

27. Church Growth

27.1 REPORT 1: DEPUTIES TURNAROUND STRATEGY (Artt 72, 79)

- A. Rev P Venter tables the Report.
- B. The Report will be concluded during the Synod session.

C. REPORT

1. Mandate

- 1.4 Point of Description: Regional Synod Free State and KwaZulu-Natal – Turnaround Strategy (Acta 2012:509, 25.4).
 - 1.4.1 A turnaround strategy is to be formulated, planned and followed in the GKSA to turn around the decline in membership in the GKSA and other churches in Southern Africa that the church of our Lord and His kingdom may grow in Southern Africa.
 - 1.4.2 In response to Christ's commission to proclaim the Gospel, which He calls His church to do and be, every congregation and major assembly of the GKSA are obliged to individually and collectively seek to be churches that glorify God by guiding people to mature faith that all believers may undertake the responsibility to bring people and communities under the authority of Christ.
 - 1.4.3 Every congregation and church assembly of the Lord are, in dependence on God, to be beseeched that we as believers, guided by His Spirit, must seek to please our Redeemer in all we do, live godly lives and be filled with a prayerful and sacrificing compassion for those who are lost in this world.
 - 1.4.4 Every local church is to be called on to grow in numbers; to equip and tend to their members; and become the mother church of as many religious groups and congregations as possible; as well as to infuse through initiatives and collaboration structures of society that are outside the local church with the Gospel.
 - 1.4.5 The GKSA is to task itself with multiplying the number of well-trained (ordained, full-time, part-time and voluntary) individuals that can proclaim the Gospel in a loving, devoted manner in every possible area of life.
 - 1.4.6 The functioning of the GKSA (including our church ethos, customs, church order, use of resources, church deputies, supporting staff, etc.) is to be continually reformed to fulfil the Lord's commission to His church.
 - 1.4.7 Study deputies are to be appointed to do research on:
 - 1.4.7.1 growing congregations and shrinking congregations as well as determine the commonalities between such congregations;
 - 1.4.7.2 turnaround strategies implemented in other churches around the world and their results;
 - 1.4.7.3 how members experience being church and their calling therein;
 - 1.4.7.4 the material available for the training of members as well as the development of new material; and
 - 1.4.7.5 the purity and trueness of doctrine, proclaimed on all levels, as well as how it can be further developed.

Decision: Point 1 noted.

2. Matters that the Synod take note of

2.1 *Reference to Synod reports of 1997-2000 regarding preservation and growth*

It is of the utmost importance for the Synod to realise that the matter, in all its scope, leading to the turnaround strategy is not new. The Deputies remind the Synod below of important decisions already taken on the matter at Synod 1994, 1997 and 2000. This information will aid the Synod in its decision to approve proceeding with the turnaround strategy.

2.1.1 Synod 1994

A Point of Description by Particular Synod Western Transvaal, titled *Falling membership trends within the GKSA*, was already tabled at Synod 1994.

The Point of Description states as follows:

- (1) The Synod expresses its concern over the decline in membership in the GKSA.
- (2) The reasons and solutions must be investigated.
- (3) Statistics for 1987-1992 indicate 0,8% growth in confirmed members, but a sharp decline in baptised members.
- (4) Reasons for the declining membership is cited as: a decrease in the birth rate of children, shortcomings in churches' evangelisation work, deficiencies in ministry, the focus on the preservation of the church and an underemphasis on growth.
- (5) An important principle is raised: God tasks His church with building up and building on.

The following statement regarding the above principles cannot be emphasised enough: *A church showing a decline in membership must thoroughly investigate how (or not) the commission of God may be fulfilled.*

Synod 1994 takes the following decision, in reference to the Point of Description:

Appoint Deputies regarding the declining membership to:

- (1) undertake a comprehensive study on the current decline in membership of the GKSA, in terms of possible causes and how the matter may be addressed in a Scripturally-sound manner;
- (2) involve and consult local churches; and
- (3) advise the next Synod on possible long-term actions by local churches and the church collectively.

2.1.2 Synod 1997

2.1.2.1 An extensive report, titled *Report of Deputies: Declining Membership*, is tabled at Synod 1997

- (1) Statistics are startling: 3.6 congregations per year close their doors.
- (2) An average decline of 1.4% in baptised members between 1977-1993 (accelerating the last two of those years with 2.5 % per year).
- (3) Ratio of members to minister:
1950: 153 congregations (41 961) with 68 ministers: 617-1
1970: 246 congregations (63 940) with 187 ministers: 341-1
1990: 300 congregations (78 946) with 286 ministers: 261-1
A problem is highlighted: The number of members per minister is too low.
Plus a question: How effective are ministries?
- (4) Termination of membership and departure without attestation have sharply increased.
- (5) Churches do virtually no evangelisation.

2.1.2.2 The Report lists a number of items that need urgent attention

- (1) Setting achievable goals by congregations that can be effectively developed into actions.
- (2) Urgent planning for evangelisation that will make the church grow.

- (3) Urgent attention to the dissatisfaction of the youth with the church.
- (4) Promoting a love for the Reformed heritage.
- (5) Cultivating a unique Reformed concept of being church.
- (6) Relevant catechism.
- (7) Restructuring of minister-led churches into congregations in which members take responsibility and serve.
- (8) Training of theology students that take into account the demands of the time.
- (9) Adaption of home visitation (shepherd-flock and body model).
- (10) Role of singing and music in services.
- (11) Greater attention to children and the youth in services.
- (12) Deeper meaning to and ministry of fellowship between members.
- (13) Greater focus on group activities among members.
- (14) Greater emphasis on role of woman in all activities.

2.1.2.3 Three core duties in Scripture are pointed out

- (1) The fulfilment of the commission to grow must be heightened through the proper functioning of the offices and the office of the believer.
- (2) Covenant children must be born.
- (3) Evangelisation, as core characteristic of the church and the calling of every believer, must be done.

The Report states it rather sharply: *Ways must be found to shake every believer out of a spirit of complacency.*

The Synod makes the following decision over the preservation of the church:

- (1) The quality of sermons, in terms of content and presentation, need to be improved.
- (2) Establishing a unique Reformed identity must receive serious attention.
- (3) Pastoral ministry needs to be improved and home visitation must be used effectively.
- (4) The office of deacon, as ministry of fellowship, must be set to rights – congregation bonds must be strengthened.
- (5) Catechism must improve to inspire baptised members.
- (6) Growth in faith must be emphasised and sought.
- (7) Youth care and after-school youth must receive urgent attention.
- (8) Church planning and administration need to be effective.
- (9) Members' gifts must be identified and employed.
- (10) Church singing must be urgently addressed.
- (11) Certificates of membership must be properly processed – especially members leaving without such certificates.
- (12) Church Order, art 44: Visitation must be adapted in light of the above.

2.1.2.4 The Synod decided the following regarding growth (expansion)

- (1) Parents must be encouraged to have children and offered guidance.
- (2) Evangelisation: Concern over lapsed members and non-believers must be awakened in members in all manner of ways and they must be called on and equipped to take decisive action.

2.1.2.5 The Synod decided the following about equipping members

- (1) The TSP is to address evangelisation in continuing training.
- (2) The Curators of the TSP should broaden the practical instruction of students and a practical year needs to be considered.
- (3) The Deputies Evangelisation Media must continue their work on training material.
- (4) Churches should offer regular training on evangelisation.
- (5) The Synod should appoint Deputies to monitoring growth in the church and offer advice.

2.1.2.6 The Synod also took the following important decision on prayer

- (1) Churches should continually pray for the preservation and growth of the church.

2.1.2.7 Other decisions of Synod 1997

- (1) Deputies for the preservation and growth of the church were appointed to revise a document on the 1997 decision and forward it to the churches.
- (2) They are to advise the next Synods on strategies to practically execute findings from the Report detailing the task of churches to address declining membership.

2.1.3 Synod 2000

The Deputies report and take a deeper look into the matter of building and expanding the church. An insightful report on the preservation and growth of the church is tabled and focuses on the following aspects:

2.1.3.1 General departure points

- (1) The motivation for preservation and growth must be clarified: It should not be about the fear of the church disappearing, but about obedience to God and His Word.
- (2) All strategies must be based on the true Biblical concept of being church and for that reason the Deputies offer Biblical perspectives rather than strategies.
- (3) Each local church is to then develop its own strategies, in light of these Biblical perspectives, applicable to its own circumstances.

2.1.3.2 Biblical perspectives for a Reformed church model

- (1) God Triune establishes the church and sets the church's nature and objective to His glory.
- (2) God Triune ensures the welfare, continuance and fullness of His church.
- (3) The church is God's mission in the world.
- (4) God uses His children as co-workers for the welfare, continuance and building of His church.
- (5) The church is focused on the Kingdom.

2.1.3.3 The Deputies point out the following views that deviate from Biblical and Reformed church practice

- (1) The church as purely sociological entity
- (2) Covenant automatism
- (3) Institutionalism
- (4) Extreme conservatism
- (5) Neo-pharisaic
- (6) Traditionalism
- (7) Neglect of the covenant
- (8) Lack of guidance to covenant youth
- (9) Atomism
- (10) Individualism
- (11) Methodism
- (12) Prayerlessness
- (13) Duplication
- (14) Planlessness
- (15) Change fervency
- (16) Churchianity
- (17) Forsaking mission calling
- (18) Office dominance
- (19) "Binding of conscience"
- (20) Synodcracy
- (21) Shepherdlessness
- (22) Worldliness
- (23) Racism
- (24) Bibliolatry

2.1.3.4 Important and guiding decisions of the Synod

- (1) Humiliation: All Reformed churches are to humble themselves before the Lord.

- (2) Self-reflection: All members must do self-reflection over the findings and decisions of the Synod.
- (3) Repentance and reformation: Members must faithfully fulfil their calling as missional church.
- (4) Churches must continually pray.
- (5) The TSP must develop ways of equipping churches for building up and on.
- (6) Membership of new converts must receive attention.
- (7) Dedicated and effective administration must take place.

2.1.3.5 Deputies' conclusion

Unfortunately, the Synod decided to refer the matter to the Administrative Bureau to attend to certain administrative aspects of the Report, like its revision and circulation to Church Councils as well as a number of other instructions. In this way this extremely important matter for our churches fell by the wayside. Deputies were not appointed to conduct further study and to offer guidance to Church Councils and this matter was never of much importance for most Church Councils and members, thus no real action was taken in the churches to fulfil this task.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.1.3.5 noted.

3. Matters that the Synod decide on

In light of and in reference to previous decisions (as above), the Synod calls on churches to stand in awe of the grace of sharing in Christ and the fulfilment of God's eternal plan on earth through the advancement of the Gospel.

3.1 *Call to repentance*

The essence of a turnaround strategy is the renewal of hearts. Turnaround is a matter of repentance, of grateful devotion, of a daily recommitment to God and to have no shame in the Gospel of God (Rom 1:16 and Rev 2:1-7). The GKSA is faithful to the Lord in many things, but there are also aspects on which members (and the GKSA as a whole) must reflect. One of these is the lack of a missionary calling and this Report focuses on this particular aspect. The emphasis on the building up and growth of the church cannot be viewed and addressed in isolation of the calling to foster the church (preservation of the church).

It is not the Report's intent for the GKSA to take up an apostolate theology, as though the church's only function is missional, but addresses the GKSA's serious neglect of this duty. The Report also shows that building the church on Biblical principles that it may be a sound church will necessarily also lead to the growth of the church.

3.2 *The reasons for repentance*

- 3.2.1 Erroneous views have arisen in the church that create obstacles for a sound church, despite the clear and Scripturally true definition in the Confessions of faith and Church Order. Questionnaires and discussions at turnaround strategy conferences as well as findings of previous Synod Reports brought forth the following erroneous views that create obstacles for a sound church and a lack of effort to reach out. (The items briefly mentioned below are to be thoroughly extrapolated by the CMTG. It will also bring the realisation that a turnaround, as continual Reformation, entails much more than just misleading "window-dressing").

3.2.2 Knowledge of God

It would seem that some Reformed members have a rather superficial knowledge of God in His sovereignty, majesty, holiness, might and love.

This precludes a child-like fear of the Lord that is indeed a core aspect of Reformed godliness (spirituality) and a missional impetus (cf Acts 9:31: “It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord”). It is, therefore, foremost repentance to God, as He reveals Himself that enables true godliness and faith that attests of surrender and devotion to the Lord and a life of *childlike fear of the Lord* (Ps 130:2).

3.2.3 View of the church

It seems that some church views are not Christocentric and theocentric, considering the congregation almost as a social club. There is too much talk of OUR church and too little about the Lord’s church, of which Christ is the Head that rules through His Word and Spirit. This leads to a quite inward-directed church view and consequently a consumer mentality among some members. Some members are quick to complain about how little the church does for them, but rarely show how the church, focused on God, must be driven to address the need of brothers and sisters in the church as well as have true compassion for the unbelieving world (e.g. Matt 9:36 –“When He (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” and 1 Pet 2:9 “...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may DECLARE the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”). The attitude of our Lord, as is clear from Matthew 20:28 viz. that He did not come to be served, but to serve doesn’t always find expression in the churches (Phil 2:5-11 and Mark 10:45).

3.2.4 Covenant automatism

This erroneous philosophy, also highlighted in previous Synod Reports, espouse that all baptised members are to be considered born-again believers. The response to queries seem to reflect that the necessity of rebirth is rarely raised in sermons or otherwise addressed and members are virtually never called to repentance (or to root repentance) in Reformed churches. The truth that services always consist of a mixed audience, comprising a mix of the spiritually mature, immature and unconverted does not reflect in the ministry style. This results in a formalistic confession of faith, a lack of loving discipline and the absence of regular calls to repentance that is also “proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them as long as they do not repent. According to this testimony of the gospel, God will judge both in this life and in the life to come” (HC, answer 84).

3.2.5 Lack of missional action

Various previous Synod Reports have all indicated the one-sided focus on the preservation of the church and very little on growth, while the Bible and the Reformed Confessions of faith consider the preservation and growth as integrated, whereby the one will never succeed without the other.

3.2.6 Office-led churches

The New Testament and the Confessions of faith make it clear that every believer receives gifts, to be used toward building the congregation (HC, answ 54; Belgic Confession, art 28). It is remarkable how often there is reference to *all* and *everyone* in passages referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:11 and 28:31; Eph 4:7 and 1 Pet 4:10). When every believer uses his/her gifts, the congregation grows both qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

Yet it would seem that neither ministers nor Church Council members or members realise that every believer's gifts must be recognised and applied toward the growth and outreach of the congregation and that it forms part of "bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve to build up others through the GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN THEM as members of the same body (Belgic Confession, art 28). Leaders who fail to identify the gifts of those under their care and to motivate and guide them to service, with their own gifts, are not truly fulfilling their calling.

3.2.7 Post-modernist relativism

The post-modern relativism of society that denies established truths and no longer accepts confirmed Biblically substantiated morals has also crept into churches and resulted in unbelievers and the churchless sometimes not finding anything different about the church or see it as an alternative community. It would seem that blatant sin like sexual immorality, homosexuality, materialism, racism, abuse of power, social injustice and idolatry (like ancestor worship, sorcery and the occult) is often not addressed openly, direct and with confidence or subject to loving corrective church discipline of those who openly persevere in such sin, listed in the formulary for the Lord's Supper. When the church differs very little from the world, it loses its missionary appeal.

3.3 *Where to must we repent? (missionary duty)*

Please read Appendix 1 for the complete breakdown of the exegetic lines, drawn by the Deputies and according to which the following conclusions have been reached.

3.3.1 The concept Missio Dei

- (1) The expression *Missio Dei* is not only an academic concept. God is a God that guides and dynamically controls the world (cf. the article of prof G Breed, titled "n Kritiese blik op Missio Dei in die lig van Efesiërs" – also on the CD).
- (2) God requires His church (***kuriake* – those who belong to the Lord**) to contribute to this mission (*Missio Dei*). How? By *giving and protecting and reaching out to unbelievers and the churchless*.
- (3) Jesus Christ Himself brings the intent of His sacrifice on the Cross into missional and worldly perspective.
- (4) A missional church purposefully **goes out to witness** to the ends of the earth and long for all people from all nations to bend their knee before Jesus Christ.
- (5) Living missional is a deliberate choice to live a life directed by God's Word.

3.3.2 Conclusions based on Old Testamentary exegetic lines

- (1) God's mission in the Old Testament is centripetal in nature (*centrum+petere* = seeking the middle point or centre). Israel and the example they had to set to the nations had to magnetically draw attention to God. The honour and glory of God (doxology) are thus inherent to this centripetal missional existence.
- (2) Blessing by God, with all His blessings, means that believers must also be a blessing to others.
- (3) In the Old Testament Israel was tasked to righteously and fully bring glory to God's Name that God's kingship may shine over all nations. They were, therefore, to live among the people and draw these nations to God through the way they lived.
- (4) The Old Testament also relates Israel's failure to be a light among nations and thus creating the expectation of the suffering Servant that was to come.
- (5) The missional expectation in the Old Testament also denotes the eschatological tension of the "already" and the "not yet". The day that all nations come to serve God remains the day looked toward with yearning.

This is why the coming of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, is a necessary part of God's mission.

3.3.3 Conclusions based on New Testamentary exegetic lines

- (1) God's mission in the New Testament is centrifugal in nature (*centrum+fungere* = centrum or middle-point flowing). God's new people/His church are sent out to all the nations. The centripetal movement of the Old Testament changed to a centrifugal one.
- (2) In the New Testament God's children are living stones of His spiritual home. They are temples of the Holy Spirit and that is why the church is the herald of the Good News of the triumph in and through Jesus Christ.
- (3) Living missional demands obedience to the command to *go out* or put differently, to not go out is disobedience.
- (4) The church must be a powerful symbol of how God manifests His kingdom in people's lives. The doxological and glorifying way of life must serve as testimony to the world and draw them in to also share in this joy (cf. Acts 2:47; 1 Cor 14:24-25). The church must be characteristic, instrumental and also the first fruits of the kingdom of God to give the world a kind of taste of the kingdom (Newbegin, 1994:33).
- (5) The work of the Holy Spirit for a missional church is essential, which necessitates the realisation that the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Eph 4:30) and "put out" (1 Thess 5:19) through sin, believers *sometimes lose for a time the knowledge of grace until God, when they once again return to the right path in sincere repentance, again shine the light of his Fatherly face on them* (CoD, 5:5).
- (6) The role of prayer in the spreading of God's Word is central to the existence of the church in the New Testament.
- (7) The missional church must also have the eschatological expectation of all people bowing down to God that the second coming may be fulfilled.

3.4 *A turnaround strategy? Necessary?*

3.4.1 The concept turn around

The essence of a turnaround strategy is the renewal of hearts. It is a matter of repentance, of grateful devotion and of the daily recommitment to God. This important aspect is revealed a number of times in the Bible, but in a unique way in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 – especially in Revelation 2:4-5 and Revelation 3:1-6. These passages thus form the central point of departure, just like many others could.

3.4.2 The church in Ephesus: When good blocks the path of the best!

Outwardly all was well in the church in Ephesus, a typical example of a hive of activity. The shell looked well enough, but the pearl had fallen out – viz. love. The congregation was charged with leaving her first love or that she no longer loved the King of the church, Christ, quite as much as in the beginning. This church rightly guarded against false doctrine, unmasking false prophets and made short shrift of liars. Truth and love was split in Ephesus. In doing so this church undermined its own existence, with the best of intentions of course. Love without truth is nothing else than sentimentality and truth without love is nothing less than brutality.

This church had to reflect on its deterioration, repent and once again return to its initial work. The turnaround of this church brought forth three steps, viz.: **reflect, repent and do (head, hear and hands)**.

3.4.3 Turnaround strategy? The three steps

The turnaround strategy of Ephesus could be called the 3-step strategy, viz. **reflection, repentance** and **practice**. Revelation 2:5 refers to the concept of *repentance* twice. **Metanoia** is a turn around, a new way of thinking and thus a way to change the understanding of things. Metanoia could in this sense also be a **starting over** and **anew**. The renewal of the mind is followed with a new way of feeling and doing and thinking!! Metanoia is nothing else than a way of following Jesus Christ. It's rather interesting that the change of heart and the *turnaround* of the life path are so strongly emphasised in this concept. The Dutch theologian, Bavinck (1984:45-46) writes the following:

“Er was iets gestrengs, bijna iets hards in hun oog gekomen. Ze zagen aldoor de verzoeking, de dwaalleer op zich aansluipen, en ze stonden dag en nacht in het geweer. Maar ze kenden niet meer de momenten van zalige verrukking om de oneindige heerlijkheid van de genade God's in Jezus Christus. Ze konden niet meer uitbarsten in blijde aanbidding van Hem...dat alles was in hun leven schaars geworden, veels te schaars.”

The verb form of the exhortation to repentance, viz. the *aoristus*, highlights the need for a **turnaround** or **turning point**. Repentance is, therefore, not only thinking and feeling differently about the church, but a **turnaround** that is enacted in the doing of the first works of love. Reeder (2004:40) summarises the commission in three concepts, viz. compensation, restoration and reconciliation. It comes down thereto that in the act of repentance that which is owed is given back, that things are restored to what it should be and that the bonds affected by sin are renewed.

3.4.4 Hermeneutic lines

The turnaround strategy of “once again returning to the first things” entails the following:

- (1) It is about **the Biblical understanding** of the Godly Trinity (*in Being and in working*); the right understanding of the *general faith*, without which no one can be saved (*Athanasius*).
- (2) It is about **the right handling** of the Godly revelation (Bible), of which the *Missio Dei* must be the sharp point of the theology.
- (3) It is about revelation history, from which the church of Jesus Christ must teach something about God and **the church's Godly calling**. It is not merely about systematic theological practices.
- (4) It is about being church that is **in service of God's Missio Dei** and not absorbed in itself, like Israel or the Judaists, or a church that lapses to ensure cultural survival; a church focused on those who have not yet heard and willing to be sent to the ends of the earth.

3.4.5 Conclusions

- (1) “Turning around” is a matter of **commitment**. It is first of all a recommitment to God and also a commitment to the members of God's body, His church.
- (2) A turnaround strategy primarily starts with **reflection**. This reflection then necessarily centres on being church and on thankful obedience to God's commands.
- (3) A turnaround strategy within the GKSA will necessarily have to walk the path of **repentance** amid widespread polarisation: in the leaders in the church, but also in the lives of all members. The test would be whether love for God and love for neighbour are still as important.
- (4) The turnaround strategy is not in the main about seeking to increase membership, but about obedience to God.

- (5) Turnaround is not the same as the so-called **turn inside out**. Turning around is not a destructive action. How can love ever be destructive?
- (6) **Turnaround strategy: Practise what you confess or put differently, become more of what you already are.** A turnaround strategy necessitated and driven by love must necessarily serve as magnet and drawing card.
- (7) Turning around is to return to the basics, the first things. The first things need to be put first and that is the essence of turning around.

Decision: Points 3.1 to 3.4.5 approved (amendments already added – Deputies Acta).

3.4.6 Recommendations for the Synod's approval

Churches are called upon to:

- 3.4.6.1 In light of God's grace, a special feast should be organised within the GKSA where all the churches praise God and, through humility, commit themselves anew to God as living and holy offers (Rom 12:1). Serious prayer is to be done on this day for guidance by the Holy Spirit in the full truth to glorify God in the eyes of non-Christians and Christians again, through the church's' ministry of the Gospel in South African cities, towns and townships. All other churches in the country should be called up to take part. A Bible study, divided into five days (one day over five weeks), can be made available, in conjunction with a sermon series, which both broadly follow the sub-divisions of the Heidelberg Catechism and in which Chapter 5 (paragraphs 5-7) of the Canons of Dort can also be incorporated.

Decision: Approved.

- 3.4.6.2 This feast should be followed by regional gatherings of ministers to collectively consider how congregations may be guided through the turnaround strategy. Classes are to be encouraged to lead this endeavour. The Deputies also refer to the book of Abraham Kuyper (1883), *Tractaat van de Reformatie der Kerken*, who writes: *“Ook in ons eigen land getuigd de historie van meer dan een clascale vergadering, waarop de gesamentlijke Dienaren de Woords hun eigen schuld en ontrouw voor God beleden, en saam voor zijn aangezicht beloften van verwakkering in eigen dienst en leven gedaan hebben...Zelfs ontbreken ook onder de latere kerken de heerlijke voorbeelden niet, van een kerk die, op de boetprediking van haar herderen, in de schuld voor God gevallen, openlijk in het bedenhuijs, onder vasten en gebeden, opnieuw haar verbond van trouw met den Heere bezegeld heeft.”*

Decision: Approved.

- 3.4.6.3 This deliberation by ministers should then be followed by regional gatherings of churches that they may consider how the turnaround strategy could be implemented in that particular region.

Decision: Approved.

- 3.4.6.4 The to be appointed Deputies could, together with corresponding Church Councils of Classes, organise and determine the content for these gatherings.

Decision: Approved.

- 3.4.6.5 Classes and Church Councils should be recommended to include praying for and deliberating on the missional ministry on every meeting's agenda.

Decision: Approved (amendment already added – Deputies Acta).

- 3.4.6.6 The to be appointed Deputies, in cooperation with the Classes, should develop a turnaround plan to aid congregations struggling financially, that churches of the relevant Classis may support that particular church and ensure that such monies go towards growth.

Decision: Approved (amendment already added – Deputies Acta).

4. Report on study instructions

4.1 *Business for the Synod's information*

The following is a concise rendition of the research conducted for each task. The Deputies refer the Synod to the CD the Deputies compiled of the relevant research material and other information that Church Councils and members may consult for further study and use in local turnaround strategies. This CD is available to all congregations.

4.1.1 Data on growing and shrinking congregations as well as the commonalities between such congregations.

A range of empirical research is being done worldwide on the reasons behind the shrinking of some churches and the growth in others (e.g. the work of CA Schwarz in Europe and at the Barna Institute in America). Books on the subject regularly appear from different churches and religious backgrounds. A local example is that of G van Wyk, published in 2014 and titled *Missio Dei as paradigma vir die verhouding tussen geloofsgemeenskappe*. Recent empirical research has also been conducted in South Africa among the Afrikaans-speaking Reformed churches and a number of articles have been written on this by dr Phia van Helden. This research is also based on surveys conducted among the GKSA.

It is important to realise that in studying these factors God is dynamically at work in His church and that it is Him who has the shrinking and guidance of churches in hand. Taking into account this “measureless” Godly element, there are still measurable factors in reference to Scripture that promote church growth. Studies show that where a number of these factors are in play in a church, measurable growth is observed.

It would, therefore, be of great value to shrinking churches to seriously consider such growth factors and apply them prayerfully, in accordance with Scripture, within the circumstances relevant to that congregation. There is no standard “church-growth recipe”, applicable to all congregations and the aim of church growth is not to pursue larger membership numbers, but to shape Scripturally-sound congregations that grow inwards and outwards.

The following is a concise breakdown of the results of the:

- a) study on the GKSA; and
- b) the most similar church-growth factors from other studies, whereby the lack of such elements would then contribute to church shrinking.

4.1.1.1 Summary of research results of Afrikaans-speaking Reformed churches in South Africa.

Please see Appendix 5 for a brief summary of dr Phia van Helden's study. All her articles are also included on the CD and churches are welcome to have a look.

4.1.1.2 Similar church-growth factors from other studies, whereby the lack of such elements would then contribute to church shrinking.

The following factors contribute to church growth:

4.1.1.2.1 Empowering and serving leadership

The role of the minister, as leader, who serves and equips members is critical to growth. Leaders committing themselves to a congregation for an extended period of time also contribute to growth. The continual training of the minister and office-bearers is key to a congregation's growth.

A congregation grows when the Church Council is able to lead the congregation to change, in accordance with Scriptural principles. Leadership that displays Scriptural vision and is able to involve the congregation in realising such vision promotes growth.

- 4.1.1.2.2 Gift-oriented ministries by office-bearers and members
A high-quality ministry that involves its members and the community can only be realised when members are enabled to apply their gifts and are thoroughly equipped to do high-quality Scriptural service.
- 4.1.1.2.3 Spirit-filled spirituality (Godly – 2 Pet 3:11)
Experiencing the presence of God Triune within the congregation through proclaiming of the Word, mutual love and faithful fulfilling of calling contributes to building up and on the congregation.
- 4.1.1.2.4 Functional ministry structures
Ministry structures, like catechism that equip parents and children for the challenges of life, lead to growth.
- 4.1.1.2.5 Inspiring services
The proclaiming of the Word is central to all church growth and can create growth if it builds up the congregation and cultivates as well as confirms a missionary identity. Experiencing the service as a meeting with God, in which the Lord speaks and the congregation actively worships God serves as source of strength for the building up and on the congregation as well as a missional launching pad.
- 4.1.1.2.6 Sustained prayer ministry (Eph 6:18-20; 1 Thess 5:17)
A church that prizes sustained collective prayer, at all levels of the ministry, experience growth.
- 4.1.1.2.7 Holistic small-group ministry
A church that equips members to be faithful followers of Christ, by living differently than the world as an alternative community, become appealing to the people of the world. Personal growth in faith of members is vital to the growth of the church.
- 4.1.1.2.8 Relevant, effective and Scripturally sound evangelisation
The church needs to understand its cultural context as well as know and understand the community in which it lives. The needs of the community provide the growing points in which the church can minister. In conjunction to the need of the surrounding area, the congregation must also be encouraged to become involved in missionary work among unreached communities in other parts of the world. Members must be equipped with the words that reveal Christ and to show fellowship to their fellow man. The congregation must make an active commitment towards obeying the Great Commission.
- 4.1.1.2.9 Loving relationships
When the building of relationships among congregation members is central to the ministry, members are stirred towards active love and support of all people within and outside the congregation.
- 4.1.1.2.10 Stewardship
By equipping believers according to the Word to assume Biblical stewardship and contribute according to ability towards the building up and on the congregation, the Lord provides the means to support growth.
- 4.1.1.2.11 Prophetic testimony to the world
A church that allows Scripture to speak and offers prophetic testimony to society, in terms of love and righteousness, becomes appealing to the world. This testimony must, however, go along with active involvement in the need of the world.
- 4.1.1.3 Conclusion
Since the research shows that these 11 factors promote growth, the Deputies are of the opinion that congregations could measure themselves effectively according to the presence of and ministry of these elements and establish local ministry plans to address these core elements within the congregation. The analysis of natural church development (NCD) could be helpful in this endeavour.

4.1.2 Turnaround strategies in other churches around the word and the results

4.1.2.1 Turnaround strategy of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)

The turnaround strategy proposal tabled at Synod 2012 is very similar to the strategy the CRCA (with whom the GKSA upholds ecumenical unity) selected and already very fruitfully began implementing. Five members of the Deputies visited churches in Sydney, Australia on 18-25 April 2012 (Flip Buys, Naas Ferreira, Ferdi Kruger, Etienne Schalekamp and Piet Venter). The following is a summary of the discussions and the impressions of the Deputies subsequent to the visit.

Historical path of the turnaround strategy in the CRCA

The church had a brainstorming session in 1999 over the state of the church. Membership was sharply on the decline, with no discernible growth. Initially the church was filled with Dutch immigrants and thus it was never really missionally inclined. **A vision was then formulated that reads: "A church reformed to reach the lost for Christ". This vision was tabled at the Synod of 2000 and acknowledged the need for the church to become more missional.** The Synod accepted the vision, but did not want to force it on congregations that according to the church order are independent entities and had to buy into the vision themselves. Few congregations took the matter seriously.

During 2002 and 2003 the church reached a crisis point when the membership numbers fell drastically and approximately 30% of the ministers left the profession, due to dissatisfaction over the excessive number of congregational workers and high ministry costs. The theological school delivered very few new ministers. It was truly a dire situation.

The churches realised at the 2003 Synod that something needed to be done. The Natural Church Development program (NCD) started gathering input from congregations, which was quite fruitful. It revealed that leadership development within the church needed urgent attention (for all three offices and for members). Mission work and church planting also came under review.

Subsequent to 2003, a ministry training strategy was drawn up that focused on in-service training of leaders. Discipleship had to become much more important – more so than pastoral care. Awareness arose about the Anglican churches in Sydney, led by Phillip Jensen, successfully implementing a turnaround strategy. Learning about church revitalisation at a conference to Anglican leaders in Sydney by Peter and Phillip Jensen was of great help to raise awareness among ministers and persuading them that change can and must be made.

In 2004 a series of discussion documents were circulated among the churches, titled: gospel ministry, calling system, discipleship, ministry review, pastoral care. It was furthermore realised that the church order was not flexible enough to make certain changes and had to be addressed. Discipleship stood out sharply: We must train people to disciple other people.

The CRCA learned of the Four-fold Task (4FT) turnaround strategy of the Anglican Church. The four central themes of this strategy are as follows:

Pray: an intensive prayer ministry for fulfilling the Biblical commission.

Multiply: making the church missionally directed that the church may grow through proclaiming the Word.

Train: a purposeful focus on the training of all church leaders to guide the 4FT.

Align: aligning all ministry structures with the 4FT for implementation.

This vision was tabled to the Synod of 2006 as vision and mission for the churches. The missions committee became the church planting committee. The Synod accepted the new vision and mission and appointed various committees to further develop all elements.

Important: The driving force behind it all was dissatisfaction with the state of the church and the need to remedy the situation according to Scripture.

The Synod reconstructed all the structures of the church in 2009, in order to implement the 4FT. Instituting a turnaround strategy necessitates changing structures, which church leaders must implement. The congregational ministry structures also needed to be aligned accordingly.

The Synod made the wise decision to appoint a minister to facilitate the 4FT in the churches. Dr. Jack de Vries was tasked, for a term of 6 years, to assist congregations with the execution of the 4FT. This appointment of the Synod hugely contributed to the success the CRCA has achieved to date. The church's strong negative growth was turned around to a positive growth of 231 members – a whole new congregation!

The Synod appointed workgroups based on the 4FT to offer guidance in its execution, among which:

- (1) Ministry formation workgroup: This group focuses on adapting and aligning ministry structures.

Dr Jack de Vries leads this workgroup, which focuses on establishing sound churches in reference to Mark 26-28. Church growth is God's work, but believers must do the sowing. Believers must till the soil by establishing ministry structures that promote growth.

The Natural Church Development program (NCD) serves to aid congregations in creating an environment in which sound church growth can occur. This corresponds to the marks of the true church, as per art 28 of the Belgic Confession.

The NCD's eight critical factors for church growth are applied. The Committee supports congregations in adapting the 4FT, as its vision and mission, to their own circumstances.

The Deputies employ their website (www.ministryformation.com.au) to inspire congregations and provide aids.

They regularly e-mail a newsletter to members relating developments and circulate information that will empower members.

- (2) Training workgroup: This group attends to the training of leaders and members. Rev Leo Douma leads this workgroup. It takes its cue from Ephesians 4:11-12: Members must be guided toward mature faith and in the process be equipped for their ministry. The workgroup especially focuses on training elders to head the equipping of members.

The mentorship training model is followed, with 2 Timothy 3:10 as departure point: Paul uses the Word to equip believers, but also his own person and conduct to equip Timothy. People must disciple to then disciple others. Training needs to be personal and in this the mentorship model of Christ serves as example. He trained 12 and they in turn trained other disciples.

The goal of this training is spiritual growth – growth in relationship as well as growth in knowledge about God and of the self. The intent is not just gaining knowledge, but gaining knowledge that can guide people towards becoming more like Christ.

This training should start with catechism and continue on to adult training. The book by Collin Marchall, *The Trellis and the Vine*, is strongly recommended as training material for elders. Members are trained through a discipleship course called *Course of your life* (Mattias Media).

- (3) Leadership development workgroup: This group focuses on the development of leaders and especially ministers.

The Synod instructed that the training of ministers at the CRCA's theological school must be brought in line with the objectives of the 4FT.

This is a very important aspect of the vision, because future ministers must already be equipped to guide the vision and mission upon entering the profession. It also affords greater attention to in-service training of new ministers, whereby they first work in a congregation for a time before receiving formal training, which makes training all the more practical and productive.

The workgroup realised that nothing would change in the CRCA before the ministers saw the need for and developed the passion for the 4FT. In order to reach and equip ministers, regular leadership conferences are held that teach ministers about the 4FT as well as other church communities that are successfully running similar programmes.

The spiritual growth and ministry skills of ministers receive great attention, for which a retreat is held each year. This is followed up with a rectory retreat, in which the minister and his family are built up and equipped together. This method has proven to be fruitful and a large number of ministers developed a collective vision to support the CRCA in this process. They have also become a support group that encourages and assists each other.

The work of dr de Vries, the full-time 4FT facilitator, is of great value in this regard. He visits ministers and their wives to offer support in ministering the 4FT in their congregations.

- (4) Church plant taskforce: This group is responsible for the missional purpose of the church and the methods to proclaim the Gospel.

Dr Brian Vaastra leads this group, in which the first task was to explain church planting as Biblical principle to the churches. A number of reports and articles were written to convey the message to ministers and Church Councils. Questionnaires were dispatched to test the waters, whereby just the completion of the questionnaires already raised awareness among Church Councils.

The committee puts great effort into communicating successful church planting stories, in order to encourage congregations and members to become involved. The Synod sets aside funds to support congregations that would like to plant churches. Important principle: Funds must not be employed to pay for the funerals of dying churches, but to plant new churches.

CRCA Synod 2012: Revision to 4FT

The Deputies recommended that the 4FT be revised, whereby the second instruction of multiply changed to grow that shifts the focus to sound church practices that will naturally lead to growth. The third instruction of train was broadened to also include members in the training of leaders. Discipleship is strongly emphasised.

Opposition management

It is important to carefully listen to the problems of congregations, because they insist on being independent and in charge of their own ministry. The 4FT committee launched a listening initiative, by means of questionnaires to ministers and Church Councils as well as personal visits. The Committee listened to the questions, concerns and fears of Church Councils.

They went to great trouble to assure Church Councils that ordinary ministry needs would be addressed, but that a new urgency and focus were needed.

It is very important herein to speak in Biblical terms and concepts that members will understand and be persuaded as well as to address protests and fears thoroughly motivated by Scripture. The vision must be deeply anchored in Scripture, whereby the Deputies often answered with: "...that is what God says in the Bible".

The Committee continually presented and explained the vision to ministers and congregations. Relating success stories are essential to changing people's minds.

4.1.2.1.1 Observations of possible interest to the GKSA Turnaround Strategy

4.1.2.1.1.1 A turnaround strategy is a long-term project that requires the sustained dedication of every congregation.

4.1.2.1.1.2 The chance of success proven by the growth the CRCA' showed after 12 years.

4.1.2.1.1.3 The critical role of a facilitator for the churches that facilitates implementation and provides support on a full-time basis.

4.1.2.1.1.4 The critical role that ministers play in the successful execution of a turnaround strategy.

4.1.2.1.1.5 The necessity of structuring theological training in such a way that it may serve the achievement of the objectives of the turnaround strategy.

4.1.2.1.1.6 The need for continuing theological training for all office-bearers and members.

4.1.2.2 Reformation and growth of Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil (IPB)

The Deputies Turnaround Strategy also noted with great interest, during their investigation of the practices of other Reformed churches worldwide, of a reformatory renewal process occurring in the Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil (IPB). This church, with which the GKSA official established ties, is deeply involved with the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) and due to his position at the WRF, dr PJ Buys could visit them twice. An initiative arranged by dr DG Breed enabled revs JL Lee (Pietersburg-Noord) and dr AJ Coetsee (Uitschot) to visit some of their congregations at the start of 2013.

These churches have turned around, the past two decades, from stagnating churches to dynamic growing churches. Despite social crises in their society, like crime that is rising to unheard of levels, immorality and the legalisation of prostitution, the membership of this denomination has increased to such an extent that they now have 1 million members. It was, however, quickly clear that there is no such thing as instant church growth or instant turnaround, because reformation is like trying to repair an aeroplane while it's still flying.

The core of their turnaround lay in *Semper Reformanda*- always returning to the Word! When they once again turned back to the source and began drinking from it again, the church started growing.

They focus on training and equipping to achieve this:

- (1) Elders are trained to be truly shepherds that lead with the Word. Only after months of training are they installed in the office. They are sometimes expected to teach from the confession in services (like trial lessons).
- (2) Members are prepared at their Bible institute for mission work, catechism and evangelisation. This initiative brings thousands inland to Patrocínio to attend short courses in ministry. Their Andrew Jumper Graduate School of Theology offers a certificate course on church revitalisation and church planting to young ministers and elders, over the course of 18 months and merely 5 week-long contact sessions. This course then provides admission to a master's degree in theology.
- (3) Children do not attend separate services; the sermon is explained to them in a specially created part of every service.

- (4) The focus of professors at their post-graduate centre is not on academic output, but on ministering the Gospel in which academic theory is only a sub-component. Theological professors are thus all involved in evangelisation and mission work in a local congregation – be it with church planting, church establishment or full-time ministry. In this way student's training benefits from the professors' continuous involvement at the grassroots level of churches.
- (5) There is strong element of in-service training of future ministers to ensure that the content of their training is directly aimed at spiritual character and ministry skills development, not only on intellectual academic development.
- (6) Great emphasis is placed within congregations on preparing members to employ their gifts to independently minister, without needing to be encouraged by the minister. In other words, the office of believer is brought to the fore. They see the primary task of the minister of the Word in the following simple term: WORD ministry. His "office" must once again become his study. The most important duty of the minister is to activate and equip members, by means of in-depth God-centred sermons, towards dedicated fulfilment of their God-given calling. Prof Davi Gomes put it like this: *The church's most important weapon, its foremost bit of equipment, is the pulpit.*
- (7) They also made the decision at Synodic level that 50% of their income would be spent on mission work and evangelisation, which is why they sent a large number of missionaries to a range of countries across the world.

4.1.2.3 Other studies

Apart from the study of the abovementioned denominations, in which a turnaround strategy achieved success, the Deputies also learned of articles, books and courses locally and in other parts of the world about church growth, turnaround strategies and related topics. The Deputies mention the initiative CRUMA took to bring dr Harry Reeder, of the PCA, to South Africa to present a course on church revitalisation (*From Embers to A Flame*) that was attended by approximately 40 GKSA ministers and members.

Another significant event that contributed to the research and recently obtained information was the largest international mission conference yet to be held in GKSA circles, in cooperation with the WRF and the Faculty of Theology in Potchefstroom in October 2013, on church revitalisation and church planting.

The CD attached to this report contains a full list of this material and is available, as far as it is in electronic form, to the churches.

- 4.1.3 How members experience being church and their calling. The views on being church in the GKSA are varied. The experience of being church in rural areas is different to that of urban areas. The youth's perception of being church also brings totally different demands to the church than that of the older generation. The impact of ministers' approach is similarly varied. These differences in perception make it difficult for the Deputies to offer a complete and empirically researched portrayal of all possible perceptions. Please see Appendix 5 that provides a summary of dr P van Helden's study in this regard.

The Deputies formulated further remarks on this subject, as contained in Appendix 4, under 3.3 and 3.4.

4.1.4 Material available for training of members as well as the development of new material.

4.1.4.1 See recommendation under 2.3.1.6 of Report 2.

4.1.4.2 The Deputies have compiled a CD containing material relevant to training. This CD will also be available to the churches and be loaded onto the suggested website.

4.1.5 Purity and appropriateness of doctrine on every level as well as how it may be further developed.

According to art 29 of the Belgic Confession, the true church must be seriously and carefully discerned from the Word. The true church can be recognised by the following characteristics:

The church perseveres in the pure proclaiming of the Gospel, the pure administering of the sacraments as instituted by Christ and the exercise of church discipline towards repentance. In other words, the church governs itself according to the Word of God, rejecting all that is in conflict therewith and serves Christ as the only head of the church.

These are the marks of the true church.

In light of the above, the Deputies deem that some of these marks are not proclaimed true and appropriate, like the relationship between faith and action (grace and good works), the correct understanding of being born again (presumed rebirth), covenant automatism, etc. Also see the reference to previous Synod decisions under 2.2 and 2.3 as well as 3.2 above. This will necessitate serious consideration in the training of ministers and the ministry of the Word in congregations.

In regard to purity and appropriateness of doctrine, as set out in the confessions of faith, the Deputies refer to an article by rev Chris de Beer titled: *“Bewaar en vermeerder U kerk: perspektiewe uit die Heidelbergse Kategismus op missionale ekklesiologie”* that defines a Scriptural missional ecclesiology according to the Heidelberg Catechism. The Deputies strongly recommend this article to Church Councils and members (the article is included in the Appendices to the Report and also on the CD).

Decision: Points 4.1 to 4.1.5 noted.

5. The proposed turnaround strategy

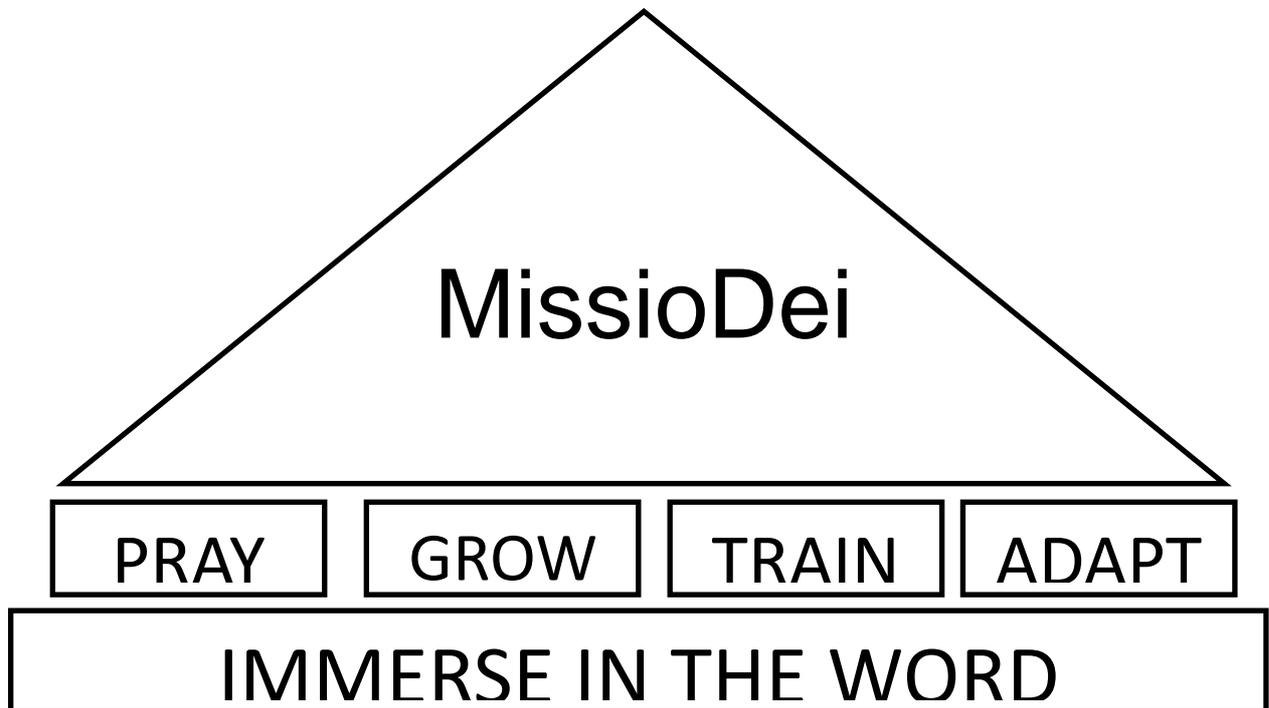
In reference to the research conducted, the Deputies propose the following core elements for the turnaround strategy. Naturally there are a plethora of aspects that can and must be addressed to successfully apply such a strategy, but the Deputies feel that a simple plan featuring the main critical elements will better serve churches than a strategy with multiple elements and levels of application.

It is recommended that the Synod again appoint Deputies to further develop the basic elements towards further levels of application within the ministry of a congregation.

5.1 *Graphic representation*

The turnaround strategy can be illustrated as follows:

ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD



5.1.1 Brief explanation of graphic illustration

Level 1: Immerse in the Word

The strategy is built on the Word of God that reflects the Scriptural principles and determines the content of all other elements (cf. 3.3 above and Appendix 1 – exegetic lines). True repentance, faith renewal and growth in faith cannot be served without God’s Word. Establishing growth requires immersion in Scripture (Ps 1), especially in terms of the need to attend to the building of the church in such a way that the building “on” aspect takes its rightful place in the life of the church (which is largely lacking at present).

Level 2: Four core growth elements

Built on the foundation of the Word, four core growth aspects are indicated that promote growth in faith and the church. The different aspects are formulated as verbs to reflect that nothing will change in the GKSA if every member, Church Council and congregation doesn’t put in the effort to, in obedience to God, execute the commission towards growth of the church.

The first core element is “Pray” = the exhortation to persistent prayer

Apart from the ministry of the Word, prayer is one of the cardinal instructions of the Lord to His church. Sunday 45 of the Heidelberg Catechism makes it clear:

“Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us. Moreover, God will give His grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts and thank Him for them.”

The question is to what degree the GKSA is a denomination that constantly petition and thank God with heartfelt longing?

The core element of prayer of every congregational ministry will have to be ministered anew, in accordance with Scripture.

This prayer, within the context of the turnaround strategy, is especially aimed at that referred to in Sunday 48 (Heidelberg Catechism) with the prayer “Thy kingdom come”. “Preserve and increase Thy church” must be the prayer on the lips of every member, minister, office-bearer and congregation. The book of Acts also clearly shows the cardinal role prayer played in the building up and out of the first church (see Appendix 2 about the importance of prayer from Scripture).

The second core element is “Grow” = two-fold growth: the growth in faith of every member and the growth in membership numbers.

Scriptural passages, like *inter alia* Ephesians 4, Hebrews 5 and 6 and 2 Peter 1, clearly show that growth in faith of members must receive great attention in the ministry of the congregation. The personal growth in faith of members leads to the building up of the congregation, but also cultivates members mature in faith that become practitioners of the Word and actively live and proclaim the Gospel.

Growth in the congregation’s membership must receive similar attention, by means of active evangelisation work among all local communities and support of mission work in other parts of the world. The immediate need of the area, but also the need of those who have never heard the Gospel, must always be served alongside each other and not in opposition to each other. Members need to be equipped to consider and use, in the new context of our country, their own living environment (family, friends, social life, work, etc.) as evangelisation terrain. Church-growth models like church planting, cooperation with existing congregations in potential growth areas, cooperation with mission organisations, support of mission congregations, missionaries, etc. are all opportunities for the congregation to contribute to the growth of the church (see Appendix 3 for the Biblical principles on growth in faith).

The third core element is “Train” = the training of all office-bearers and members

This training is much broader than the scope of the turnaround strategy, but also includes it. In a sense this third core element could serve as second element, but this training is much more than just training for growth in faith. Here it is about the re-evaluation of every office-bearer’s task and role and how it forms part of the congregation ministry as well as the deploying of members’ gifts to once again give the office of believer its rightful place in the church and guide the congregation towards becoming an evangelical congregation.

The fourth core element is “Adapt” = this is about practically aligning the different ministries in the congregation in service of the turnaround strategy

Research shows that structure follows on vision and not the other way around. In other words: structure does not form vision. This means that the ministry structures of a congregation must be adapted to the ministry plan the congregation follows. If the ministry plan is aimed on the growth of the church, then the structures within which this ministry occurs must also be adapted accordingly. Each congregation will attend to this in its own way (see Appendix 4, which provides practical suggestions that could stimulate Church Councils to consider and act on their congregation’s particular set up).

Level 3: The Missio Dei as milestone of the strategy

The focus point of the turnaround strategy is obedience to the commission of the Lord to build up the congregation in such a way that the church grows. The Missio Dei thus plays an important and central role in immersing in the Word and the application of the core growth elements, as set out above. If the GKSA truly wants to promote sound church growth, this aspect cannot and may not lose sight of this concept.

The Deputies confirm once again that the commission for building on the church cannot be separated from the building up of the church, as though it's the only right to existence of the church, but without this element the GKSA is not truly church either. Since the Deputies consider this the main deficiency in the GKSA, the *Missio Dei* forms the sharp point of the strategy.

Decision: Points 5.1 and 5.1.1 approved (amendments already added – Deputies Acta).

5.2 *Practical suggestions for the practical execution of each core element*

5.2.1 Immerse in the Word

The Deputies believe that this immersing must take place first in the hearts and ministries of the ministers of the Word.

The Deputies' research into other turnaround initiatives clearly showed the central importance of ministers and preaching in such initiatives. When the minister does not take the lead in such a return/restoration process, it is usually doomed to failure from the start. Secondly, the work of the minister is as such the activity according by which a congregation's growth stands or falls, since he is called to make the voice of Christ be heard.

The Deputies are convinced that no endeavour to grow in faith and church inward or outward can succeed if the minister of the congregation himself doesn't grow in obedience to his calling and take the lead in such an initiative. This trend relates foremost to the nature of the church.

5.2.1.1 The Word of Christ is key to any turnaround initiative

- (1) The church is in essence and its wellbeing completely dependent and bound to Christ, its Head (Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:19).
- (2) Christ gathers, protects and sustains His church, through His Word and Spirit (HC, Sunday 21).
- (3) The church can only be a true church when it knows and heeds the voice of the Good Shepherd (John 10).
- (4) It is for the above reasons that we profess that the pure administration of the Word, sacraments and practising of discipline are the marks of the true church (Belgic Confession, art 29). The church can only be a true church when it heeds the voice of the Good Shepherd (pure ministry of the Word), is strengthened by it (pure administering of the sacraments) and obeys it (practising of church discipline).
- (5) Any form of return/repentance/turnaround in the church is thus completely dependent on the pure (Spirit-filled) proclaiming of the Word.
- (6) The church can only grow and be restored when the voice of Christ is heeded, the congregation is strengthened by it and the congregation is obedient to it. In fact, its utter existence, survival and growth are dependent on hearing Christ's Word and obeying it.

5.2.1.2 The minister of Christ's Word is at the core of any turnaround initiative

- (1) Christ calls ministers to proclaim His Word that His voice may be heard. This calling is as such summarised in the Form of Ordination for Ministers of the Word as the proclaiming of the Word, administering of sacraments, the service of prayer and to help govern the church.
- (2) The form for ordination of ministers divides the work of the minister into six main points that pertains to the building up and on the congregations, viz. proclaiming of the Word, administering of sacraments, the service of prayer, teaching covenant children, governing together with the elders and evangelising.

It is clear from the form that the minister's entire calling must be devoted to the prayerful study of the Word, to prayerfully lead the congregation with the Word and to equip the congregation to proclaim the Word to a lost world.

- (3) Consequently, the minister of a congregation that has been called to administer the above must take the lead in such a return/turnaround/repentance to the Word of God.

5.2.1.3 The growth of faith of the minister of the Word is vitally important to any turnaround initiative

- (1) The minister's personal growth in faith, spiritual development and increase in knowledge of the Word form the basis of his work as minister of the Word. The form for ordination instructs the minister to earnestly study God's Word. The minister himself must continuously grow in faith to be able to proclaim the Word.
- (2) Paul writes to Timothy (1 Tim 4:15) that he must devote (more literally: meditate on) these things that his progress/development may be clear to all.
- (3) The things Timothy must devote himself to are set out in especially 1 Tim 4:12-14. He must set an example in word, deed, love, faith and purity. He must dedicate himself to reading Scripture, encouraging and teaching.
- (4) These actions that Timothy must dedicate himself to can thus be summarised as the study, proclaiming and heeding of the Word.
- (5) In doing so, Timothy must show progress for the church to see. He must grow and increase in his work as minister of the Word that it may be clear and visible to the congregation.
- (6) Why must his growth be seen? It sets an example for the congregation to follow.
- (7) When the minister doesn't grow, he can't guide the congregation through the Word to grow either.
- (8) The above statement reflects one of the most important principles for the growth and development of a church. When ministers fail to immerse themselves fully in the Word, they cannot guide the church to spiritual maturity.
- (9) The spiritual development of a congregation is thus never truly independent of organisation, administration, planning and strategies, but directly dependent on the spiritual nourishment they receive. In this the calling of the minister is central and in which he must take the lead.

5.2.1.4 Aligning the work and work schedule of the minister of the Word is crucial to any turnaround initiative

- (1) It would seem that a large part of a minister's time is taken up by management and administration. Stewart (2009) claims that as much as 46% of ministers' time is spent on management and administration.
- (2) The minister and Church Council will have to decide whether they are going to retrain the minister to master this management challenge or rather take the Scriptural path of refocusing the minister's work and time away from management and organisation.
- (3) As already mentioned, the work of the minister's calling is broadly set out in the form of ordination. This holds that the minister must once again dedicate himself to the tasks he promised to fulfil before the Lord. The commitment a minister made upon entering the ministry should be the benchmark against which he measures his time.

- (4) The minister must keep careful watch over himself and doctrine, in light of the Word and his promises to God and His church (1 Tim 4:16). The minister is called by Scripture to serious consideration and sound self-reflection to ensure that his is truly fulfilling the Lord's instructions to him.
- (5) This makes it necessary for the minister to refocus his work towards the ministry of the Word and prayer. It was after all the main focus of the apostles, according to Acts 6:4: "...and we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word".
- (6) The Church Council and minister will have to clearly take into account the nature of the minister's calling in their planning and ensure that the minister's workweek reflects these duties.
- (7) The Church Council will have to aid the minister in refocusing on his core ministry work, by equipping both the congregation and the minister.
- (8) The above makes the continuous training of ministers important.
- (9) It would also require the Church Council to refocus the congregation's expectations of the minister. The minister's work will not become less, but will centre greatly on the study of Scripture and the ministry of the Word.
- (10) The Church Council must ensure that the minister equips the congregation according to their gifts that they may do their service work and the minister can concentrate on his primary responsibilities.
- (11) The minister needs to receive the time each year for in-depth study of the Word and also for regular leave.

5.2.1.5 The spiritual health of ministers is crucial for any turnaround initiative

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) has launched five comprehensive research projects since 1987, to determine the spiritual welfare of congregations and the spiritual welfare of ministers in studies conducted in 2004 and 2007 (sources can be downloaded from the CRCNA's website). Although there will surely be differences between the ministers of the CRCNA and that of the GKSA, there will surely also be correspondences. The trends identified could in many respects be indicators of similar challenges within the GKSA. The trends that came to the fore, in reference to the spiritual welfare of the minister, in the most recent research (2007) among the ministers of the CRCNA and among congregations in 2012 are the following:

- (1) Ministers do far too little personal Scripture study.
- (2) Ministers engage far too little in personal prayer.
- (3) Ministers are overloaded with management and administrative duties in reference to the congregation.
- (4) Many ministers and congregations expect ministers to rather focus on management than on spiritual guidance.
- (5) Ministers don't pay adequate attention to the core of their ministry duties.
- (6) Ministers are often stressed and overworked, which has a negative impact on the ministry of the Word.
- (7) Ministers often get involved in conflict in the ministry.
- (8) Ministers struggle in general to maintain a balance between work, leisure, exercise and a healthy lifestyle.

Decision: Points 5.2.1 to 5.2.1.5 noted.

5.2.1.6 Recommendations

The training of ministers at the TSP is addressed in Report 2 and, therefore, we recommend that a training manual for ministers and Church Councils be compiled, by the yet to be appointed Deputies, that:

- 5.2.1.6.1 conducts comprehensive research into the state of affairs among ministers of the GKSA;
- 5.2.1.6.2 details how the minister's work may be refocused on his original promises at ordination, for which the form of the ordination of ministers may serve as point of departure;
- 5.2.1.6.3 especially equips the minister to once again fully concentrate on the ministry of the Word, in all its forms;
- 5.2.1.6.4 equips the minister for increased prayer and in leading prayer;
- 5.2.1.6.5 equips the minister to be a spiritual leader (Heb 13:5) to the congregation and not a congregation manager;
- 5.2.1.6.6 emphasises the importance of the minister's personal spiritual growth;
- 5.2.1.6.7 links the minister's spiritual growth with that of the congregation;
- 5.2.1.6.8 equips the minister to lead a balanced life, amid the pressures of the ministry;
- 5.2.1.6.9 equips the Church Council to re-evaluate the minister's work and to align it to Scripture, the confession, the church order and the form of ordination of ministers; and
- 5.2.1.6.10 equips congregation members to realign their expectations of the minister with Scripture once again.
- 5.2.1.6.11 That the deputies ensure that in the execution of the mandate they do not insurge into the service of professors in terms of CO, art 18.

Decision: Points 5.2.1.6 to 5.2.1.6.11 approved (amendments already added – Deputies Acta).

5.2.1.7 The focus of immersing in the Word as basis for the strategy makes the following matters of importance:

- 5.2.1.7.1 The minister must study the Word anew in light of the Missio Dei and how the congregation is to be built up with the Word to stimulate growth in the congregation. The exegetic lines and conclusions, provided in Appendix 1, serve as example of a study that can be fruitfully administered by means of ministry structures like preaching, Bible study, small-group ministry, catechism, office-bearer training and home visitation to engender growth among members. The Church Council must ensure that the minister is given the time to study the Word for personal enrichment.
- 5.2.1.7.2 The relevant aspects of doctrine, as indicated under 3 of this report and previous Synod reports, must be addressed in sermons that it may renew members' thinking, bring about repentance and enable members to contribute, with the correct Biblical vision of the church and faith, to upholding a sound congregation that can grow.
- 5.2.1.7.3 The Church Council must ensure that the minister gives adequate and balanced attention to the ministry of the Word, in relation to building up and on the congregation.
- 5.2.1.7.4 The Scripture principles that form the basis of the four core elements of church growth must be explored and conveyed to the congregation.
- 5.2.1.7.5 The Church Council must formulate, in reference to the abovementioned, a ministry plan according to which the minister, office-bearers and members can execute the turnaround strategy purposefully.

5.2.2 Pray

The following aspects are important:

- 5.2.2.1 The minister's service of prayer must grow in correspondence to the form of ordination and letter of calling. The Church Council must ensure that the minister gives clear and consistent attention to his personal prayer life and to praying for the congregation.
- 5.2.2.2 Office-bearers and members must be equipped to deepen their own personal prayer life and also their prayers for the church ministries.

- 5.2.2.3 The above training can centre on the meaning and practice of personal prayers, prayer during services, public prayer, collective prayer (where more than one leads prayer at the same event) and prayer for specific needs identified in the congregation.
- 5.2.2.4 Research can be done and training offered on the importance, meaning and execution of the instruction to persevere in prayer, for the fulfilment of the Holy Spirit, and to always pray in the power of the Spirit (Jude 20; Luke 11:13; Matt 6 and 7).
- 5.2.2.5 There must be guarded against formalism in prayer that is prevalent in the church in different ways. For example, meetings and functions are “opened” and “concluded” with prayer, wherein prayer becomes – surely not consciously – simply a way to start and end an event and not a conscious entering into the presence of the Lord to pray for the relevant event or matter.
- 5.2.2.6 The Church Council must teach members to use every opportunity to pray for the congregation and specifically for church growth. Family worship, Bible study, small-group gatherings, ward functions, meetings and services are all to be opportunities for prayer for the congregation’s ministry. A prayer calendar can, for example, aid a congregation in focusing their prayers on the particular ministry matter indicated for that month. It is also an opportunity for members to use their gifts in building up the congregation by, for example, allowing office-bearers and members to pray from time to time during services.
- 5.2.3 Grow
The following core issues must be addressed to apply this part of the strategy in church ministry.
- 5.2.3.1 The Church Council must adopt the Scripture principle that the ministry of ministers, elders and deacons is not only to maintain the spiritual life of members. The aim of every office-bearer’s service and of the ministries in the congregation must be clearly directed at the growth in members’ faith (Eph 4) (cf. Appendix 3).
- 5.2.3.2 Elders can start by studying how Scripture portrays growth and maturity in faith and then determine how the service of office-bearers as well as the different ministries within the congregation can best facilitate growth in faith. See Appendix 3 for practical suggestions in this regard. The ministries in the congregation must then be adapted to promote the growth of faith to maturity of every member.
- 5.2.3.3. The Church Council must earnestly reflect, in light of 5.2.1.1 above, on how involved the congregation is in outward evangelisation and seriously consider how the congregation may be equipped and guided to engage with the community in which the Lord placed the congregation as well as in mission work further afield. Only when the Church Council and congregation accept the calling of the Lord in this regard, will the inner and outer resistance to becoming involved in the spreading of the Gospel be overcome. Upon thorough reflection, prayer and analysis of the need in the community and the world, the Lord will show the opportunities for members and the congregation as a whole to spread the Gospel in Word and deed.
- 5.2.3.4 The Church Council must ensure that the minister and elders, in accordance to their forms of ordination, will set the example in proclaiming the Gospel, in guiding members and in evangelisation. Proclaiming the Gospel offers all members’ the opportunity to employ their gifts.

5.2.4 Train

The following matters are crucial:

- 5.2.4.1 The training of the minister to equip and guide the congregation in bringing about sound church growth is vital (see Report 2 Deputies Turnaround Strategy about the training of ministers).
- 5.2.4.2 Just as important is further training, towards enabling church growth, for ministers already in the profession (also see the recommendations in Report 2 Deputies: Turnaround Strategy, in reference to continuing ministerial training).
- 5.2.4.3 The Church Council must be urged to encourage further training for the minister and also support the minister financially to seek such training.
- 5.2.4.2 The minister must take his role as guide to the congregation seriously and adapt his ministry to enable office-bearers and members to receive purposeful and specific training for the correct understanding of their role and ministry that will enable them to apply it for sound church growth.

5.2.5 Adapt

Every congregation is unique and the principles for sound church growth will in practice be different and for that reason the Deputies don't intend to launch into prescriptions for adapting a ministry to facilitate church growth.

The Deputies would, however, like to earnestly urge Church Councils to realise that if congregations intend to truly take on the ministry of church growth, then existing ministry structures will have to be reviewed and adapted and new ministry structures will have to be put in place to achieve this goal.

In order to aid Church Councils in their consideration of the matter, the Deputies provide an account, in Appendix 4, of their deliberations over critical elements related to adapting ministry to institute the turnaround strategy and also practical examples of how the ministry of a congregation can be restructured to achieve the objective.

Decision: Points 5.2.1.7 to 5.2.5 noted.

6. Final recommendations

- 6.1 The proposed strategy is to be approved and Church Councils encouraged to study the strategy and the principles behind it for application according to their particular circumstances (to be read in conjunction to the recommendations under 3.4.6).
- 6.2 The yet to be appointed Deputies are to be tasked with forwarding the Synod's decision to every congregation in writing and ensure that each congregation receives the CD listing the study material.
- 6.3 The title Deputies Turnaround Strategy should be changed to Deputies Church Growth.
- 6.4 Deputies are to be appointed for the church growth ministry (should the title be approved) to:
 - 6.4.1 Investigate, plan and mobilise the process of establishing the CMTG, in cooperation with the curators (see Report 2 – Deputies Turnaround Strategy).
 - 6.4.2 Support and provide training and training material (where needed) for the implementation of the church growth ministry upon request to congregations and Classes, until the centre has been established and a coordinator appointed.
 - 6.4.3 Specifically focus on the needs of the black churches, in relation to the implementation of the church growth ministry.
 - 6.4.4 Particularly focus on the training of ministers for the implementation of the church growth ministry, especially by means of regional assemblies, conferences and in other suitable ways.

- 6.4.5 Explore the further deepening of the church growth ministry, suggest the next levels of implementation and advise the Synod accordingly in cooperation with the CMTG and in reference to any new research that may come to light.
- 6.4.6 Create an active website for the church growth ministry to keep congregations abreast of training material, training opportunities and other relevant information that may stimulate and aid with the church growth ministry.
- 6.4.7 That the Synod recognises with great gratitude towards the Lord the great work of church growth already done by the churches in response to the call from the previous Synod according to the decision of the Deputies Turnaround Strategy (mandate, pt 1.4.2).

Decision: Points 6.1 to 6.4.7 approved (amendments already added – Deputies Acta).

Appendix 1 Exegetic lines related to Missio Dei, lines from the Old Testament and New Testament

1. Exegetic lines

The goal of these exegetic lines is to hold up anew the string of pearls (golden thread), as it unfolded through the Revelation history, and thereby reflect on what God demands in His Word from the churches in following a turnaround strategy. The point of departure is that everything that we as creations of God can and must know is revealed (Art 2, Belgic Confession) by the one true God (Art 1, Belgic Confession). This fact of faith implies that only those who recognise and accept the fact and means of God's revelation can know Him in Being and deed (Art 3, Belgic Confession). God is only known through His revelation and without His revelation, we cannot truly know and serve Him according to His will. According to God's revelation in His Word, God has in Essence always been a *immanente* (*ad intra*) Trinity (Art 8-11, Belgic Confession; Genesis 1:1-2; John 1:1; Ephesians 1:3-4; Athanasian Creed). This *immanente* Trinity is revealed in an "executive" (*ad extra*) Trinity (also called the economic Trinity).

The Deputies are of the conviction that should this exegetic substantiation be formulated to include the churches, it will lead to a change in heart. These exegetic lines thus also endeavour from the get go to delve into Scripture about the shading of being a missional church in a more modern way. The concept *missional* is, therefore, for the time being circled as **an adjective** that describes the identity of being church as participating in God's mission. The concept *missional* describes and frames the dynamics of missionary work.

1.1 *God with a mission or God's mission (Missio Dei)*

1.1.1 Who God is in Essence is revealed in God's works and from this the following can be concluded:

- 1.1.1.1 God as *immanente* Trinity has a "preconceived" (*eternal*) plan for creation (Eph 1:5, 9). Before the creation of the World, God made in the Essence of His eternal being His unalterable decisions.
- 1.1.1.2 God's *eternal plan* is instituted by the *economic* Trinity (Eph 1:9). What God already firmly fixed in eternity He now, at a time He has determined, brings to fulfilment by the active working of the three Persons of the Triune.
- 1.1.1.3 The Triune God's *executive* deeds can be discerned in His *creation* (Belgic Confession, art 12) and *preservation* (Belgic Confession, art 13) of the world.
- 1.1.1.4 The *preservation work* of God Triune is for the sake of His *works of recreation* (Belgic Confession, art 14 et seq.). The *recreation (redemption)* is not an "afterthought" of the fall, but was already part of God's eternal "preconceived" plan. God continues to involve Himself in a creation that was broken by sin, for the sake of His plan of grace that must reach the ends of the earth and all people, nations and languages.

- 1.1.1.5 God Triune's *executive work* become visible in the *revelation history* as revealed in His special Revelation (*The Bible*).
- 1.1.1.6 God Triune's *executive work* = **Missio Dei**. Conclusion: In the Missio Dei the Triune God is revealed in His Essence.
- 1.1.2 The meaning of the expression "Missio Dei" serves to indicate God Triune's dynamic work in this world. In fact, the mission of the church can only be understood if the concept of Trinity is clearly understood. The Triune God already made a covenant in the Holy Trinity, in which the Son was appointed King and Ruler over all (John 17:2), before the creation of the world. The Son was **sent** to the world to suffer, perish and conquer to attain eternal life for those the Father predestined and gave Him (cf. John 6:36). God in His wisdom also had a plan of redemption in which God the Father and God the Son **sends** the Holy Spirit to make the Good News of Jesus' work echo in human hearts (John 16:7-12). God the Holy Spirit is sent on the basis of work fulfilled by God the Son, making all human activity related to mission and missionary work sharing in and heightening this Godly mission.
- 1.1.3 The expression *Missio Dei* has a theocentric point of departure and this gives rise to the idea of man's participation in God's mission. In Genesis 1:28 man is already instructed to live on and rule the earth. Within the order God established, man is empowered to care for the earth. Man is instructed by God to **care for** and to **protect** all that He placed on this earth. God did not destroy man or creation after the fall, but brought His eternal plan (Eph 1:5, 9) to fulfilment by reaching out to sinful man in His grace (Gen 3:9). After the whole of mankind (Gen 11) (re)confirmed the fall of the first humans, God established His plan of grace for the whole of the world. The people of Babel are not wiped out, but spread over the whole earth in nations, languages and cultures that inherently rebel against God. In calling Abram (Gen 12) God reveals that He will reach out to all the nations of the earth and will call on a people of the world (*the descendants of Abram*) to reach all the peoples of the world. Abram and his descendants become part of God's Missio Dei. Sin and its spread (Gen 3-11) do not threaten this instruction of God. In Genesis 12 God calls Abraham and his descendants to be a blessing to the nations. This command would also be and remain throughout the generations part of Israel's calling.
- 1.1.4 In Luke 12 Jesus puts His sacrifice on the cross within the world's perspective. He describes Himself as a seed that would give Himself, but that this cross and offering would bring a harvest of all the peoples, languages and nations. He further promises through His cross to draw in all of those the Father gave Him and thus He gives the all-encompassing command, with His ascension into heaven, to *go out and make disciples*. This commission finds clear focus in Luke 24:45-47, with the emphasis on proclaiming to all nations and also in Acts 1:8, where Christ's church is described as His witnesses (**martures**). God thus involves His church in His mission, but God uses His church to spread this Good News in ever-widening circles. The goal of this mission is clear, viz. **πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, (all the nations)**.
- 1.1.5 The apostle Paul describes God's mission, in and through His Son, as His way of reconciling the world to Him (2 Cor 5:19).

Summary

The above dissemination shows the following to be of significance:

- (1) The expression Missio Dei is not only an academic concept. God is a God that sends out and that remains in a dynamic way in control of this world.
- (2) God demands that His church (**kuriake, those who belong to the Lord**) participate in this mission (Missio Dei). How? By *caring* and *caring for*.
- (3) The intent of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross He Himself brought into missional and world perspective.
- (4) A missional church is serious about **going out** to be **witnesses** to the ends of the earth and care for all nations.
- (5) Living missionally is an intentional choice in the sense that God's Word is the drawing power.

2. The Old Testament

- 2.1 The church is God's chosen, in grace (Gen 12). God called Abram from heathenism to make him (and his descendants) part of God's Missio Dei. Through Abram and his descendants, God wanted to reach the world with his message of grace. Genesis 12: 3 – "...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you". This particular calling of Abram has a universal intent, because God wanted to bless all nations through Abram. In Genesis 22:18, after Abraham showed his willingness to sacrifice his son and God provided, the same promise is made. These words are echoed in Acts 3:25 and in Galatians 13-16. God placed Israel at the centre of the known world: The land of Canaan was in a sense the part of the world that played a central role in one way or another in the world of the time. All that happened to Israel sent a clear message to all nations and world empires of ancient times. God wanted to establish with His chosen/called people a testimony of grace in the world, as He already made known to Abram.
- 2.2 God sent Joseph, through the humiliation of being sold as slave by his own brothers, ahead to Egypt (Genesis 37:12-36). He could even confess in Genesis 45:5 to his brothers that the Lord had sent him to save his people and also the Egyptians from famine.
- 2.3 After many years in Egypt, the time for the exodus arrived. The exodus was not only God's liberation of his people Israel, but also a very definite learning curve for them. Exodus 6:6-8 expresses God's mission in the lives of his people. He would liberate them from the yoke of the Egyptians to enter into a covenant with Him and thus bring them to the Promised Land. Through all of this they had to learn that it was the Lord their God that brought all of this about.
- 2.4 In Exodus 19:5-6 God's people entered into a whole new era in His kingdom. God set apart His people from all the nations to make of them a kingdom of priests. This brings the extraordinary providential love of God to the fore. Although God reigns over all, He set His people apart as holy. A priest's sole duty is to serve after all. Israel was thus chosen and called to serve among the nations (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). In these words a clear missional calling was found for Israel. What God did in and among His people had to serve as example to other nations. This would also be the case if they broke their covenant with God (Deut 29:24-26).
- 2.5 The song of Moses (Ex 15) speaks of the Lord's eternal rule. He is in other words King. Deuteronomy 10:14-19 relates the paradoxical nature of The Lord's kingship. The Lord's rule is set in contrast to His compassion and care. It is clear from this passage that everyone and everything belongs to Him. He also shows love to the solitary and lonely.

- 2.6 Deuteronomy 10:17-19 expresses God's love toward strangers and the suffering. God's righteousness (**sedek**) had to be reflected in the conduct of His people.
- 2.7 The book Jonah is generally labelled the missionary book of the Old Testament.
- 2.8 Psalm 67:1-7 raises the call that all people must praise God for His salvation. All nations must rejoice and sing over this. Thus the writer sings of how God's blessing to His people will become clear to all the nations (cf. Ps 22; Ps 86:9-10; Ps 99:1-3; and also Ps 117).
- 2.9 In the prophetic books of the Old Testament God's plan of salvation is set out in a notable way. Isaiah 2:2-3 relates the prophetic vision of the nations that would go to Zion to worship the Lord (cf. this theme in Is 14:26, 19:23-25, 24:13-16 and 34:1-2). Isaiah 42 describes Israel as the servant that would bring God's righteousness to the nation and thus also light to the gentiles. Isaiah 43 calls Israel God's witness to the nations. In Isaiah 56-60 the same perspective is sketched.
- 2.10 The failure of the people Israel: Israel, however, failed its calling. They wanted to be like the world and turned to the idols of the world, thus not fulfilling their missional calling for the sake of the whole world.
- 2.11 The missional perspective of the exile: When God sent His people Israel into exile it was not the prized gift of His plan of grace to the world, but a reconfirmation of His *Missio Dei*. In exile the Israelites would be instrumental in preparing the world of their time (*Roman Empire*) for the spreading of the Gospel.
- 2.12 After seventy years in exile, God had a part of His people return from exile. This return to their homeland was also for Judah a steep learning curve. They had to learn that God is unique and singular, but also learn about the universality of His work. God's people knew He is the Lord, God (**Jahweh ha Elohim**). The other nations did not know this (Isaiah 44:18) and, therefore, Israel had to be witnesses that the Lord is God.
- 2.13 In Zachariah 8:13 God's people is described as a blessing to the nations. Zachariah 9:9-10 relates the universal directedness of God's salvation.

Conclusions

- (1) God's mission in the Old Testament is centripetal in nature (*centrum + petere* = seeking the middle point or centre). Israel and the example they had to set to the nations had to magnetically draw attention to God. The honour and glory of God (doxology) are thus inherent to this centripetal missional existence.
- (2) Blessing by God, with all His blessings, means that believers must also be a blessing to others.
- (3) In the Old Testament Israel was tasked to righteously and fully bring glory to God's Name that God's kingship may shine over all nations. They were, therefore, to live among the people and draw these nations to God through the way they lived.
- (4) The Old Testament also relates Israel's failure to be a light among nations and thus the expectation of the suffering Servant that was to come.
- (5) The missional expectation in the Old Testament also denotes the eschatological tension of the "already" and the "not yet". The day that all nations come to serve God remains the day that is looked toward with yearning. This is why the coming of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, is a necessary part of God's mission.

3. The New Testament

- 3.1 The fullness of the time: At the time determined by God, Jesus Christ was born to the world (Eph 1:10). In Him, God brought about redemption for the reconciliation of sins and God establishes the New Testament church. The “incarnation” is nothing less than the *economic Trinity (Missio Dei)* that “outside God Himself” steps in for the fallen world of man, for the sake of the salvation of sinners. The church of the New Testament now becomes God’s “chosen” that He, in reference to His promise to Abraham, wants to use to reach the whole world (*all people, languages and nations*) with the Gospel (Eph 1:11, 13; Matt 28:19-20).
- 3.2 In Luke 2:30-32 Simeon praises the Lord, in prayer, for seeing the salvation that God prepared before the nations for the enlightenment of the nations and in honour of His people Israel. The Gospels describe the coming of Jesus as the fulfilling God’s promise of His mission to the world.
- 3.3 In Luke 3:6 John the Baptism cites Isaiah 40:3-5, in his powerful declaration of how all people will see salvation in Christ.
- 3.4 Over the course of Jesus’ life and work here on earth, Israel was often the focus of His ministry, without it being exclusively about Israel. Matthew 2:1-11 tells of the involvement of wise men from the East in the birth of Jesus and in Matthew 8:1-13 a centurion crosses Jesus’ path. Jesus’ spends time and effort on the Samaritan woman in John 4. It is a Roman soldier that calls out at the crucifixion that this man is truly the Son of God. In the Sermon on the Mount the church is described as the salt of the earth and the light for the world.
- 3.5 Jesus also places His mission to this world regularly on the agenda. In John 10:16 He speaks of sheep that have gone astray and that He must lead back to the sheep pen.
- 3.6 The Sermon on the Mount portrays a turnaround strategy in terms of the typical thinking over God’s kingdom. Here the emphasis is much more on the inner change needed in God’s followers. These virtues in the Sermon on the Mount simultaneously form the basis for transforming society.
- 3.7 Jesus tells the kingdom parables in Matthew 13. God’s Word is the seed that will be sown and fall on different kinds of soil. The kingdom of God is also compared with a fishing net, with which both the good and bad are dragged ashore. The task of the church herein is to keep sowing and keep on throwing the nets out. God takes care of the harvesting and crop.
- 3.8 Jesus Himself anticipates the day people from all directions will come to share in God’s kingdom (Matt 8:11-12 and Luke 13:29).
- 3.9 When Jesus describes the law of the shrivelling wheat kernel in Luke 12 and as such foretells the way He will die, He puts His death into worldly perspective. The Greeks wanted to honour Him, but He confirms that the Wheat kernel must first die before the crop can be harvested.
- 3.10 Jesus brings, with His ascension into heaven, the corners of the world into view (Matt 28:18-20). The lines of the “is” and “did” are clear. Here the prophesy of Daniel 7:14 also becomes a fulfilled reality. The meaning and intent are to make disciples. *Go, baptise* and *teach* describe how it must be done. This making of disciples of all nations is **intentional (go!)**. The participation in God’s mission and obedience to His commission are now also making disciples of all nations. This commission is connected to the predominant assurance that it can never be accomplished by man’s power, but through His power that will be with His children to the end of days. It is a lifelong commission for the church and the end will only come once this precious Word has been brought to all the nations (Matt 24:14).

- 3.11 John emphasises in his gospel the “sending out” concept. In John 20:21b Jesus tells of how the Father sent Him to this world and in His High Priest prayer He prays for His church that is being sent out into the world. The church after all has this powerful message for the world.
- 3.12 Acts 1:8 underscores this involvement or the outlines thereof in God’s mission in being sent by God. The Old Testament reveals the prophetic expectation of heathens streaming to Jerusalem and Luke speaks in Acts of the Gospel that would go out to all nations from Jerusalem. This is also remarkable in the structuring of the book of Acts:
- 3.12.1 Acts 1-7: The gospel in Jerusalem.
- 3.12.2 Acts 8-9: The gospel in Judea and Samaria.
- 3.12.3 Acts 10-28: The gospel to the corners of the world.
- 3.13 Acts 1:8 tells of how the disciples and also the church of all time had to learn that sharing in the fullness of God’s kingdom, about which expectations were so high, would be a mission of power (***dunamis***). Through the dynamic/dynamite-like power of the Holy Spirit, the church would be motivated and empowered to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. How? By testifying of all they had seen and heard! This expression of *testifying* appears 39 times in the book of Acts. The word *testify* is derived from the legal word and is only of any meaning when it supports the truth. The church is thus not witnesses of a thing or an event, but of a Living Person, Jesus Christ and for this reason Luke speaks of the ends of the earth (***eschatou tes ges***) in Acts 1:8.
- 3.14 The Paulinitic Epistles brings the lives of the churches across the world into view. Paul calls himself the apostle of the gentiles (Rom 11:13; Gal 2:8). Romans 10:8-15 describes the need for people to proclaim the Word of God, because hearing the Word brings faith and repentance. The proclaiming of the Word resonates the wonder of those who bring the Good News. The concepts of “**kerux**” and “**euangelion**” are noteworthy, reflecting the premise that those who proclaim the Word are messengers of the triumph of Jesus Christ.
- 3.15 In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 Paul describes the important aspect of how the message he brings can be adapted. Without shying away from the truth of the Word by any means, he adapts the way it is proclaimed according to the unique circumstances of every people and nation.
- 3.16 Ephesians emphasises the unity in the church of all who accept the Leadership of Jesus Christ and for this reason the apostle starts of the description with the spiritual blessing of the predestination. This act of predestination of God’s ultimate plan unites people under one Head, Christ. Ephesians 2:1-10 describes what God did, in His Son, for this body. This new mankind, consisting of all peoples, languages and nations is then revealed in Ephesians 2:11-18. Such unity is only possible through the proclaiming of the Gospel, which brings them before this truth to experience faith, through God’s work inside of them (Eph 3:13). The new Israel: Never before in history has the “mystery of (God’s) his will” (Eph 1:9); the “mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4); been “made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit...” (Eph 3:5). God’s hidden mystery (Eph 3:9-10) must now be proclaimed by the church. The implication of one multicultural church that lives as the body of Christ and has a missional task in the world is clear.

- 3.17 The Paulinite Letters reflect the mission movement of God as well as the knowledge that He makes His church part of this movement. In Christ a new unity has come. The other epistles of the New Testament even raise the premise that this new unity, the people of God, is a predestined priesthood. The church of all time, therefore, shares in this *Missio Dei*.
- 3.18 The disciples' commission (Matt 28 and Acts 1:8) starts in earnest with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Without the Dynamite of God no one can share in this missional calling. The role of the Holy Spirit can and may not be taken lightly, which is why the Spirit is called the Spirit of truth (John 14:7, 15:26, 16:13). The Spirit binds His church and reminds His church of what Jesus did. The message proclaimed in spreading the Gospel is as such from the Spirit and only the Holy Spirit can convince the world of its sin (John 6:7-11), in this the Holy Spirit enables conviction. Only the Holy Spirit can perform the miracle of being born again through the powerful proclaiming of the Word (John 3:5-8 and Titus 3:5). The church is the product of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) and for this very reason the church is the Spirit's vehicle to the world. The Spirit then also grants believers the gifts to perform this work (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:7-16).
- 3.19 Confessing the intrinsic role of the Holy Spirit raises the importance of prayer to the missional church. In and through prayer believers express their dependence on God. In Matthew 9:38 Jesus exhorts His disciples to pray that God will send workers to the field for the harvest. Paul urges believers in Colosse to pray for open doors and clear preaching of the Word (Col 4:3-4). Believers are called up in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 to pray for the spreading of the Gospel and Paul also asks of the Ephesians to pray that he will have the confidence to proclaim the Word of God.

Conclusions

- (1) God's mission in the New Testament is centrifugal in nature (*centrum + fungere* = centrum or middle-point flowing). God's new people/His church are sent out to all the nations. The centripetal movement of the Old Testament changed to a centrifugal one.
- (2) In the New Testament God's children are living stones of His spiritual home. They are temples of the Holy Spirit and that is why the church is the herald of the Good News of the triumph in and through Jesus Christ.
- (3) Living missional demands obedience to the command to *go out* or put differently, to not go out is disobedience.
- (4) The church must be a powerful symbol of how God manifests His kingdom in people's lives. The doxological and glorifying way of life must serve as testimony to the world and draw them in, to also share in this joy. The church must be characteristic, instrumental and also the first fruits of the kingdom of God to give the world a kind of taste of the kingdom (Newbegin, 1994:33).
- (5) The work of the Holy Spirit for a missional church is essential.
- (6) The role of prayer in the spreading of God's Word is central to the existence of the church in the New Testament.
- (7) The missional church must also have the eschatological expectation of all people bowing down to God that the second coming may be fulfilled. The "already" and "not yet" will always be part of the church's existence. Nevertheless, the church sharing in God's mission is a clear indication of God Triune making His way through this world.