

AFRICA EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
EBENEZER - “USIMAKADE UHAMBE NATHI KWAZE KWABA LAPHA”
“THUS FAR THE LORD HAS HELPED US” (1 Samuel 7: 12)

BACKGROUND

“By faith we see the church working in unity in diversity of language, race, culture and gender, with an agreed evangelical doctrine of salvation whose body life is experienced by all members so that it disciples and reproduces itself in holiness of living.”

1. INTRODUCTION

Since our church is celebrating 60 years since it came out from under the control of the whites in 1962, it is important that we look back a little from there and reflecting on the role we played in growing the church spiritually and winning lost souls. Commissioned by the Board of the church, I will try to briefly comment on the success of the AEC Church since its establishment in 1962. Before looking at the quality of the church from this year, I want us to look back to when the gospel came to South Africa until now. In 2012 we observed the Golden Jubilee during our Annual General Church Conference (AGCC) in KwaZulu-Natal where we were celebrating the 50th anniversary of the church. The verse of the year was found in Psalm 126:3 "The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy." At that time the church was led by President P Mntambo. We thank God that today we are celebrating 60 years, which is the Diamond Jubilee under the leadership of the President of the Church P. Mntambo. The church has had four presidents who have led them faithfully by being faithful to the word of God. We thank the Lord for keeping President Mntambo up to this point. The mission of the Church remains; we say in this year of celebration; " But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written: “Be holy because I am holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16).

2. HOW DID WE GET TO WHERE WE ARE?

1488 – 1744 – 2022

(534 years of the Gospel in South Africa)

When we look back and see where we came from as an AEC church, we can start by recounting when Christianity came to South Africa. 534 years ago for the first time that Christianity was mentioned until now, it humbles us to see the power of God in his children. It started with believing individuals in church who volunteered to preach the word of the Lord and spread it all over the world. These brothers were sent by Missions abroad. They gave up their homes and

countries so that the religion could reach the African country. In 1488, the Portuguese Bartolomeu Dias hung a cross at the place known as the Cape of Good Hope. In July 1737, George Schmidt became the first Missionary in South Africa and established a Mission known as the Moravian Brethren in Cape Town. At that time he was working with the Khoi people whom Jan Van Riebeeck arrived in 1652. In 1742, he baptized the Khoi tribe, which caused a great uproar among the whites, who complained about why black people were baptized. This resulted in him being disliked hence, he had to go back to where he came from in 1744. The preaching of the gospel stopped for about fifty years.

Then in the year 1842 they headed to Durban led by James Archbell with the British Force that was sent to fight the Boer soldiers who had established their own kingdom, the Republic of Natalia. They preached the gospel in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and Verulam until they went to eSwatini led by Pastor James Allison. At that time, eSwatini was ruled by King Mswati 1.

Here in KwaZulu-Natal, they built a Mission in Ndeleni and a farm in the Edendale area. Then in 1867, they moved on to Ladysmith with the aim of expanding to the north of Natal. Reverend Allison founded the Mission, Nzondelelo which still exists today in KwaZulu-Natal. With the arrival of Indian people in 1861 to work in the sugarcane farms, Pastor Ralph Stott who had been in Sri Lanka was able to communicate with the Indians in the Tamil language and preached for 17 years in Durban winning souls.

1792

In 1792, three Missionaries came to renew God's work. They came from England, Scotland, France, the United States of America and the Netherlands. They started the work of translating the Bible and hymns to make it easier to communicate with the people of South Africa. The main objective was to preach the gospel and educate and improve the blacks who were considered barbarians in the dark continent of Africa. (The Gospel has come to the black nation).

1840

In 1840, the London Missionary Society sent David Livingstone and other missionaries to South Africa to begin the work of the Lord. Among the missionaries sent were from the Glasgow Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society from America, Germany, and Scandinavia. When they came (the missionaries), they were of the view that black people had no religion, even though it existed, yet did not acknowledge it. Let me mention this that there was a clash of religions, that of black people presenting a different view from the one by the white people. This is where the conflict began between the cultures of the people and those of the whites.

There are black people who give themselves to the Lord and accept the gospel like the Xhosa king, Ngqika and the Sotho king Moshoeshoe. A traditional healer, Mlangeni led a war against the whites in 1853 which they did not win.

Many missions from Europe came to this country and started many missions with the intention to convince people to accept Christianity. At that time apartheid was rampant; the whites established a church known as; the Dutch Reformed Church which had 3 million members who supported the proposal at the time. The church was established with the help of the people in the church who were independent and that is why it was called General.

2. SOUTH AFRICA GENERAL MISSION (SAGM) – CGM – SAGM – AEF - SIM - AEC

The Cape General Mission (CGM) led by Martha Osborn, Spence Walton and Andrew Murray in 1889. Then in the year 1891 Miss Osborn who was married to George Howe established a mission in Cape Town known as the South East Africa General Mission. The gospel spread to many African countries and met with other missions and a new word came up which is; South Africa General Mission in 1894. People referred to it as the General Mission and the church is still called that in other areas. Most of us grew up knowing our church as General Mission. The General Mission was formed with the dedication of brethren in church from many countries, including Canada, the USA, England, and Australia. It brought together various churches (interdenominational) that preached the gospel of salvation. It focused mainly on evangelizing soldiers and sailors in the Cape Town area. It grew and reached black people as the gospel was preached. In the year 1891 the General Mission started work in eSwatini where fifty churches with 5000 members were founded. They settled in the first Mission Station in Bethany. Then in the year 1893, they continued to Hebron. In 1897 they started work at Mankayane Mission Station. Then in the year 1905 they opened another mission at kaBoyce which was followed by Mbuluzi in 1920 which was a farm. The motto of the General Mission was; “God First” until today we still use this slogan that emphasizes that God should be the first in our lives. The main purpose is the reconciliation of people with God and faith in his name. The motto was to ignore everything else and put our trust in God. A church grew from black people giving themselves to God. Then in the year 1892 to 1897 mission work was started in Johannesburg, KwaNdongaziyaduma, and Pretoria which later became the Headquarters of the Mission.

Rev. Fred Suter

The arrival of Pastor Fred Suter who was born in 1865 and passed away in 1951. This young man was from Halifax, Yorkshire in Canada and his father was Samuel Suter. He was a Baptist minister in England with a calling to preach the gospel to the Zulu people, in 1893 he established a branch and a night school and in 1895 he moved to Florence.

The first church was in the city of Durban on Gillespie Street. In Durban, the first mission in 1891 had 36 members who were baptized in KwaZulu. In 1895 Pastor Fred Suter and Mr. Waka Ndlovu started the mission in Dumisa and then spread to the whole province of Zululand until they hit Vryheid, Maputaland, St Lucia, Ntabamhlophe, Makhowe, and Mseleni. They opened twelve missions where Mr. Waka Ndlovu was working with Fred Suter. It is not surprising that the first Annual General Conference (AGCC) was held at Dumisa before SAGM/AEF met. In Ntabamhlophe there is a man from Dlamini whom after he was saved, started to preach the word and many people were saved. It was in Dumisa that the training of church ministers began in 1939. Reverend Fred Suter was gathering men from hostels to teach them the Bible with the help of Mr. Waka Ndlovu. Waka Ndlovu's father who was breeding pigs used during the day when they were resting, he would visit homes in Highflats and Mzinto to preach the gospel. In 1924 he opened Kwa Dumisa Bible School (UBS). Other pioneers who were trained in this school were Reverend Nicholas Bhengu who was a teacher at the time. This school opened up opportunities for the establishment of a bible school in Pietermaritzburg, the Union Bible Institute (UBI) in 1942, in Sweetwaters, which is still there. This land belonged to the Swedish Zulu Mission. There were 21 students compared to 9 in the Bible school in KwaDumisa. He became the first principal until he retired at the age of 78. The spread of the gospel continued and in the year 1895 the work was started in Nkanga in December and then moved to Luthubeni, Transkei.

Natal-Transvaal

In 1948, Natal-Transvaal held a meeting where it was agreed to name the Mission House for the General Mission. In 1950, the Johannesburg Bible Institute (JBI) was established. Reverend Petros Magagula who was originally from eSwatini was collaborating with the whites at that time in Soweto. Other missions were established in Roodepoort where Dr Donal Smith was appointed as Secretary/Writer. The operation of this school was officially started in 1985, the Durban Bible College was established in Merebank, Durban and the Christian Training College in Renishaw which trained natives from India and was taught at night. Later, the Evangelical Bible Seminary of Southern Africa was opened in Pietermaritzburg. In 1953 the engineers introduced the two-person light aircraft Piper Cub. The first doctor arrived in 1959 working under the mission until

in 1970 it came under the control of the South African government. In 1960, the Youth Alive movement started to meet young people living in cities. Jerry Nkosi and his wife Mavis were instrumental when they dedicated their lives to Youth Ministry, with Missionary from USA – Allan and Lorry Lutz. Pastor F. Bodibe and Pastor P. Mntambo were leaders in this youth organization. It still exists today and has helped many young people.

4. A NEW BEGINNING

In the year 1911 SAGM proposed that it would focus on training young people to accept the gospel so that they could be independent as a church. (*Genheimer 1970*). It was the purpose of the mission to develop a church of black people that will deliver the gospel in the language of the people. They had the plan to work with the church and help it grow, manage itself, and provide for itself financially and develop itself. This plan matured and in 1957 it was agreed that there should be no division but continued cooperation and support. In 1960, the black church was ready to take over the reins. The next two years saw a new beginning. This is the beginning that is being celebrated this year after sixty (60) years the church has stood until now.

We thank God for leading us to this point.

The General Mission (SAGM) transferred administrative autonomy on July 08, 1962 to the black leadership at the conference held in Ntabamhlophe, Estcourt, KwaZulu-Natal. This region was led by Rev. Wilfred Green, the Field Director of SAGM at that time which later changed into Africa Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) which is now known as Society for International Missions (SIM) Serving in Mission. The name of the church changed to African Evangelical Church. At that July meeting Pastor Green presented a gift of a Bible to Rev. E.J. Mfeka who became the first President of AEC. This gift of the Bible was a sign of leading, teaching, and helping the church to move forward. It is a symbol of unity in our separation as brethren and strong support for the church. Besides the gift of the Bible, there was a letter written to the SAGM. Here is what was written in the letter:

“Even if it seems that we are separating, it is not so. With all its heart the Mission wishes to continue full cooperation with the Church, so that the fellowship that we have now may be preserved, and that we may help each other; that the lovely Name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified. The Mission needs the help and fellowship of the Church, and the Church still needs the help and fellowship of the Mission. (SAGM 1961)

This letter is very important to us as we plan the way forward as an African Evangelical Church. It clearly explains that the purpose of the separation was not through the conflict between the Mission and the black people in the church. It explains that in their hearts they have the desire to continue their relationship with the new Church. The letter concludes that the Mission needs help and a relationship with the Church, and the Church still needs help from the Mission.

Serving in Mission (SIM)

In 1962, the Mission changed the name of the General Mission and the Mission was known as; Africa Evangelical Fellowship (AEF). We will remember that in the year 1893, the mission was officially established which was called; the Sudan Interior Mission which later on changed to Serving in Mission (SIM). The change of the name of the Sudan Interior Mission in 2002 did not make a difference because the new name had the same letters. This was due to the fact that they were in contact with foreign missions. SIM was founded by three men, one was Walter Gowans who came from Canada, Roland Bingham who also came from Canada and Thomas Kent from America. They had a vision of winning 60 million souls in Africa. Due to malaria, Kent and Gowans did not live long and died in 1894. Bingham returned to his native country Canada. After a long time, a third team was sent to carry out the gospel. Time went by and in 1998 the Africa Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) became one with SIM. SIM is the largest mission in Africa as it has approximately four thousand (4,000) missionaries in 65 nationalities in the world working in six continents in seventy countries. In Zimbabwe, SIM has partnered with the United Baptist Church of Zimbabwe, which has a Bible school called Rusitu Bible College. Rusitu was founded in 1897. Besides Rev. Green has had many AEF Directors before. We can count Rev. Dr Ronald Genheimer from 1969 - 1988, for eleven years he was the International Director from 1989 - 1994 in England. After working in England, he returned to Pietermaritzburg until 1990 when he retired. Rev. Richard Morgan, who joined the AEF in 1962 from Mseleni, eventually became Field Director Assistant, went to Mozambique and eventually returned to America where he passed away. There in Mseleni, were two lady missionaries, Barbara Stevens who came from Canada in 1945 and Norah Farley who came in 1950. What is remarkable is that the Missions supported colonialism through repression even though they brought better life to the people by building schools, hospitals and clinics that helped the sick. It was Mr. Harold Stevens who had an emergency plane. In the history of Missions in the rule book there is a text that read as follows:

“Missionaries from overseas are guests of the Government and People and should always avoid, and in every circumstance, criticism of Government officials and their policies. Their mission is not political but spiritual, they have been commissioned as “ambassadors of Christ” to reconcile people with God. (SAGM 1953:15)

The above text emphasizes that the Missionaries obeyed the apartheid law that prevailed in South Africa because of preaching the gospel which brought them to South Africa. This comes from the AEF motto which is; God First, God first. Even today, our Church stands on that truth that says let's put God First in everything. The purpose is to preach the gospel. Then in 1929 the Natali/Zululand region was established where there was a conference of black leadership for the first time. Over time it evolved into Natal/Transvaal, eSwatini and Transkei followed.

5. FIRST LEADERSHIP SINCE 1962

The General Church was called the African Evangelical Church from the year 1962 which was all the local churches established by SAGM in South Africa. The constitution of the church was created with the help of God which was ammended again in 1994 and other years that follwed. What is notable in 1994 is that the term of office of committees in the branches was changed from two years and decided to be three. There were opinions that the leadership at the ciircuit level should be chosen based on talents and education, and the focus should not be on the pastors only according to the constitution, while the chairs were agreed to be ordained clergy only. To become a pastor, you must go to a Bible school for three years, although the constitution does not specify the level of study to be accepted into a Bible school. It is important to know God as Savior and calling. Another thing that was agreed upon is that the leader of the Church will be known as the President although other noted that as conflicting with the President of the country and wish that he would be called by another name. There is a trend to like the word; The Bishop. The structures of the church were also strengthened where young people were given the opportunity to lead in their section. The board was appointed for a five-year term of office. The Regions were revised to four: namely Eastern Cape, eSwatini, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Regions are led by chairs who are part of the Church Board. Most of the workers are in eSwatini, followed by KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and finally Gauteng. In 1962, six pastors were ordained in the AGCC, which was Llyod T. Magewu, Raymond Mbele, Samson Shabalala, Cornelius PM Gumedze, Samson Magagula and Zephaniah S. Madonda. From 1962, more than 170 pastors have been ordained according to the statistics of 2018. The harvest is great, the servants are few. There is a great need to train leaders.

The congregations had regions and worked under three regions, which were Natal-Transvaal, Transkei and eSwatini. The head of the church was appointed to be its President who is also controlled by the Annual General Church Conference, the Board, Regions, Circuits and Branches. In 1962 the leadership was as follows:

President: Rev. Edmund J. Mfeka – 1962 -1978

Vice President: Rev. Lloyd T. Magewu

Secretary: Mr. PSB Mkhize

Deputy Secretary: Mr. J Fatsha

Treasurer: Mr PM Magwaza

Publicity Secretary: Mr Salzwedel Ernest Motsoko Pheko;

Additional members: Evangelists Mr, S. Mawasa; E Ndodana and E Dlamini.

Over time, there was a conflict of opinion about the independence / autonomy of the AEC, some saying that it should not be accepted, but due to political changes, it was difficult to go back. At the same time Mr. Pheko left South Africa and went into exile and joined the PAC. President Mfeka led at a very difficult time because of the politics of the time. There was fear and doubt among the brethren in the church about the future of this church. God is good, the church moved forward as it is still standing. The relationship between the Mission and the leadership of the church is getting stronger day by day. The church stood to the fact that as leaders we should not be politicians but we need Christian leadership. At that time black people did not have the right to vote in South Africa. After 1994 that door opened, and voting was conducted openly for every person, not being judged by colour or race.

Then in the year 1978, Rev. E.J. Mfeka fell ill and could no longer continue, and the Vice-President, Reverend L.T. Magewu took hold of the leadership and in 1979 he was appointed as the President of the Church. He faithfully, led the church for twenty (20) years. During the leadership of Reverend Magewu, in 1989 the name of the Church was changed from the African Evangelical Church to the Africa Evangelical Church with the aim of spreading the gospel throughout Africa to people of different races. The word; African stands for black people only, that's why the idea of removing the "n" from the word African made a big difference, the Church was able to spread in Africa. This idea of changing the name caused a lot of commotion in the church, the members were divided and criticized the leadership for changing the name of the Church. The Church was even taken to court which was the first time in the history of the Church. There was chaos between 1998 and 2007. The biggest problem was caused by not following the Church's constitution, distinctives and bylaws.

The Eastern Cape leadership misled the membership in churches by telling them that the Eastern Cape Region will be independent and no longer be part of eSwatini, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. These individuals were members of the Board but they persuaded their Region to push their struggle. This dispute caused the Church to lose property and money for court costs. The court ruled in 2001 that the legal name is; Africa Evangelical Church.

After the death of President Reverend LT Magewu in 1999, his Deputy Dr. CPM Gumede held until he was appointed as the new President of the Church in the year 2000 at a meeting held in Matsapha, eSwatini until the year 2006. Dr. Gumede became the third President after Rev. Mfeka and Rev. Magewu. Gumedze led the church for only six (6) years. The former Deputy of Magewu was then supported by Rev. P. Mntambo.

After Dr Gumede, the Church elected a new President Reverend P. Mntambo who took over from Dr CPM Gumede in 2007. He is the one who led the Church until now, 2022. President Mntambo was the one who led the church when it celebrated its 50th anniversary (Golden Jubilee) at the University of KwaZulu. The board chaired by President Mntambo is as follows:

President: Revd P. Mntambo 2007 to date

Vice President: Revd SR Maseko

General Secretary: Revd VW Ndinisa

Deputy Secretary: Mr. BSV Zwane

Treasurer: Revd JA Shoba

Publicity Secretary: Prof SE Ngubane

Eastern Cape Chairman: Revd MP Mgewu

ESwatini Chairman: Revd T Mthethwa

Gauteng Chairperson: Revd GM Makwela

KwaZulu-Natal Chairman: Revd BT Chonco

Additional Board Members: Revd LLP Mafuna; Revd TG Ntongana.

President Mntambo was also the one who turned the sod at the Church Conference site in Mankayane when the General Church Center is being built. The President has established a new method of donating technology **PAYFAST** which is the first in the Church through his **UPGRADE** program. We have seen him encouraging the Church to donate to the Church wherever he visits to take out a bag of cement (R100). We saw sacks raising the walls of Centre and a lot of cement went into the ground to build the foundation. The construction work was stopped due to the COVID-19 that hit the whole world from the year 2020 until now it is still there. The situation is returning to normal which means that the cement bags are about to go in and continue the work.

Under the category of leadership in the church, there are conflicting opinions about the leadership of women. Regarding the issue of women working as leaders or pastors in the church, the Mission decided that they should be trained in the same way as men. It looked at the person directly, whether she was married or not, but if she was successful, she was taken to a Bible school. (*Fiedler 1994*). They were used where the missionaries could not reach even though they were not ordained to be pastors, but they only preached and were not given opportunities to lead the church. In the

1980s, Ruth Wyatt was one of the people who was chosen to be Field Director in eSwatini as there were no men. Likewise, the AEC agrees with this idea of training women in Bible schools. As we celebrate sixty years, we can say that our church has moved forward and accepted women as servants. This is in line with the idea of the Evangelical process that the worker who delivers the gospel reaches the whole world. We need to send them to other countries to preach as their called to heal people's souls. We need to continue to train women to study the word until they get a higher degree. Although culture and religion clarify this in the scriptures that makes us different from the world. Romans 12:2

"Do not imitate this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may have an understanding of the will of God, which is good, lovely, and perfect."

We need to be guided by the Holy Spirit in this matter and examine his will.

6. CHALLENGES WE ARE FACED AS A CHURCH

The independence of the Church and political changes in South Africa created challenges for our church, some of which are manageable. The absence of the desire to follow Jesus (discipleship) completely and to grow in knowing God has had a very bad effect on the Church. Following Christ means growing like him, being controlled by him in everything, knowing him as Lord and Savior and living a holy life. We need to pray and encourage the members to live a holy life. We hope that the future of the Church can bring hope if we change our way of doing things.

Evangelical religion and the gospel are still plagued by many challenges, some of which were caused by the clash of Western and Human cultures. Apartheid in South Africa left a trail of apartheid, land theft, failure to self-reliance as it happened in a democracy, poverty, unemployment for our children and poverty. Even if the whites leave us with the church buildings we cannot take care of them properly, some are in the same condition as before. We thank God for giving us the strength to build buildings for our churches, but even so, the strength we have is not equal in our branches. There are still branches that struggle more than others. There are still churches that worship in schools due to a lack of funds for construction. Donations are especially encouraging after a COVID-19 pandemic. We have gained a lot from the whites and we have lost a lot from our independence as a Church. The poverty and challenges we face are caused by the absence of donations. We had Mission's donation before which helped to spread the gospel to the people. This fund was very helpful as the donations did not meet the needs of the church. There are pastors who are very poor, which causes the church to not move forward. But even so, we thank God who walked with us to where we are. It is obvious that as a church we fail to change

the situation in line with the times we live in. Our lack of spiritual growth is disturbing and not training our young children, who will be the leaders of the future, will lead to the gospel not being able to reach other areas in South Africa. Currently, the church is located in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape but not in the Western Cape, Northwest, Mpumalanga, Free State, Northern Cape etc. Although we have brethren from other regions, there are places where we have not reached. In KwaZulu-Natal we have not yet reached Newcastle, Ladysmith, Nquthu, Vryheid, Mahlabathini, KwaNongoma, and other towns.

I spoke with some members in church and we are looking at where the Church is from, where it is now, where it is going, and how we will reach where we are aiming. I am very grateful to those who succeeded in expressing their feelings in order to bring a solution that can fulfill the vision of preaching the gospel in black communities. Those who voiced their opinion are:

Mama Phuthumile Bhengu, who is the wife of Rev. Sipho Bhengu

I had the opportunity to speak with mother Phuthumile Bhengu who was married to Pastor Sipho Bhengu looking back when they were doing God's work in Jabavu, Dobsonville and Mofolo. Work was also opened in Hammaskraal, Pretoria and Winterfelt. She also commented on the work of promoting the gospel through radio stations such as the Christian Radio Fellowship. Most of what she commented on is to encourage the church, especially she laments that the young female pastors must be part of the service and work together with the spouses in church to fulfill their needs in the service.

Mama Mavimbela, who is the wife of Rev. Knox Mavimbela.

I spoke to Mama Mavimbela and she recounted how they came to this church from the Assemblies church with her husband who eventually was the Chairman of Natal/Transvaal, who has since passed away. They met Mr. Josia Mbuyisa in 1982 who told them about the General Mission church. From there on, they never looked back. She listed many individuals in church who were active in preaching and developing the church such as Mr. Shoti Vilakazi; JB Magagula, and Mr Nhlabathi, Revd Raymond Mbhele; Revd Majombozi and Rev Nkuhlu who worked at the Mission House in General Mission Jabavu. They started worshipping at Pastor Mbhele's house. Rev. Knox Mavimbela-Mbuwako led Natal/Transvaal from 1996 to 2001. Rev. WTA Xaba has been a secretary since 1980.

Revd A.M. Zondo

I also had the good fortune to talk with Revd AM Zondo who told me about the two men Waka Ndlovu and Dlamini who were used by the Lord to win many souls that I mentioned above. He

explained to me about his work in the Natal/Transvaal District Committee with leaders like Revd J.M. Msweli in 1980 and Revd PS Magagula who became the first pastors in Jabavu. He mentioned Revd Samson Shabalala, Levis Vilakazi and others who worked for the Lord at that time. He told me about the division of the West Rand and the East Rand due to the differences in opinion between the Pastors Bhengu and Buhlalo, in the East Rand. In the West Rand there was Rev. Mlambo and Gumede, who pastored the Hilbrow church. In the leadership of Natal/Transvaal were Revd Samson Gumede, Revd WTA Xaba, Revd Mfeka, Rev Gambushe, Rev. Mfeka and Mr. Elphas Ngubane. There were four who were under the leadership of Revd JM Msweli.

Apart from the work at Dumisa and Ntabamhlophe, there is a man Makhakathane who preached the gospel in Mtubatuba and Rev. Mbuyazi who also moved to Madwaleni, then Mtuba. At Emadwaleni is where Rev. JM Msweli pastore and at Bhekumusa. Publicity secretaries at the Board level had two who were elected being Mr. Eric Ngubane and later Revd P Mntambo followed. In Transkei there were missions in Nkanga, Libode, Luthubeni, Mqandule, Lukhanyweni and Lusikisiki.

Revd WTA Xaba

Rev. Xaba is one of those who have worked for the SAGM church and the AEC at various levels and has been the Secretary General of the AEC for many years. He told me a lot about what I have already mentioned above. The issue of the KwaDumisa mission and the Bible school in Sweetwaters, Pietermaritzburg.

Revd Samson Gumede

Gumede has worked for our church for many years under the leadership of Natal/Transvaal and we have discussed a lot. His opinion is that there must be a solution to support the branches because they are burdened by the situation of donations that do not go in well. That hinders the work of the Lord. His idea is that there should be a fund for pastors to help those who are struggling. He also noted the issue of the absence of a main office or church headquarters. The President has no resources and ends up taking out of their own pockets which makes the task go wrong. He suggested that there be a reserve fund that will spread the gospel and help where needed. According to him, the church is in warm hands and has a bright future.

7. VIEWS OF OTHERS: REVD TE GOBOZA; REVD J.M. BODIBE; MR. J.M. TEMBE; MR. J.B. ZIKHALI; REVD JA SHOBA; MR. M.T.E. MTETWA.

(1)

“The celebration of 60 years in existence causes one to reflect on the successes and losses of the Church and how to go forward to the next ten years from now on more, especially in the Eastern Cape Region where there are still lacking behind in terms of upholding the Constitution and other Policy documents of the Church not only on the ordinary members of the Church but also to the leaders who are in the Pastoral Portfolios. The Church Board needs to consider the following:

- The Church workers and leaders must be instructed to uphold the Church Constitution not only for ordination purposes but be his daily working tool together with the Holy book the Bible.
- Graduate students who recently come out from Bible or Theological Institutions must not only be placed under experienced Church workers but must also be introduced to and trained on the history, policy, and doctrine of our Church.
- The Church must make sure that anyone before he or she is elected into any leadership position is properly trained and tested to be found suitable to holding any position.”

“The relationship of the Church and the Mission reflects the times and society upon which the relationship was formed. This may be seen in the way the AEF or Mission founded churches were or are still organized they are racially organized. At one meeting with a missionary, we were tasked to find a site to relocate the JBI after it was moved to make way for the freeway. The Missionary representing the Mission was a younger missionary who had come to teach. He reported that he was told by his seniors that the mission was set to serve the Zulu-speaking persons. Thus we could not pursue the idea. The relationship between the Church and Mission was not of equals. There was always a looking up to the mission as the adult of the relationship, and we (the Church) were the child. For instance, the dates of the AGCC were the 24th of December to 30th to accommodate the missionaries who were to be with their families during Christmas. This unequal relationship continued even after 1962. A memorandum of understanding was made on how the Church and mission were to corporate into projects.

We are a developing church finding our way in how to negotiate the maze of modern society. We still have some roots in the old rural missionary instilled way in our traditions. (We have not yet

accepted that women may lead and contribute in the matters of the Church. Though some of our congregations are founded and led by women.)

Our vision is to see us be and do what our documents say we are and want to do. (To do this we need to make our vision and mission statements shorter and simpler. Capturing the essence and intentions of the current statements.)

Our vision will only be realized if the President and all regional chairs form a forum that will craft and champion the vision forward.

(2)

At Mseleni, there were doctors from the hospital who would also come back and preach the gospel. We can count Stevens, followed by Du Plessis and others. They not only brought the gospel but they also brought health, skills and schools that were not in the community. They also established an orphanage and hostels for school children where students lived. The missionaries came with all the equipment such as cars and airplanes. Another important thing was that needy people were given clothes from abroad. After that they established branches and schools in Mseleni, Ndlondlweni and eMalangeni. The pastor studied in the churches and worshiped there every week. Since the area was sparse and there were no level roads, airplanes and land rovers were used. The missionaries also took care of the poor. They brought them food such as meat and milk which was stored in the chiefs' houses and it was easy to reach the community. Evangelists were trained at UBI. The songs that were sung were found in hymns and the Icilongo LeVangeli. Choruses could not be sung and speaking in tongues could not be done at all. They were elderly or retired people. Evangelists such as: Nomandla, Nxumalo, Zikhali, Mageba, Sawuli Ntuli, Timothy Tembe, Makhanya, Mkhize, Buthelezi and others can be counted. Evangelists were given promotions and pastors were bought cars. Every December there were camps for young people held in Nkovukeni and Lake Sibhayi. The youth were taught the Bible and manual work and even sports. There were tents where the youth slept. This camp lasted at least one week. *"Here on the beach, we are staying in a camp with others, who love the Lord, we are always in his mercy."* *"Laph' ogwini sihlal'ekhampini kanye nabanye abathanda iNkosi, Sihlala njalo emseni wayo."*

Regarding the future, I see the Church spread throughout Africa and overseas. I see more and more young people because the pastors are no longer old men only, but the pastors are young now and not retired.

The church should learn to use the members in church according to their abilities and not just the pastors. Pastors who focus on the gospel and leadership are given to members in church with skills. There is a strong feeling that says women should be allowed to preach anywhere, not just preach in their services.

(3)

“The Region has had its ups and downs in the past 60 years just like the other Regions but overall, we Praise God and boldly say EBENEZER. The past three years have been the most challenging ones where the Region saw itself with two administrative structures, a matter that saw itself two structures taking each other to the Courts of the Land for adjudication. The Regional Board is not in the Denominational Constitution but was created by the Articles of Association. when Denomination was registered under Revd CPM Gumede, Presidency in South Africa. No additional structure was added as it happened in ESwatini where a new Regional Board of Directors was born which created the confusion that was the EXCO and the Regional Board taking each other to Court. The Region has produced a President, Revd CPM Gumede; Vice Presidents: Revd CPM Gumede, Revd TM Dlamini, Revd. AB Nxumalo and Revd SR Maseko. A Treasurer - Mr. MTE Mthethwa and four Deputy General Secretaries: Revd TM Dlamini, Revd HM Stewart, Mr. MTE Mthethwa, and Mr.BSV Zwane.

We as the Region of eSwatini, see ourselves hosting the AGCC in a completed Denominational Conference Centre Structure within the next few years at Mankayane. We see this happening due to improved unity after the division that has bedevilled the Region. It is also hoped that the other Regions will join hands and concentrate on this Denominational Conference Centre after which such Centres will be built in the three other Regions respectively depending on the availability of sites and money.

There are challenges facing the Church and amongst others are:

1. Pastor’s stipends are a challenge across the Denomination that needs to be addressed. It is, however, improving because during President Magewu’s time on the Board I learned with shock that in the Eastern Cape at the time, there were local Pastors who got R50.00 quarterly. I do not know what the position is now but I want to believe that position is history.
2. The Constitution needs to be explained to some Pastors when it comes to Retirement. Some think they were called by God and that the Clause on Retirement should not be there as No one has the right to RETIRE them. They confuse their Administrative Duties as Pastors and their Calling.

(4)

“In my view, the church is detached from the community. It does not have joint projects with the community that responds to daily socio-economic needs. There is no programme that involves the community except prayer sessions when there is bereavement. Women must be elevated to senior positions and the lack of their involvement deprive the Church of the wisdom to lead in the Church. The structure led by women is more productive than that of men’s fellowship. This is evident from the level of their church offerings during conferences. They bring more revenue to the Church. There is no cohesion between the Denominational and local levels Pastors are not allowed to take decisions. Pastors do not vote at the denominational level. There is no accountability by structures and there is no link between Denominational and Local and it affects offerings for Church. Vision: The Church needs to re-align itself with the communities where it operates. This should see the Church becoming relevant not only spiritually but socio-economically. There must be a clear path for electing administrative leadership. The Church must engage with local communities. Each branch lacks a process. AEC is not affiliated with any National organization such as the Council of Churches and this accounts for the reason why it is not recognized by many people in South Africa. AGCC is not an actual conference all attendees must be part of the delegates and resolutions that are taken at the Conference must be mandated by their local branches. At the moment our AGCC is nothing but a revival where the overwhelming majority attend, and the few members engage in the business of the Church. So for me, we must relook at this situation by employing the services of a Developmental Practitioner but first the Church at all levels needs to do a swot analysis. Going forward I see the Church going down and localized unless it looks into its role. The Church may acquire Union Bible Institute and conduct intellectual seminars to attract thought leaders and engage in research to evaluate the progress of the Church.

(5)

“AEC was born from a natural process that all organisations face due to growth and the need to be independent. The spirit of the time as well as the environmental influence (Struggle against apartheid) opened the eyes of the members (black members) to the fact that there were some issues of superiority and inferiority within SAGM, as a Church, (a typical example of the Church in Act. 6). This friction led to the separation of the SAGM (the missionary wing) and the Church wing. The mission became known as the AEF and the Church assumed the name AEC in 1962.

The above came with many blessings, though, as growth became noticeable from the indigenous leader’s efforts; God blessed the Church with amazing and humble leaders (oMengameli) that

kept us united and focused. As a result, the Church grew and many pastors and leaders led the growth of our churches. We also experienced the birth of the fourth Region i.e. the Gauteng Region. The Church also purchased its first property, that is as a denomination in Pietermaritzburg. The challenge, though, is the pace of growth is challenging the methods we use as a denomination e.g. our conferences, which can no longer be efficiently accommodated, by the venues we use. The attempt to build a Conference centre is proving to be insurmountable. The other challenge that came with growing, is the cross-pollination of AEC doctrine and the watering down of Evangelical Doctrine. We are experiencing divisions, within the Church which we have to guard and watch jealousy.

Ten years from now, I am rather pessimistic, unless we plan seriously; maybe look into radically changing our denominational outlook i.e. further subdividing the centrality-based administration of the denomination, and granting Regions absolute autonomy.

This would lead to solving the problem of venues; leadership proximity to their constituency and putting the Church (AEC) on a growing trajectory path again.

8. CONCLUSION

This task attempted to narrate the origin of the church and its vision under the slogan; "God First". It narrated the reasons for the separation of the white SIM and the AEC. It was explained by the leadership for the first time that we are independent from 1962 until now. The needs of training young people and the growth of the church in terms of spirituality and evangelism. The beginning of new activities where the church is not present and the salvation of new people in church. The opinions of the members in church revealed the problems we have and brought their answers. The church stands by the word which is the goal of the founders of the church in South Africa. The question that exists is whether our relationship with SIM can be revised or transformed into a parent and child, but it should be balanced as we have the same vision and motto. The second question; Can we trust them? The political climate is no longer the same as before when black people had no rights to say anything freely. There is still a lot of work on our shoulders in terms of donations, church management, training young people, cooperation, helping each other in leading the Church and preaching the gospel. Another question is whether we still need white people or we don't need them at all. We will continue to be independent and use new methods and strategies that will take us forward. The question I throw to the members in the church of this time is that they should think about it until they identify the way that will move us forward.

With faith we will succeed as AEC and there is no problem that God cannot fix. Let's move forward and forget our past and put God first. Here we are, we can learn a lot about what has happened and try to reorganize ourselves so that our Church can bear fruit that will please God. In my opinion, we are the best where we are; then where we come from; we now have more members in the church in branches than before, our Regions work independently, and we have connections with countries outside of South Africa. We need to strengthen relations with Botswana and other African countries. I see our Church growing and spreading throughout the world. I am grateful for the opportunity that has been given to me to cut the twist and tell the brief history of the AEC Church in South Africa as we celebrate our 60th Anniversary.

Humbly presented by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ngubane', written in a cursive style.

Prof S Ngubane