narrative is an untold story that still need to be told, it's a story for another day. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic on the 11th March 2020, and unfortunately, South Africa was severely affected by the pandemic. The pandemic penetrated throughout the walls of the country and demanded us to wear masks, social distance and also to sanitize. Many, South Africans were infected and affected by the pandemic, hence the country experienced a serious lockdown.

The doors of the church buildings had to be closed but in the process, members were forced to understand that church is not a building but a movement, a network of people, or relationships. Above all, members had to align themselves with the concept of "Emmanuel" which is interpreted as "God with us." The pandemic brought the concept to live and drastically demonstrated that God is present, God exists in every corner of the world. Therefore, church continued even in the midst of lockdown.

First thing first, Sunday services were prioritized, we continued with our quarterly schedule but eliminated liturgists and interpreters, our focus was mainly upon the preachers. In the process, we introduced daily devotions which were inclusive of all ministry structures in the church. The main purpose of the devotions was to continually enhance members to take a step away from the routine and focus daily on their spiritual welfare. Daily devotions reminded members of URCSA-MYT (Melodi ya Tshwane) that God is present, God is with us but above all, it painted a bigger picture of God’s presence in us. The church also introduced the virtual Holy Communion services where members were encouraged to prepare their tables at their respective households, partake and share as a family in remembrance of Jesus death.

Maybe while reading you ask yourself, which platforms did we use, I would say we almost tried all social media platforms that we knew but not all social media platforms could work. Therefore, we used what worked for us: Facebook, Youtube and Whatsapp. Literally, we used Facebook and YouTube for Sunday sermons and WhatsApp for daily devotions. Our daily devotions were scheduled from Monday – Saturday as Sunday were mainly a day for a broader community. Fortunately enough, we were flexible, we were live sometimes on Facebook and some other days we were live on YouTube but mostly we preferred to convert an audio to a video and thereafter, post it on both social media platforms but mostly we preferred to convert an audio to a video and thereafter, post it on both social media platforms. In the process, we developed a "sermon coverage statistics" which helped to identify the number of members who could access and who could not access the sermons. We understood that "data" played a major role, therefore, the sermon coverage statistics included it. The statistic pushed us to think out of the box and ideally we came up with an idea of having an online radio.

Online radio created an awe-inspiring platform for us, it really put us on our toes but in the good way. We realized that we had hidden talent within the church; e.g. presenters. We created an educational space, youth empowerment space but above all, we created a spiritual space. In short, online radio was a hub that connected spirituality with education. As we touched issues pertaining to COVID-19, and Christian education. On Wednesdays we went through, the Living Belhar study manual as we did before in our different ward meetings. Indeed, this was an overwhelming experience which could be accessed globally as long as you have internet connection. Thus, we managed to host a tribute for the former General Synod Moderator Prof Mary Anne Plaatjies van Huffel and “may her soul continue to rest in peace.” Indeed, URCSA have lost a true church politician and an informative Minister. Secondly, we managed to host CMM Northern Synod prayer week.

Pastoral Care

In citing Magezi (2019:1) the discovery is that “Pastoral care refers to care provided from a spiritual perspective. The term ‘pastoral’ from the Latin word pastor [shepherd] refers to the notion of tending to the needs of the vulnerable. Pastoral care entails intentional enacting and embodying of a theology of presence, an embodiment of the love of God and of the neighbour in response to people’s needs. Pastoral care is known as cura animarum (i.e. care of souls), which refers to the care of people in their existential situations.”

From the above citation, URCSA MyT initiated the habit of “mouse visitation” which is not different from the normal house visitation concept. It is still a visitation to the family but virtually and not physically. The initiative emerged from the understanding of vulnerability, that members of the congregation were vulnerable, anxious, overwhelmed and frustrated but above all, they were scared of the new virus. In relations to that, the virus became a reality and members started testing positive.

The aim of the mouse visitation was to reach out to such members and to remind them that God is indeed with them. We would pray with members, individually or as a family through Zoom, especially with members who could connect and telephonically called those who could not. We extended the concept to wards and allowed members to share their covid-19 stories but also to remind them of their URCSA MyT community.

Psychosocial support

Covid-19 came like a thief with the intention to steal, kill and destroy. Thus, the church council understood that being confined could affect us differently and therefore, established URCSA-MYT Lockdown Psychosocial support for those members who were anxious, scared, frustrated, stressed, in a panic, or even those members who felt overwhelmed and needed someone to speak to. Psychosocial support formulated with social workers, namely: Ms. P Khonoaga, Ms. M Manetha, Ms. A Mathavhathe and Ms. R Mphou

Outreach Programme

A month after the lockdown announcement, Care and Outreach committees initiated and established an MyT COVID-19 Relief project which aimed to reach families and individual members of URCSA-MYT who were adversely affected financially by COVID-19 and the lockdown that the country was under, with monthly food parcels. The project sustained 27 families and 3 individuals for a duration of 8 months (May-December 2020). In addition to that, wards 2, 3 & 4 also initiated a drive to knit or crochet blankets for pre-term and low birth weight babies in the Kangaroo Mother Care ward of Kalafong Hospital. The drive materialized during level 4, when we were anxious, panicking and experiencing the winter cold. As tough as it was the women of ward 2, 3 & 4 thought of the little babies and their mothers. Thus, they saw a need to extend a helping hand to the babies by giving them soft and warm blankets A group of members went to Kalafong to hand over 39 blankets to the mothers on World Premature Baby Day in November 2020. All the participants said how much they enjoyed making the blankets as it helped them to feel less anxiety during the lockdown.

Catechism

Our catechism classes took place virtually (on zoom) with the help of the church council and teachers. As those who could not connect due to “data”, church council extended a helping hand. And throughout, the challenges and constraints, 2020 catechumen met requirements and therefore, will soon do confession of faith.

In conclusion, Swart (2013:1) argues that a narrative begins with the idea that a word opens a world. "Human beings are products of words that develop into stories, as stories of our lives are created through linking words together and putting them in a particular sequence. Living human beings make sense of their life events, and their daily experiences become meaningful through the stories they tell about themselves. Thus, Swart (2013:20) describes human beings as story beings. We are the products of our stories and our lives are multi-storied. By the grace of God, we as members of Melodi ya Tshwane continued to live our faith stories this past year. We discovered in a new way that we are part of God’s story and that God will never leave us or forsake us.
URCSA Bethesda Congregation on surviving COVID 19 Pandemic

THE BACKGROUND

Bethesda Congregation surviving the storm of COVID 19

Bethesda Congregation is situated in Senwabarwana (Bochum) in the Limpopo Province and it has about 22 wards with 20 preaching points around different villages. Life is nice and slower than in the township where I come from. There are no industrial firms were people can go to work or even big shopping malls that can provide job opportunities. People depend on farming and other natural means for living. It is against this background that I call this period of pandemic surviving the storm of COVID 19.

A pandemic can be extremely challenging to a minister who is still new in ministry or in a particular congregation. I was ordained and welcomed with my wife in Bethesda Congregation 2018. The Plan was first to study the “liturgy”. The original word is leitourgia or meaning “the work of the people” or “the work for the people” this is the work that impacts the whole congregation not only the minister of the word and the church council. The plan was to find a way in which we can practice diaconia meaning to serve in this context. I usually use the phrase “Liturgy after the liturgy”. Serving people outside church vicinities.

CHALLENGES

Just like any other congregation we also faced challenges. In this article I will like to point the few and also show how the Congregation survived COVID 19. The lockdown started last year 2020 March when the president of our Country Cyril Ramapho-sa declared a national lockdown due to a spread of COVID 19 and even the churches buildings had to close. However, later the president eased the restrictions and the churches were allowed to continue with their worship services under COVID 19 pre-cautions. The Northern Synod called ministers of the word for a workshop at the church office. It is in this workshop where I personally became brave and realize that it is possible to survive this Pandemic.

FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Financially it was not easy and just like most of the congregations. Without Sunday collection funds decreased. However, with God on our side we managed to conduct our two most fundraising initiatives.
- Our Bazaar was different, members where only contributing funds and we did not have our fundraising sales as usual. We used pledge form; member contributed what they can afford.
- Puno was also affected tremendously; the Conference was shortened from the usual two days to one day due to COVID 19 restrictions. However, members understood that they were not contributing their Sunday collection and therefore they were motivated to add it on their Puno contribution

SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES

It has been a mammoth tusk to accommodate everyone spiritually. We use different kinds of social media like Facebook and Whatsapp to preach and send audios. Other sermons were download in a USB send to the villages’ members will play on their television that has a USB ports.

THE PLAN OF SECOND WAVE

On the 29th December 2020 the president announced that there is another tremendous increase of Corona virus cases and he took the country back to alert level 3 of the lockdown. Second wave has been very bad as more members were now infected. In the beginning of the year 2021 January things got out of hands. Most of our member lost their lives, others were admitted in Hospital. However; due to the fact that Bethesda Congregation is the “Body of Christ” Meaning every single member is important for the healthy functioning of the Body. When one is in pain after losing their loved one, congregants from different wards will be there to support the whole family. But since the President announced that funerals are super spreaders of COVID 19 and the number should be limited to 50. It is very difficult for those families to deal with the situation on their own. But in all funeral service there are few members who will represent the church one of them will give a message of support condolence.

Let me conclude with good news that we also managed to give out food parcel to the most venerable families during the time of this pandemic. Member donated perishable and none perishable food.

In the book of Acts 27, Paul survived the storm. There is still hope that we will be surviving this Pandemic in URCSA congregations.

The Northern Synod called ministers of the word for a workshop at the church office. The plan was to find a way in which we can practice diaconia meaning to serve in this context. I usually use the phrase “Liturgy after the liturgy”. Serving people outside church vicinities.

We had a church council meeting. Elders and deacons were taught about corona viruses and how to prevent it from spreading to our members during worship. During the level 3 of lockdown small shops were closed and only the big supermarkets were opened for business. It was against this background that we also clustered the wards into 6 so that we use big buildings that will accommodate the recommended amount of members while adhering to the COVID 19 regulations.

We approaches the local radio station Mohodi FM and the National radio Thobela FM and that is where most members were accommodated to hear that word of God. It has been a journey of surviving the storm because CWM managed to have their annual conference and fundraising under level one lockdown regulations. It is not all ministries that survive the storm our CWL was ready to be lunched but that did not happen after all the preparations. CYM and CMM were given the opportunity to preach during the youth month but it was not enough.

URCSA Bethesda Congregation members receiving food parcel donated by the church council and other congregants

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In the book of Acts 27, Paul survived the storm. There is still hope that we will be surviving this Pandemic in URCSA congregations.
The recognition of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, plus all other (LGBTIQ+) peoples sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics is still a contention point in URCSA. LGBTIQ+ people cannot access ordination, have their unions solemnised by ministers, and be fully present as both parents at their children’s baptism. Although strides have been made at the Southern Synod in 2018, some congregations and presbyteries still have not communicated their stance to the General Synod. Some may view this process that started in 2005 as justice delayed and therefore, justice denied. We need dialogue that transforms the deadlock in the current conversation.

A great example of the power of dialogue for transformation is the 2019 film *The Two Popes* (Netflix). Portraying a fictional meeting between Pope Benedict XVI and Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio from Argentina (who became Pope Francis I), the film begins with both Benedict and Bergoglio at a place of disorientation. Bergoglio is on a mission to resign as cardinal because of his disillusionment with the church. Benedict XVI’s papacy is scandalised by sexual abuse stories perpetrated by priests and covered up by church officials. In the film, Benedict is portrayed as a traditionalist who strictly follows Catholicism. He is depicted as a devout German intellectual who believes that the Roman Catholic Church’s strength resides in its unchanging steadfastness in theological convictions. Providing continuity, certainty, safety, and absolutism.

In contrast, Bergoglio is portrayed as a liberation theology follower that proclaims God’s preferential love for the poor. He believes that the church undoubtedly has a role to play to elevate the poor’s lived realities and contribute to a better life. Bergoglio’s Catholic Church welcomes divorcees, ordain women, accept LGBTIQ+ people and encourages priestly marriage.

The two characters experience life and make sense of it in contradictory ways. Throughout the film, one notices the various steps of behaviour change: pre-contemplation (self-assessment), contemplation (confirmation of readiness and identification of barriers), preparation (the plan of action), action, maintenance (multiple strategies to cope), and relapse (disappointment) in the dialogue process. These stations are not linear, but provide an essential insight into how behavioural change transpires within a dialogue process. Values like flexibility, reciprocity, vulnerability, authenticity, empathy, and risk, accompany these stations and form an integral part of the dialogue process.

For me, the climax in this fictional movie is the dialogue in the Room of Tears where the two characters mutually encounter one another through their embodied stories of guilt, calling, vulnerability, forgiveness, and hope. Benedict and Bergoglio’s embodied stories portray dialogue characteristics of partners on opposite ends in the conversation. If the URCSA is genuinely committed to embodying unity, reconciliation, and justice in her prophetic witness, we need dialogue that transforms. I therefore call upon the General Synod of 2021 to lead the way in transforming the deadlock into dialogue.

By Hazel R. Davids

**URCSA Stellenbosch congrant, working for Inclusive and Affirming Ministries catalysing faith communities to recognise and celebrate LGBTIQ+ on the African continent.**

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**CYM in the context of Covid19**

The Covid19 pandemic introduced many restraints to members, not only in their personal spaces but also in terms of engaging in ministery programs that were planned to take place in 2020. As members of URCSA, the CYM members were concerned about the spiritual well-being of themselves first, and also of the congregations at large. At many congregations across the regional synods we have seen CYM members take lead in encouraging church councils to continue to use social media platforms to ensure that the gospel reaches the congregants at a time of uncertainty and loneliness. One could almost identify congregations that do not have youth on their church councils; they took longer to explore other means of communicating the word of God. One presbytery in the Southern Synod, CYM Westrand Presbytery, went as far as developing an online channel with programs on a daily basis which provided content pertaining to the Ministry as well as food for the spirit.

The ministry has year plans that are compiled and need to be executed. The execution thereof relies on the leadership of executive members. Unfortunately, some events and programs such as CYM 25 years celebration, leadership workshops, congresses and conferences, had to be cancelled and or postponed. The feasibility of these events depended heavily on the use of technology and internet, and the unfortunate reality of expensive internet was taken into account to the detriment of some of the events. It is pleasing indeed to note that CYM members understands that the Church is not the physical building itself but a communion of believers, and therefore the access to buildings did not disrupt the mission to feed their spirits. Spiritual revivals were hosted on social media platforms such as Facebook and Whatsapp and these continue to date. It was clear that a new normal was to be introduced, even if it was for a short while to preserve the health of the members. This statement was clearly articulated when in the Northern Synod the CYM leadership pleaded to the Moderamen to not rush the opening of churches as compliance to the protocol would have proven to be a challenge. There have been a series of weekly prayer initiated by the Central Executive on Thursdays dedicating the prayers to all of God’s children, front line workers, families who have lost loved ones, all who tested positive and are on the road to recovery, those who have lost their jobs, families who have no income.

The ministry has also gone above and beyond to ensure that in these trying times they do not forget their duty to extend a helping hand and to give back to the community. CYM have, while observing Covid19 alert protocols, continued to donate food parcels, clothes and blankets to people in their communities who were in need. The annual awareness program against gender based violence hosted by CYM Phororo region was shifted to an online platform to avoid cancelling an event of such great importance, and a great event it was.

CYM members are encouraged to comply to the alert level protocols, to practice personal hygiene and avoid gatherings were possible to ensure that we contribute to the flattening of the curve. While we are finding our way around the new normal, we do look forward to the day where we are one day able to meet in a spiritual revival without having to worry about social distancing and we believe that that day will soon be here.

CYM CEC Secretary

By Sister Pearl Lobize

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By Sister Pearl Lobize

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You have recently been chosen as Moderator of the Cape Regional Synod. What are the challenges of this Synod - and what is your vision for the Synod as its Moderator?

A very clear mandate that Synod gave to the elected leadership has to do with our internal unity. There was very lively, and at times very robust discussions on this very important matter. These played out especially with the election of the Moderamen. The reference was to the 50/50 decision taken in 2002 whereby 50% of the elected leadership should be isiXhosa-speakers and 50% Afrikaans-speaking. There were strong arguments for and against the continuation of this principle. We must honestly confess that not enough has been done to strengthen our internal unity, and that much more commitment and hard work are needed to bring us closer to the ideal of a unified church that transcends the divisions imposed on us through social engineering and political systems. We are obligated by the Word of God and our Confession of Belhar to do more during the recess. URCSA has a calling within our South African context to lead the process of nation-building.

We have also “harvested” some thoughts and suggestions from delegates in this regard, and will collate these suggestions and feed it into our continuous deliberations and courageous conversations that will hopefully take us forward.

We hope to deal with this “elephant in the room” in a much a more positive, constructive, systemic, but honest way throughout the recess. This will include some courageous conversations with external facilitators. A Committee on Internal Unity, in consultation with the Moderamen and other ministries, is currently working on a number of proposals to facilitate these conversations in all our presbyteries.

Secondly, we will have to continue to reflect on Synod’s theme, COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY TRANSFORMING THE WORLD. Our country and communities are facing major socio-economic and political challenges. The church will have to step up with regard to its missional calling as a sent-church. This will have to be on more than one level, and include advocacy, a ministry of presence, and concrete acts of compassion not only within our congregational and denominational spheres, but in public spaces.

This will also mean stronger ecumenical networking, as well as working with other faith-based and community organisations. The annual crime statistics call on faith communities to seriously interrogate our purpose and witness. We will have to do more, and stand where God stands - with the marginalised, voiceless, and broken people (Belhar Confession).

A third challenge facing us is the financial constraints and challenges. We will work closely with our CEO and Ministry for Finance and Administration (SMFA) to address these challenges. The fact that the Cape Region is numerically (number of congregations) and geographically the largest regional synod requires new and fresh thinking and ideas to address this.

The Covid pandemic with the subsequent national lockdown has hit congregations very hard, with many struggling to survive. This has a knock-on effect on the regional and general synod which depend on levies or offerings from the congregations.

1. Romeo, we know that you are deeply involved in the CYM, and that you make virtual programmes for URCSA. Can you tell us more about both these engagements?

Thanks for this opportunity. The idea of having this virtual videos, did not only come to play during the lockdown. We used the lockdown to push it strongly as it left the gap between the church and congregations. One must say that, many viewed praising God only inside the walls of the church, but we delivered powerful services straight in to their living rooms and their mobiles. We also managed to ensure that young people of the URCSA are not left out, as we have fun shows through out the week, spiritual shows, leadership engagement shows and fun shows through singing. All of these are aimed at keeping the entire audience and membership of our church relevant and up to date with developments of the church.

2. What do you think should be the role of the youth in church leadership?

The role of the youth in the church, would be to keep the church up to date and relevant to current developments, essentially the nation is younger and so is our church, young people can bring fresh and innovative ideas to the church, such as advanced collaboration technology, and ensuring that other young people don’t feel like they are in the 60’s with the old styles and ways of doing things, by older people. If all decisions of the church suits old people, young people will be left out, thus leave no room for the future of the church, so young people can assist by changing the mindset and the face of the church.

3. How do you think should the involvement of youth in decision making in URCSA be enhanced practically?

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IN CONVERSATION WITH ROMEO MOGAPI

He is the producer of Chairman’s Corner where he interviews URCSA members on Facebook

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3. How do you think should the involvement of youth in decision making in URCSA be enhanced practically?

By involving the youth in church councils, it will give expression to young people to advance their interest and that would be paving the way for the future of URCSA. Young people need to be consulted in decision that would affect them for the future of the church, so young people can assist by changing the mindset and the face of the church.
In memory of our fallen Reverends

The Spirit and Witness (Act 1:8)

By Prof Rev Tshepo Lephakga

The events of Acts 1 occurred in a situation of uncertainty, confusion and a threat to life. These events occurred days after Jesus Christ had been violently crucified and the High Priest Caiphas with the help of the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate had deployed a heavily military guard and had given his army an instruction that, the tomb of Jesus Christ must be heavily guarded, and that all disciples of Jesus Christ must be hunted down and be arrested. These guards were going through the city of Jerusalem, harassing the people and searching houses of followers of Jesus. As a result of this, the disciples of Jesus were scattered in Jerusalem. Some were in hiding and some had even left Jerusalem in fear of their lives. But those who remained in Jerusalem remembered the promise that, Jesus had given them before he departed physically from them. They remembered that, Jesus had promised to send a helper in a form of the Holy Spirit (Parakletos). But for them to witness the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the disciples of Jesus were also instructed to remain in Jerusalem. The call to remain in Jerusalem was a call to have trust, believe, patience and mostly importantly to take a stand. The disciples did not know the specific date and time of the coming of the helper- the Holy Spirit. They are to remain in Jerusalem even though things were not going well, even when their lives are threatened, and they are not sure if they will make it through. However, Jesus’ promise is that, the helper will come and when the helper comes, all those who have experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be protected, provided for and will be witnesses not only in Jerusalem but in all Judaea, and in Samaria and to the uttermost part of the world. We are therefore called to be WITNESSES IN THE MIDST OF CHALLENGES.

The Pandemic of Covid 19 has caused havoc in the world. COVID has caused physical, psychological, spiritual and economic wounds. We are losing our loved ones left and right, center, people are retrenched in their workplaces, churches are suffering, people are terrified and like the disciples of Jesus we are in a situation of uncertainty, confusion and a threat to our lives. Our faith is tested, we have tried to remain strong, but it is unbearable. However, as Christians we must always remember that, even in situations like this, we share in the benefits of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Our helper is here. The Greek word used to describe our helper is Parakletos and Parakletos is our counselor, intercessor, the one who pleads on our behalf our cause and the one who closes the gap. Our helper (Parakletos) will be with us as WITNESSES IN THE MIDST OF CHALLENGES.