1st Semester | 2024

CONGREGATIONAL WITNESS

Newsletter



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A message from Witness Ministry's MSS

Rev. Stephen Pedro

Dearly beloved,

Our Congregational Witness Newsletter has a dual purpose:

- **We want to inform:**

On the one hand, you have this newsletter in your hand, or on your phone, because we believe an informed church/congregation is an involved church/congregation. Furthermore, information helps us to make informed decisions and choices, leading to engagement, empowerment, growth, new ideas, opportunities, and much more.

- **We want to encourage:**

On the other hand, we hope our congregations and presbyteries will be encouraged by the stories in this newsletter. We aim to inspire and inform you to reach out to the office of Congregational Witness and to utilize our support and service for your benefit and growth. We also encourage you to connect and work together in your respective presbyteries for the greater good and well-being of our congregations.

Here at Congregational Witness our vision is to see our congregations and presbyteries, not only grow in all spheres of being church, but we also want to see our congregations and presbyteries to flourish, making a difference and an impact in their communities, celebrating their new identity in Christ, and just enjoying being a caring community where acts of love and service are part of the dominant culture of the congregation and its disciples.

Therefore, our mission is to assist, empower, and support the leaders of our congregations and presbyteries in cultivating a culture that is Christ-like, Spirit-filled, and Kingdom-bound. This will serve as a foundation for unselfish service, intentional and contextual witness, and a caring, affirmed community life.

Hence, the stories in this newsletter are an account of our efforts to accomplish our mission. Please pray and work with us, support our mission with your cooperation and commitment, and provide feedback to help us improve our service to you.

Rev. Stephen Pedro

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1. SUPPORT OF CONGREGATIONS



Our support of congregations continues to focus on visitations, conversations, informational workshops, training, and research, with a special emphasis on training and information sharing.

Over the past six months, the Minister in Synodical Service (MSS), Rev. Stephen Pedro, visited several congregations, initiated his Missional Transformation of Congregations (MTC) workshops with ministers, facilitated a workshop and a session with congregations that have either started or plan to start the MTC process, coordinated and managed the introduction of Contextual Bible Study (CBS), and assisted a congregation with the training of their catechists.

1.1. INFORMATIONAL & ADVISORY VISITATIONS AND CONVERSATIONS

Visitations and conversations with congregations, especially congregations where there is not a full- or part-time minister, continue when and where possible.

- **URCSA KAREEDOUW**

On the weekend of January 19, 2024, such a visit took place. On his way to Qgeberha (Port Elizabeth), Rev. Stephen Pedro visited the church council of Kareedouw.

URCSA Kareedouw is part of the Presbytery of Kariega (Uitenhage), and like many other congregations of our regional synod, they also operate without a full-time or part-time minister. With the permission and cooperation of the relieving minister, Rev. Gregory Jacobs, the goal of the visit and conversation was to encourage and share relevant information, as well as to provide material aids to assist the elders and deacons with their ministerial tasks.

"My visit and conversation with the church council members on that Friday evening confirmed once again that our congregational leaders need all the support they can get, especially when they cannot afford even a part-time minister," says Rev. Pedro.

Read more about this visit: https://bit.ly/3KFh4bc

- **URCSA BEAUFORT WEST-EAST**

URCSA Beaufort West-East was also on Rev. Pedro's radar since last year after he joined the 100 Town Dialogue with Dr Braam Hanekom in Beaufort West.

Following this dialogue and after a few conversations with the local minister, Rev. Ruiter Julies, he visited the church council on his way to Graaff-Reinet on 31 January.

The purpose of the visit was to have a preliminary conversation about Contextual Bible Study (CBS) and the possibility of facilitating a CBS session with the church council, other leaders of the congregation, and members of a local NGO.

These young NGO leaders have shown interest in learning more about CBS after Rev. Pedro promised to introduce this tool to them to utilize in their community work.

Read more about these visits and the workshop: https://bit.ly/3x3Vcn2



Rev. Stephen Pedro (centre) with church council members of URCSA Die Ark Congregation in Beaufort West-East. The local minister, Rev. Ruiter Julies (left from Rev. Pedro).

1.2. TRAINING & EQUIPMENT

Our support of congregations in the form of training and equipment has been adjusted to focus on our ministers, ministerial candidates, and church councils. The scope of the training is the missional calling of the church.

1.2.1. THE MISSIONAL CALLING OF THE CHURCH

Here, our focus takes place on two levels. On the one hand, we have started with the empowerment of our ministers to lead the missional transformation of their congregations. On the other hand, we also support church councils who want to start with the conversation about being a missional church.

1.2.1.1. The Missional Transformation of Congregations (MTC)

Our focus regarding the missional transformation of our congregations has shifted primarily to the empowerment of our ministers.

The strategy is to empower and equip our ministers with tools to lead and facilitate the missional transformation process with the leaders of their congregations. Hopefully, they will also be able to start the MTC conversation with some of the "vacant" congregations in their presbyteries.

Since January, MTC workshops have taken place with four clusters. We have grouped the 29 presbyteries into clusters.

- The first MTC workshop has taken place at URCSA Graaff-Reinet from 31 January to 1 February 2024. Ministers from the presbyteries of Graaff-Reinet and Kariega (Uitenhage) joined the first MTC workshop.

- **From 28 February to 1 March 2024 the second MTC workshop has taken place with the ministers of the Malmesbury (Wesland) and Porterville presbyteries at URCSA Saldanha**. Eleven minsters attended the second MTC workshop.



In session with the colleagues of the presbyteries of Graaff-Reinet and Uitenhage.



Ministers from the presbyteries of Porterville and Malmesbury (Wesland) eager to learn more about this process of missional tranformation.

- The third MTC workshop was held from 11-13 March 2024 with the ministers of the presbyteries of Amandelboom, Clanwilliam and Steinkopf at URCSA Vanrhynsdorp. Nine ministers participated in the third workshop and the MSS was assisted by Rev. Clive Jacobs as co-facilitator.

- **The fourth MTC workshop took place from 9-11 July 2024 in East London with the ministers of the presbyteries of Cala, Mthatha and Rietvlei.** The workshop was attended by ministers (active and retired) and 2 part-time theological students. The MSS was assisted by the two co-chairs of Witness Ministry, Revs Victor Ntshabalala and Jan Grobbelaar.



Ministers from the presbyteries of Amandelboom, Clanwilliam, and Steinkopf who attended the MTC workshop at URCSA Vanrhynsdorp.



The MTC workshop with the presbyteries of Cala, Mthatha and Rietvlei .



MTC workshop, Goudini

From here we will continue with the MTC workshops to at least introduce the MTC process to all ministers. We also plan to have at least one follow up workshop with each cluster and to start with focused training with the ministers of the individual presbyteries soon. Hence, on 18 June 2024, another training workshop took place at URCSA Goudini, with ministers that will assist with the focused training and equipment of ministers of presbyteries.

With this shift of focus and strategy we hope and pray that more congregations will start and join the conversation about how and where God invites us to join God's mission and in doing so, sharpen our focus as the priesthood of believers."

1.2.1.2. The Missional Calling of Congregations

Although the focus of the MSS has shifted primarily to the training and equipment of the ministers, he constantly tries to keep theory and practice together.

Therefore, he accompanies a few congregations in discerning their missional calling. In some instances, his accompaniment includes a few workshops with a congregation, like with URCSA Stellenbosch, and in other instances he will assist congregations to start the conversation about their missional calling, like with URCSA Huguenot.

- **URCSA Stellenbosch – Missional Transformation kicks off in Stellenbosch**



On Sunday, 11 February 2024, he and Rev. Clive Jacobs, the minister of the congregation, resume the conversation about the missional calling of the church, with the church council. They were introduced to the missional transformation process and the three different phases were explained.

From here, the two of them will facilitate the Ethnographic Study and the Missional Conversation Board with the church council and other leaders of the congregation.

- **URCSA Huguenot, Paarl – Starting the Missional Conversation**



Flowing from the workshop Rev. Pedro facilitated with the Presbytery of Wellington, Rev. Michael Wildeman and his church council invited him to help them start the conversation of the missional calling of their congregation.

On 1 June 2024 he facilitated a session about the missional calling of the church, with the church council at the Manyano Centre, in Paarl. The church council expressed their eagerness to continue with the conversation, especially with the practical part of it.

1.2.2. CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY (CBS) & CONGREGATIONS

Contextual Bible Study remains our flagship programme through which we support our presbyteries, ministries, and congregations in building leadership capacity. We achieve this by training our leaders to facilitate CBS at the presbyterial, congregational, and community levels.

With this programme, our goal is not only to reignite a passion for Bible reading and Bible study but also to help our congregations and members rediscover the transformative power of the Bible at their disposal. Therefore, our vision remains to empower our congregations as agents of transformation and disciples of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

In recent months, we conducted CBS introduction workshops with two congregations: URCSA Beaufort West-East and URCSA Dimbaza. URCSA Dimbaza even extended CBS to the youth in their community.

• URCSA BEAUFORT WEST-EAST

On 16 March 2024, Rev. Willa McKay facilitated a CBS session with the church council and other leaders of the congregation. He introduced CBS to the leadership and guided them through the three parts of CBS, with a particular emphasis on the SEE and DISCERNMENT components.

We are looking forward to the follow-up workshop with the leaders of the congregation and the community," says Rev. Pedro.



Rev. Willa McKay (2nd from right) facilitated the CBS workshop. The local minister, Rev. Ruiter Julies (left from the banner)

• URCSA DIMBAZA



Here at Congregational Witness, Contextual Bible Study is not only our flagship training programme that we are rolling out to our presbyteries, congregations, and ministries. We also believe that we can do much more with this powerful tool to build leadership capacity, empowering our members, especially our youth.

This is precisely what happened when the ministers of URCSA Dimbaza, Rev. Victor Ntshabalala, with the assistance of Rev. Steven Potwana, worked with a group of young people and leaders from the Dimbaza community to introduce CBS as a tool to empower other young people with various skills and support their development.

We encourage presbyteries to do the same and use the CBS platform to invest in the young people of your congregations and communities.

Read more about it at https://bit.ly/3L7DnXt

1.2.3. FAITH FORMATION & SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Although the responsibility for equipping church council members, elders, deacons, and training congregational leaders like catechists lies with the presbyteries and ministers, we recognize this need, particularly in presbyteries and congregations with limited ministerial resources.

• URCSA KRAAIFONTEIN

On 27 April 2024, Rev. Pedro facilitated a workshop with a group of catechists (Sunday School and Confirmation) from URCSA Kraaifontein. They raised several key questions:

- Where does catechism fit within the structure of the church?
- What support is available for us as confirmation teachers?
- What are the characteristics of an effective catechism teacher?

Overall, it was a fruitful and blessed gathering. The outcomes of this workshop underscored the need for equipping our congregational leaders, particularly at the congregational level, and highlighted the importance of follow-up workshops.

We are currently mobilizing and empowering our emeriti ministers to assist with this need. We encourage congregations and presbyteries to inform us if there is a need for assistance in equipping leaders, especially church council members and catechists.





2. Support of Ministers and Ministerial Candidates (Proponents)

Due to the lack of an official support system or structure for our ministers, ministerial candidates, and their families from the synod's side, Rev. Pedro is currently establishing a support and engagement platform to address this need. In the meantime, he continues to support our ministers and ministerial candidates in various ways. This includes pastoral and induction conversations, participation in training workshops, and attending ministers' gatherings and events such as breakfasts and retraites.

Upcoming plans include leadership workshops tailored for our ministers and ministerial candidates, as well as utilizing this platform to engage our emeriti ministers and create collaborative opportunities for programmes and projects that will benefit our ministerial fraternity, congregations, and the broader church community.

2. 1. SUPPORT OF MINISTERS

Building of Leadership & Deepening Unity



Presbytery of Wynberg.



Presbytery of Clanwilliam.



Presbytery of Porterville.

- Workshops
- Conferences
- Retraites
- Breakfasts
- Installations

Building of relationships



Breakfast - 20 March 2024



Breakfast - 30 May 2024



Rev. Danny Bock's installation at URCSA De Aar.

2. 2. SUPPORT OF MINISTERIAL CANDIDATES

"Ministerial formation for our theological students can only cover so much regarding the practical side of ministry. It's crucial, especially after licensing, to immerse them in the smaller yet equally important practical aspects of ministry," says Rev. Pedro.

- **Building of Relationships & Deepening Unity**



Rev. Pieter Windvogel with colleagues at his ordination at URCSA Goudini.

This year, we aim to continue with the annual retraite for our ministerial candidates and launch the mentoring and coaching dimension of our support.

3. Support of Presbyteries

As usual, the support of our presbyteries includes providing advice, sharing information and materials, and empowering their members.

In the past six months, the MSS facilitated workshops with the presbyteries of Cala, Wellington, and Porterville.

3. 1. INFORMATIONAL & ADVISORY WORKSHOPS & CONVERSATIONS

- **WORKSHOP WITH THE PRESBYTERY OF CALA, URCSA INDWE**

The visit and workshop with the Presbytery of Cala took place over the weekend of 3 February 2024 at URCSA Indwe. “This was a long-overdue follow-up workshop, which was so necessary,” says Rev. Pedro.



The fact that all nine congregations of the presbytery were represented at the workshop, with a total of 31 elders and deacons, including the last serving minister, Rev. Derick Myburgh, is evident that there is a great need for personal contact between the synod, our presbyteries, and congregations.

The purpose of the workshop was to share relevant information and material, but especially to focus on the challenge that soon, if a calling of a minister does not take place in the coming months, the presbytery will have no minister in their resort.



- # CONVERSATIONS WITH THE PRESBYTERIES OF CALA & FISH RIVER

On 3 July 2024 the MSS, Rev. Pedro, had follow-up conversations with the leadership of the presbyteries of Cala and Fish River at URCSA Ezibileni, Komani. He requested the moderature to join him and was accompanied by Rev. Hendry Tromp (moderator) and Rev. Lucas Plaatjie (interim actuarius).

The goal of the visit was to attend to the urgent matters, that the presbytery only has one or no employed minister in their resort, and that most of the congregations of the presbytery are not sustainable.

We hope that this first-hand information received by the leadership will enable the moderature and synodical commission to give direction and advice that will help these presbyteries to take steps that will address the situation in a constructive and favourable way.



Presbytery of Cala



Presbytery of Fish River

3.2.1. THE MISSIONAL CALLING OF THE CHURCH - PRESBYTERIES

• PRESBYTERY OF WELLINGTON

The workshop with the Presbytery of Wellington took place on 1 June 2024 at URCSA Zions in Paarl. This was also a follow-up workshop, with the focus on missional leadership. More than eighty church council members and leaders of ministries attended the workshop.

It was once again a very blessed gathering, and we are very excited about the follow-up session where we will focus on the Missional Conversational Board (MCB).



• PRESBYTERY OF PORTERVILLE

The Presbytery of Porterville invited the MSS to facilitate a session about the missional calling of the church on Saturday, 8 June 2024, at Zikomo in Strand.

“What stood out for me is the strong leading role the presbytery plays in the ministerial activities of the congregations in their presbyterial resort, and their communal activities like outreaches, Pentecost services, etc. Their presbyterial vision contributed to this strong bond of affiliation and cooperation,” says Rev. Pedro.

One of the outcomes of the session is the presbytery's commitment to start a process of rethinking and reimagining their missional calling and presbyterial vision to evaluate whether their presbyterial and congregational activities are still in step with God’s mission for today’s challenges facing their presbytery, congregations, and the community around them.





3.2.2. CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY – PRESBYTERIES

This year, we will be focusing on the training of current and new CBS facilitators at the presbytery level. The plan is to make a special effort to reach and empower our youth leaders during these spaces we will be creating with CBS.

• URCSA MOTHERWELL, GQEBERHA



On 20 January 2024, the MSS kicked off the CBS training with a group of CBS facilitators at URCSA Motherwell, Gqeberha. Far left is Rev. M. Soga, the local minister.

• WITNESS MINISTRY OFFICE, BELLVILLE



Rev. Stephen Pedro (MSS: Congregational Witness) facilitates a planning session with Rev. Rachel Linderoth, Rev. Aidan Windvogel, and Rev. Cecile Murray-Louw.

Having a think tank for continual planning and training is an important facet of Contextual Bible Study. On Tuesday, 21 May, Rev. Pedro had such a session with a group of ministers.

• URCSA GOUDINI, RAWSONVILLE



CBS Training workshop with ministers and ministerial candidates (proponents) at URCSA Goudini, Rawsonville.

On Wednesday, 19 June 2024, a very important CBS training workshop took place at URCSA Goudini, Rawsonville. The training was facilitated by our colleagues from our partner, The Warehouse.

Almost 25 ministers, ministerial candidates, elders, and congregants attended the training. From here, we will have a few follow-up training sessions with these CBS facilitators. They will also take CBS to their congregations and facilitate at least one CBS with a ministry or a group of congregants from their congregation to gain practical experience.

In the future, they will also be called upon to assist the ministers and church councils when they want to do a CBS workshop as part of the assessment phase of the Missional Transformation process of their congregations.



4. Partnerships & Networks

• MSS COORDINATION FORUM

An important aspect of synodical service is to work together in a coordinated fashion regarding overlapping synodical decisions and communal challenges facing our congregations and presbyteries.

To discuss this and other aspects, and to encourage one another, the Ministers in Synodical Service of URCSA Cape try to meet on a regular basis. Such a meeting took place on 11 March 2024.



• GRAPE PROGRAMME OF WCRC

Identifying opportunities to build new networks and partnerships to strengthen our support and accompaniment of congregations and presbyteries is a vital part of our strategy and a priority for Congregational Witness and Witness Ministry.

Such a partnership started this year when Rev. Stephen Pedro joined the Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement (GRAPE) programme of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

The aim of the GRAPE programme is to mobilise the member churches of the WCRC to get involved locally with Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement to contribute to meaningful change for just and peaceful societies.

At Congregational Witness, we are especially excited that this partnership with the GRAPE programme will strengthen and benefit our Contextual Bible Study (CBS) project, particularly at the stage we are currently in, as we bring CBS to our congregations. This programme will help us empower our congregations and presbyteries to address challenges such as poverty, unemployment, the impact of COVID-19, the climate crisis, etc.

The South African part of the GRAPE team has championed themselves for the mission to advocate for a Universal Basic Income Grant (UBIC) which will challenge the extreme income inequality, widespread poverty, and soaring unemployment rates.



Rev. Stephen Pedro, manager of Congregational Witness (back row, 2nd from right), Dr Llewellyn MacMaster, former moderator of URCSA Cape Regional Synod (back row, far left), and Rev. Bonganjalo Mbenenge (back row, middle) with the group who attended the GRAPE workshop in Johannesburg.



Members of cohorts 1 and 2 who attended the GRAPE workshop in Windhoek.

• OTHER SYNODS



During his visit to Windhoek in Namibia, Rev. Stephen Pedro reached out to Dr Zack Pienaar from the DRC Namibia Synod. Dr Pienaar is also working with congregations within their synod.



In June this year, Dr Daniël de Wet and Rev. Stephen Pedro were accompanied by the moderators of the DRC Western Cape, and of the URCSA Cape Regional Synods on their visit to our sister church in Zimbabwe, the Reformed Church of Zimbabwe (RCZ). On the photo, which was taken at their meeting in Masvingo, stand from left to right at the back: Dr. Daniël de Wet (Witness Ministry), Rev. Tafadzwa Masimba (RCZ's general secretary), Rev. Stephen Pedro (Witness Ministry). and sit from left to right in the front row: Rev. Hendry Tromp (URCSA Cape's moderator), Rev. Isaac Pandasvika (RCZ's moderator), and Rev. Marinus Theron (DRC Western Cape's moderator).