

Mission calling in a congregation of the Dutch Reform Church of Africa in a transforming society: A case study in South Africa

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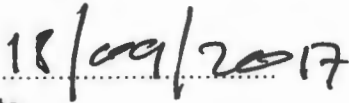
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DECLARATION

I Molebatsi.Peter. Konzane 21901562 declare that this mini-dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been appropriately acknowledged. The mini-dissertation is being submitted for the masters of Arts Degree in Theology (Missiology) in the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, in the Department of Theology of the North West University: Mafikeng Campus, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.



Molebatsi Peter Konzane



Date



Professor S.J. van der Merwe



Date

PREFACE

This piece of work is dedicated to my late parents, Johannes and Seitshiro Konzane, who both taught and nurtured me to be what I am today. It is also dedicated to my in-laws, the late John and Manneo Marapyane, for giving me a wife who stands by me through thick and thin. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my sons, Tiisetso and Sizwe, who put up with the absence of their father, most of evenings, while studying.

It is further dedicated to my mentor Rev. Seroke Kgobokoe, who is tirelessly willing to part with astute advice, at any given time, as well as to my supervisor, Prof. Sarel van der Merwe, who determinedly continues to assist me with his insightful, resolute comments and fruitful suggestions that fortified me throughout my studies.

Most of all I thank the Almighty Lord, our God, for the wonderful opportunity that He gave me, Who continues to shower us with His blessings throughout our lives.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study is to investigate and analyse the missionary calling of the Molopo congregation in the transforming society of South Africa. The Molopo congregation is struggling to cross the frontiers because of the transforming society within its borders. In order to break down these barriers, solutions have to be solicited to respond to questions such as: What are the circumstances of transformation and what is the *Missio Dei* and its meaning for the church of today?

As the body has many parts each with a specific function, similarly the congregation has different members, each with varying talents that have to be used to advance the gospel and spread the Word of God (Greenway, 1999:171). The members of the Molopo congregation must learn how they can complement one another and work together in advancing the church of Christ.

The study indicates the way in which the Molopo congregation should understand and take part in the *missio Dei* in their context to remain committed in communicating the gospel and transforming society according to the Word of God. As such, when the Molopo church understand and take part in the *missio Dei*, it will become a missional church that retains and grows its members and nurtures them to be transformed so that the church fulfils God's command to be the salt and light in society.

Key words:

Mission; Calling; Molopo Congregation; Classis; Colonised; Membership; Decline; Ethnic; Lichtenburg; Reformation; Transformation; Zeerust

OPSOMMING

Die hoofdoel van hierdie studie is om die missionêre roeping van die Molopo-gemeente in die veranderende saamlewing van Suid-Afrika te ondersoek en analiseer. Die Molopo-gemeente sukkel om die grense daarvan te oorbrug, as gevolg van die veranderende samelewing in hulle omgewing. Om hierdie struikelblokke te oorbrug, moet oplossings gevind word om op vrae soos die volgende te antwoord: Wat is die omstandighede van verandering en wat is die *missio Dei* en die betekenis daarvan vir die kerk vandag?

Soos die liggaam verskillende ledemate het, elkeen met sy eie funksie, het die gemeente verskillende lidmate, elk met hulle eie talente om die evangelie te bevorder en God se Woord te verkondig (Greenway, 1999:171). Die lidmate van die Molopo-gemeente moet leer hoe hulle mekaar kan aanvul en saam tot die bevordering van die kerk van Christus kan werk.

Hierdie studie wys hoe die Molopo-gemeente die *missio Dei* binne hulle konteks moet verstaan en uitdra sodat hulle toegewyd die evangelie kan verkondig en die samelewing volgens God se Woord kan rig. Sodra die Molopo-gemeente die *missio Dei* verstaan en daarin deel, sal dit missionale kerk word wat hulle lidmate behou en vermeerder en koester om hulle so te verander dat die kerk God se opdrag om die sout en lig in die samelewing te wees, sal vervul.

Sleutelterme:

Sending; Roeping; Molopo-gemeente; Klassis; Gekoloniseer; Lidmaatskap; Afname; Etniese; Lichtenburg; Reformasie; Verandering; Zeerust

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1 Chapter 1: Formulating The Problem

1.1 Background information

When a church is part of the *Missio Dei*, it will grow and expand. This occurred immediately after Pentecost. The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Many wonders and miraculous signs were done during this time by the apostles, filling believers with admiration, and the Lord increased the number of new believers daily (Acts 2:42-47). When the church is devoted to the means of grace and its life symbolises the attractive life of the kingdom to itself, Goheen (2011:148) asserts, the Lord will add believers. This in essence means that the church has a pertinent role to play in ensuring that the Word of God is proclaimed to people to permit God to increase its believers. When people live in darkness and are not properly educated according to the Word of God, they tend to cling to darkness. When they are guided and they are shown light, they can indeed be transformed (Nida, 1990:253-255).

The Molopo congregation, which is based in the rural area of Buhrmansdrif north of Mafikeng town, faces the frightening challenge of a decline in membership and is unable to assert itself as an agent of transformation after 1994, the post-apartheid era. This study seeks to analyse the decline of membership and to investigate how it can be turned into a growing church. The main focus of this study is the Molopo congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) within the Lichtenburg/Zeerust Classis and references are made to the DRCA: North and South Transvaal Regional Synod. The Molopo congregation has considerable representation and influence in the DRCA: North and South Transvaal Regional Synod (DRCANSTS) when it comes to issues of national interest. Yet while they are fulfilling a positive role in the Synod, problems at home, such as a decline in membership, are neglected and this is of grave concern.

The membership of Molopo congregation was determined to be in the region of one thousand three hundred and twenty (1 320) by the year 2003, according to the membership register, and has decreased by two hundred and seventeen (217) members to one thousand one hundred and three (1 103) members, representing 16.4%, at the time of conducting this study and in accordance with the Dutch Reformed Church 2014 Yearbook. This constitutes a decrease of 16.5%, when the membership of any church of Christ should actually increase and have influence in its community. This is a hindrance to God's mission. God's calling presents believers with a lifelong responsibility to direct their energy and ambition towards renewing the world. In the beginning (Gen. 1:28) God called people to be stewards of the kingdom. God created everything good (Gen. 2.1), but it was blemished by sin (Gen. 3). God's purpose is to

redeem His creation, to restore its original gleam and to renew it beyond all imagination. The calling of stewards is a sign of mercy and the work for justice (Mic.6:8), as God would mysteriously but surely guides His purposes (Phil. 2:13). Related to this calling should be the Bible prescripts indicating God's indiscriminate love. Believers are called to live honestly and openly demonstrate the virtues of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, and other fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23). This must be practiced in their daily lives that they may be the salt and light of the world.

During 1990 drastic change occurred in South Africa. The political situation changed with the unbanning of political parties and the subsequent release of Nelson Mandela (Hamilton, 2001:50). Apartheid was abolished. A new era ensued, ushering in a democratic constitution, allowing freedom of religion in the country. The people were not prepared for the drastic changes that were brought about by the introduction of a democratic environment, which gave rise to the migration of people and unrealistic expectations.

The introduction of the Labour Relation Act (66 of 1995), which aims to promote economic development, social justice, labour, peace and democracy in the country, has also put pressure on farmers in terms of the improvement of working conditions and paying employees in accordance to the stipulation of this Act. These and many other reasons compelled farm labourers, who constituted a great part of this congregation, to leave their employment on farms. This gave rise to new squatter¹ camps springing up around towns.

There were also some who left because of a sense of entitlement that the government must provide them with free housing, water and electricity as well as free education without any effort on their part. The government must also cater for the aged, the disabled, children born out of wedlock and orphans.

The number of South African children under the age of 14 years benefiting from the R200 per month grant to caregivers, earning less than R800 per month, was over 8 million² in 2007.

During the 2013/14 financial year, the North West Provincial Government, through the Department of Human Settlement, handed over 8 000 RDP houses across the Province³. These figures exclude the recipients of childcare grants.

¹ Land Act (19 of 1988). South African Squatter Rights December 9, 2013

² UN Office for the Humanitarian Affairs November, 29, 2007.

³ Together we Move Northwest Forward, Saamwerk-Saamtrek. February, 5, 2014

Farmers, who are pressured to comply with this Act, do not make it any easier for farm labourers. They continue to dismiss these workers from their farms. There are also instances where a farm has changed hands and the new owners refuse permission families to bury their dead on their farms and to an extent these farm dwellers are evicted from the places where their fathers have spent their entire lives (Lamprecht, 2012/13).

This creates a problem, because African tradition dictates that the dead needs to relate to the soil of their birth in order to connect with their ancestors. This aspect, however, falls outside the scope of this study.

The result of these and many other contributing factors are such that most of the communities living in and around the boundaries of Molopo congregation are faced with great poverty, a high unemployment rate and a high illiteracy level. These factors result in a high rate of child pregnancy, leading to uncontrollable the spread of communicable diseases. The Molopo congregation must address these issues, because God called them to transform the community.

The liberation of Israel out of Egypt shows that transformation is not easy. Democracy requires responsibility to keep the calling of God to be kingly priesthood, which is as valid today as it was for Israel. (Judg. 17:6). Transforming from flock herders to city dwellers, who had to take up sewing and harvesting, was an insurmountable challenge for Israel.

Everything changed in society and even trusted relationships between mother and daughter churches were influenced. The Molopo congregation buckled under the pressures that came with transformation. History made the Molopo congregation that is part of the DRCA was entirely dependent on the mother church, a member of the DRC, and the congregation was not prepared for the sudden transformation that took place.

The congregation was not equipped for this new dispensation, as was the case for the Israelites who also struggled. One of the main problems the Israelites encountered, according to Reggie (2007:2), was grasping that there is only one God. They believed that a god was needed for every area of life, i.e. a god that brings rain, another god that ensures a good harvest, one for winning wars, etc.

Similarly, people tend to misconstrue democracy as the removing the standards, as if God is no longer relevant in the new dispensation. Globalisation plays an important part in this belief. The result is that people end up believing that our conduct and opinions are left entirely up to us.

The area in which the Molopo congregation is situated is populated by an apparent influx of people from various places making it a highly diverse culture. These people have not only

taken the businesses owned by locals, but have also stolen the hearts of the young girls in order to impregnate them and thereby entice them into marriage to acquire citizenship. This in itself is part of a changing reality in this society and as Kritzinger (2000: 95) surmises, it stimulates a new missiological field amongst various religions. Mosques are beginning to become a common site in the area and have been growing at a fantastic rate in the past 20 years (Van Gelder, 1999:4). These religious groupings are actively involved in the activities of the community and the community is thus easily persuaded.

Urbanisation has quite a number of positives, (Greenway, 2007:10-17) yet it also comes with a range of consequences that leads to the degeneration of morality. The Molopo congregation has to be courageous in dealing with these challenges, as Bosch states (2008:239-2243), to enable successful transformation - as was the case during the Middle Ages. They should not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Rom.1:16), as it is the power of God for salvation to those who believe. The dependency syndrome that the Molopo congregation fell prey to impeded their understanding of *missio Dei*, i.e. the commitment to proclaiming the gospel and transforming society. The Molopo congregation lacks the training to take part in the *Missio Dei* and be the salt and light of the earth as God requires. As Conder (2006:168) highlights, what is needed is the posture of persons seeking to perpetually participate in God's work. The failure of Molopo congregation to participate in God's work makes it unable to inspire hope and advance the transformation of society.

1.2 Problem Statement

The church has to serve mankind unselfishly, thus transforming humans holistically (Bosch, 1985:35-36). The church is called to the mission of bringing to all nations the good news of salvation in Christ (Hedlund, 1991:199). The Molopo congregation does not understand the *Missio Dei* and lack the commitment to proclaim the gospel in a way that will grow and transform society toward glorifying God. The decline in membership and failure to take part in the *Missio Dei* has contributed to Molopo congregation to be irrelevant as a church.

This study endeavours to show that a better understanding of the *Missio Dei* will enable the church to equip its members to bear the pressures that come with transformation and how this transformation can be used to affirm itself as a vehicle of reconciliation of the people with God, thus retaining its members.

The Molopo congregation is not proclaiming the gospel to society, in accordance with the Word of God, giving rise to a continual decline in Christians and an impediment to God's mission.

The main question that this study raises is: What must the Molopo congregation do to become an active part of the *missio Dei* so that it grows and transforms society to glorify God?

1.3 Central Research Question

The central research question of this study is: How should the Molopo congregation understand and take active part in the *missio Dei* in their context, to remain committed in communicating the gospel and transforming society according to the Word of God?

The questions arising from the above problem are:

- What is the history and context in which the Molopo congregation is functioning after 1994?
- Why has the membership been declining in the past 20 years?
- What is the *missio Dei* and its implication for the Molopo congregation's active participation in it?
- What preliminary guidelines, found on the *missio Dei*, will enable the Molopo congregation to fulfil their calling.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to develop preliminary guidelines for equipping the members of this congregation with the Word of God to ensure that they understand and remain true to the cause of Christianity. This study undertakes to develop preliminary guidelines, based on the *missio Dei*, for the Molopo congregation to fulfil their calling.

In order for this to be a success, the study focuses on the following objectives:

To investigate the basic academic aspects to determine the positive contribution that can be made toward developing and retaining the current believers as well as drawing in more believers within and around the boundaries of Molopo congregation, the following questions are addressed:

- What is the history and context in which the Molopo congregation is functioning after 1994?
- Why has the membership of Molopo congregation declined over the past twenty years?
- What is the *missio Dei* and its meaning for the Molopo congregation of today?
- How can preliminary guidelines found on the *missio Dei* be developed for the Molopo congregation to fulfil their calling?

1.5 Central theoretical argument

Once the Molopo congregation understands and takes part in the *Missio Dei*, they will become a missional church that retains and grows its members and nurtures them to be transformed so that the church fulfils God's command to be the salt and light in society.

1.6 Research Methodology

This missiological research study proceeds from the Reformed theology tradition. Information is analysed by examining various related academic scholarly sources, Scripture as well as comparative literature research. This research study focuses more on the role of leadership than that of laity. Since most of the records and writings are unavailable, leaders and members have been interviewed to obtain their perspective and this was done according to the NWU ethical code of conduct. The elders who willing and able were also interviewed to obtain knowledge of the past. The method is a mixed method research using literate study, primary sources and empirical research.

1.7 Study Limitations

This research study is hampered in the sense that transformation is a very broad area. It affects lives and past experiences, especially the emotional wounds, and hence, the need to investigate the past and bring about closure. Once we are saved, we begin the journey of growth and transformation to becoming more and more like Christ (Rom. 8:29). In the process of growth, we don't rely on our own ability but on this new identity and Christ within (Col. 1:27). We are to live out of salvation (Phil. 2:12). The contents of this research study are confined to the Molopo congregation. It is not possible to give a detailed history of the congregation, because of the unavailability of records, but the focus is trained on issues relevant to the study. It is also not possible to address the whole scope of transformation and, therefore, only the relevant points are highlighted. Therefore, this study lays an informed basis for future studies, while taking into consideration the period in which this study is undertaken. It is expected that it will offer assistance on the set of issues that sit at the centre of the challenges of transformation, focusing on the Molopo congregation. This can be of value to the North and South Regional Synod in general in ensuring that other congregations within their boundaries do a similar exercise, in order to assist them to understand and take part in the *missio Dei*. It will assist the synod with making its congregations missional churches to retain and grow its members and nurture them towards transformation that the church may fulfil God's command to be the salt and light in society.

1.8 Chapter Division

This research begins with a review of the work previously done, the history of the Molopo congregation and the context in which they have been functioning. It also investigates the reasons for the decline in membership of the Molopo congregation in the past 20 years. The correct understanding of the *missio Dei*, in helping the Molopo church of today to be missional, is also studied. Finally, preliminary guidelines found on the *missio Dei* are presented for the Molopo congregation to fulfil their calling.

The research is conducted from the Reformed Theology Tradition as the researcher is a member of the DRCA, who has held several positions such as the Secretary and the Treasurer of the church council, he has also held a position of the Secretary of the Regional Synod.



2 Chapter 2: The History of the Molopo Congregation and the Context in Which They Have Been Functioning Since 1994

2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the history of the Molopo congregation and the context in which they have been functioning since 1994, it is imperative to first briefly relate how the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) came about in South Africa and what gave rise to the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA), the church to which the Molopo congregation is affiliated. In other words, the study first details the background of the DRC and then continues with that of the DRCA, through to the background of the Molopo congregation. This chapter intends primarily to provide an overview of the recent events of the Molopo congregation.

2.2 Background information about the DRC

The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) came into being with the settlement of the first Europeans in the Cape in 1652, during the era of colonisation (Hofmeyr, 12). The doctrines of the DRC are captured in the following three articles of faith:

- i. The Heidelberg catechism, which consists of 129 questions on all the essential aspects of Christian doctrine
- ii. The Belgic Confession of Faith, which was mainly compiled by Guido de Bres in 1561, consists of 37 articles that deals with the fundamental aspects of the Christian faith such as the nature of God, the Bible, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, original sin, election, the incarnation and the sacraments
- iii. The Canons of Dordt, the statement of faith produced by the Synod of Dordt held in 1618/1619 in the Netherlands

These affirm the following five points:

- i. The complete depravity of humanity
- ii. Unconditional election
- iii. Full atonement
- iv. Irresistible grace
- v. Perseverance of the saints

The Calvinist position is that: God has predestined who will and will not be saved and therefore, people cannot contribute to their salvation

The Europeans used slave labour since their settlement in South Africa in 1652. These Europeans began evangelising their slaves and the local tribes. As the slaves and local tribes were converted, they were accepted into the church and permitted to congregate together with the white converts. More slaves and local tribes were converted and the discomfort of being around black or coloured people became apparent amongst the whites.

The first synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), held on South African soil in the year 1824⁴, discussed the possibility of establishing a missionary church separate from the main church, but the white members continued to congregate with the coloured and black population. The idea of a separate missionary church, fuelled by the discomfort that white members felt in sharing the cup with people of colour (black people) during the Holy Communion service, emerged as far back as 1829.

As Saayman (2007:20-21) points out, the white colonists found any physical contact with indigenous people very difficult if not obnoxious. White believers in South Africa were unable to overcome the divide in fellowship and leadership, as the community in Jerusalem and in Antioch that was made up of Jews and the gentiles (Goheen, 2011:148). Their communal life was bound together only by the grace of God and commitment to Jesus Christ and thus these believers were appropriately the first to be called “Christians” (Acts 11:26), characterised not by their ethnicity or their religious observances, but by the One they follow.

In essence the white settlers arrived at the Cape of Good Hope with a preconceived notion of superiority over the black population, whom they considered to be uncouth and pagan in nature. Baptised slaves and other indigenous peoples were accepted as members of the mother church from the founding of the Colony, as mentioned, and they all attended church services and received sacraments together⁵. This led to the Cape Synod reluctantly agreeing to make concessions to human weakness and permitted, in particular circumstances, separate ministering of the sacraments and the Word (Hofmeyr, 2002:114). The decision of that sitting reads as follows:

“The Synod considers it desirable according to the Holy Scripture that our heathen members (non-Whites) be accepted and initiated into our congregations wherever it is possible; but where measure, as a result of the weakness of some, would stand in the way of promoting the work of

⁴ It would be cumbersome to give a full account of the history of the DRC of more than 350 years in this research, only a brief framework is provided to arrive at the formation of the DRCA (Kriel, 1961).

⁵ The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the problem of race relations.

Christ among the heathen people, then congregations set up among the heathen, or still to be set up, should enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate building or institution.”

It is rather difficult to interpret these concerns as a prediction of a policy of separate churches, as Smith (1980:82-83) indicates, but it was a decision to enable congregations to gather separately for Communion services and nothing more.

The Zendelings Genootschappen, a missionary society, was established in 1834 solely to Christianise the natives and group them in parishes. This move paved the way for the establishment of separate indigenous congregations and ultimately separate churches. In addition to this, the Holy Communion which was served separately also gave way to the church developing divisions. Consequently, the Synod of 1880 made the decision to establish a missionary church on 12 November 1880 (Kriel, 1961:79). These developments resulted in the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) on 5 October 1881 at Wellington. The fact that the Synod did not give the DRMC full power to govern itself was indicative of problems to come in the future, a sentiment highlighted by Rev. Paulus Teske on the day the decision was taken. Rev. Paulus Teske asserted that the decisions of an established church cannot be rectified by a small commission of a different church, a statement seconded by his elder (Kriel, 1961:79).

Over time apartheid crystallised and by 1940 it was used by various DRC ministers, such as Rev. J.C. du Plessis who claimed being responsible for the first recorded use of the ideology (Giliomee, 2003:374). This further fuelled the idea of a separate church. The main objective of establishing the DRMC was to ensure that white members do not share the Holy Communion cup with their black counterparts.

2.3 Background information on the DRCA

The decision of congregating separately was enforced with the forming of a mission church for the black population in the Free State during 1910. It should be noted, however, the formation of this mission church did not entirely discourage the black and coloured believers from congregating together in other parts of the country, since establishing a church for the black population only came later in other Provinces. Unlike the coloured church, which was homogeneous throughout the Republic, the black church was formed according to the demarcation of the four provinces that constituted South Africa at the time. These were as follows:

- Orange Free State: DR Mission Church in Orange Free State in 1910

- Transvaal: Transvaal DR Mission Church in 1932
 - Cape Province: DR Bantu Church in South Africa in 1951
 - Natal DR Mission Church in 1952
- From the years 1881 and 1951 there was no ethnic differentiation in the DR Mission Churches of the other provinces between coloured and black members, except for the Free State. This ethnic differentiation arose from the mission work of the white Cape Synod in the Transkei, leading to the formation of the DR Bantu Church in 1951. Church planting policy along racial lines in the DRC since 1881 was influenced by the introduction of self-governing indigenous churches, which was a concept developed by Anglican Henry Venn and an American Congregationalist Rufus Anderson who were the missionaries of their respective denominations (Kritzinger, Meiring & Saayman, 1994:7-8). Nonetheless, because those churches were reliant on white churches to provide ministers and assist with church buildings, the idea of self-sustainment failed to realise.

Even though separate churches were established for the black and coloured groups, they continued to congregate together in other parts of the republic. This began to change in the mid-fifties when the DRC conducted mission work in the Cape Province, where they established the DR Bantu Church in 1951 (Smith, 1980:104-105). It then became mandatory for black believers to congregate separately from the coloured, upon the introduction of apartheid in 1948. The DRMC remained firmly with coloured converts, mainly in the Cape Province, and the four churches that were constituted according to the demarcation of the provinces remained with the black.

Because black believers were now congregating separately, the four mission churches (namely, the DR Mission Church in Orange Free State, DR Mission Church in Transvaal, DR Mission Church in Natal and the DR Bantu Church in South Africa) merged on 7 May 1963 and formed the "Dutch Reformed Church in Africa - DRCA" (General Synod Acta Kroonstad, 1963). The merger abolished the four churches and, as mentioned, the DRCA was formed in Kroonstad. The DRCA is firmly based on the Bible as the holy and infallible Word of God, with the five essential doctrines of *Five Solas* of Protestant Reformation – *Sola Scriptura* or Scripture Alone, *Sola Gratia* or Salvation by Grace Alone, *Sola Fide* or Salvation by Faith Alone, *Sola Christi* or In Christ Alone and *Soli Deo Gloria* or For the Glory of God Alone. These essential doctrines are set out in the doctrinal standards or confessions of the DRCA, namely in the three articles of faith that include: The Dutch Confession of Faith (*Confessio Belgica*), The Heidelberg Catechism and The Canons of Dordt (General Synod Acta Kroonstad, 1963).

The general Synod of the DRCA comprised seven regional synods, namely:

1. Cape Regional Synod
2. Free State Regional Synod
3. Natal Regional Synod
4. Northern Transvaal Regional Synod
5. Phororo Regional Synod
6. South Transvaal Regional Synod
7. Transkei Regional Synod

Even though the DRC planted the DRMC and the DRCA using an autonomous concept, these churches did not have complete control or self-governing authority (Kriel, 1961:78). The decisions of these churches were to be ratified by a commission established by the DRC and was an issue right from the establishment of the DRMC, as raised by Rev. Paulus Teske (Kriel, 1961:79). In other words, these missionary churches were to remain dependent on the mother church. It was evident at this point that the DRC wanted to retain control over the two churches (DRMC and DRCA), nicknamed daughter churches ("dogterkerke").

As Smith (1980:39) indicates, the DRC continued its efforts of mission work in 1947 and planted yet another church, the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) along the same principles of racial classification. The RCA was established to cater for the Indians. They had only four congregations with two in Natal, one in the Cape Province and the other in Transvaal.

The DRCA made the decision, at its Third General Synod sitting in Worcester, to unite with other family⁶ churches (DRCA: Acta Worcester, 1978). This decision was emphasised at the Fifth General Synod in Barkley-West in June 1983 (DRCA: ACTA Barkley-West, 1983), as a result of the discussion emanating from the DRMC report about reconciliation and apartheid. The report led to the apartheid policy being interpreted as one that separated people along language, racial and colour lines.

The apartheid policy thus ensured that the coming close to each other for the purpose of God was in essence invalidated, supported by government legislation and brutal police enforcement.

The Synod (ACTA Barkley-West 1983) concluded that this environment was not conducive to genuine Christian reconciliation. The report gave rise to the perception that the DRC was ambiguous and ambivalent in its language of apartheid. As such the DRC was not considered ready for church unity and stalling the negotiations purposefully. Despite this, the DRMC and

⁶ The family churches refer to DRC, DRMC, DRCA and RCA that came into existence as a result of mission work carried out by the DRC, the latter being the "mother church" and others being the "daughter churches", as they are affectionately known,

the DRCA continued their quest for unity.

During the same Synod, the DRMC's Status Confessionis document of 1982 was discussed and adopted (Agenda & Acts DRMC, 1982: 22). This document was fundamental in shaping negotiations and the road towards unity between the DRCA and the DRMC.

In order for unity to be realised, there was to be a process of negotiations and that process was to concern, but not be limited to, the following issues, namely:

- The church order and the Reformation principles that corresponded (e.g. the position of the general synod on the quality of ministers) were to be enhanced to allow for all ministers to serve in all areas of the church.
- The continuous training of clergy and personnel (proficiency in the classical languages to ensure equity) was to be maintained. The syllabus of the student clergy was to be the same irrespective of colour or race.
- The use of language being mindful of its sensitivity. Afrikaans was the predominant language used within these family churches, and was to be investigated to allow use of other language.
- The manner in which meetings were to be administered was not to dilute content. Meetings were conducted in Afrikaans, even among the black congregations.

The process was to take place in a conducive and trusting atmosphere, where all the party could work with confidence and pleasure. No resolutions or decisions were to be suppressed. It was agreed that this would be a process that would take time to be realised (ACTA Barkly West, 1983). The process was based on the principles of Reformation in which family churches were to be present to ensure fairness and finality.

The quest for unity was hampered for various reasons, such as the official language and qualifications of the clergy. Even though racism was not cited as being amongst the reasons hampering unity, it was seemingly implied. This is evident in the fact that the white ministers, serving in the DRMC and the DRCA, did not eat together during gatherings such as the general synod sittings and they also booked different sleeping accommodation, in compliance with the government policy of separate development.

The DRMC and the DRCA Churches took the issue of racial theology and practice in South Africa to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in 1982, after many years of struggle. Dr Allan Boesak delivered a speech at the WARC on the situation of South Africa, in which he argued against racism and apartheid. It was at this meeting where apartheid was

declared a sin and that its moral and theological justification was a travesty of the Gospel and in its continuance disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy. Given the decision of the WARC⁷, the DRMC resolved during the same year to confess anew the truth of the Bible in the light of the quasi gospel. A new confession was developed and tabled at the Synod of 1986 and this confession was accepted on 26 September 1986 (ACTA Umtata, 1987). It was to be known as the Belhar Confession, since it was accepted in the suburb of Belhar in the Western Cape.

The DRCA General Synod in Belhar during 1994, following its decision, resolved to unite with the DRMC. It was for this reason that this gathering resolved to take advantage of the DRMC: General Synod that was incidentally also sitting in the neighbourhood of Belhar, thus making it easier for the two to meet, and to finalise the unity of these two churches. An agreement was made and the new Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) was founded on 14 April 1994 (Elphick & Devonport, 1997:154).

This agreement of uniting the two churches was made (Acta Belhar, Synodi URCSA 1994) in recognition of all the long-unfolding processes that were paving the way to unity, such as rectifying the issues mentioned above. To emphasise their point, the newly formed leadership requested a meeting with Dr. N.R. Mandela. They informed him that they had merged the DRMC and the DRCA, citing oppression by a white government as their main reason. The agreement predominantly excluded the two partners of the DRC and the RCA. This is why the newly formed church was named "Uniting", indicating that the process of unity was not yet complete and still to be pursued in the future.

The agreement was not accepted by all representatives of the seven DRCA Regional Synods, as the moderator of Phororo (Rev. M.J. Lebone) refused to sign given that the general synod as temporary structure could not resolve such an issue without the blessing of the congregations. His position was not surprising since it was conspicuous in his moderator's report to the DRCA General Synod in Umtata (ACTA: Umtata, 1987). The moderator of Natal (Rev. Z.B. Nkosi) passed away during the synod and was as such also unable to sign. The moderator of the Free State (Rev. D. Matabola) was expelled (Kgobokoe 13/14) by the DRCA: Free State Regional Synod for reporting the news on arrival, since he was not mandated to a decision his blessing that still needed to be discussed by the congregations prior to its finalisation by the general synod (DRCA: Church Order, 1964).

The above-mentioned activities ensued contrary to the formal evaluation of the Belhar

⁷ WARC Ottawa 1982, Proceedings of the 21st General Council, Geneva: <http://www.warc.ch.dcw/bs25/11.html>

Confession by the DRCA. It is a known fact that the DRCA at its Sixth General Synod, in Barkley-West in 1983, had an opportunity to evaluate the Belhar Confession as petitioned by the DRMC, and referred it to a commission for further study. The DRCA had another opportunity to re-evaluate this Confession at its General Synod of 1987 and again referred it to their Commission for Scripture and Confession to investigate the desirability of the acceptance of this Confession and also investigate to what extent the acceptance thereof may promote or impede the unification process of the family churches. At the extraordinary sitting of the DRCA in Cape Town on 1 October 1990 (represented by six of its seven regional synods, namely: Orange Free State, Phororo, Southern Transvaal, Northern Transvaal, Cape Province and Natal), it resolved to adopt the Belhar Confession. The DRCA adopted Belhar Confession⁸ during the Synod of 1991 and the DRCA Church Order was amended to permit Belhar to be part of the confessional basis of the DRCA.

There would seem that 1991 to 1994 was a cooling period that would allow members of the DRCA to digest the adopting of Belhar Confession and finally merging with the DRMC. The understanding was that the merging of DRCA and DRMC would bring to end these two entities and become a church named Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa (URCSA). Some members of the DRCA refused to accept the Belhar Confession. The newly established URCSA was formed with the exclusion of these members. On realising that these groups continued to make use of the name "DRCA", the URCSA was infuriated by this DRCA group that refused to be part of the newly established church and took the matter to the High Court, claiming that the DRCA no longer existed having been dissolved and that all rights, privileges, properties, assets and liabilities for the legal entity DRCA had been transferred to the corresponding legal entity of the URCSA. The DRCA Phororo representing 26 congregations together with the DRCA Free State representing 76 congregations defended the matter, but the court ruled in favour of the URCSA.

The two regional synods then took the matter to the Highest Court of Appeal in Bloemfontein, (Case No. 536/96). Chief Justice Judge Harms, sitting with four other judges, found that the previous court erred in its decision in that the general synod cannot take decisions about the assets of the church without the consent of the church councils according to the DRCA Church Order 1964.

Following the Presbyterian system that the DRCA prescribe to, ultimate decision making rests with the church council and not the general synod as it is a temporary entity that exists because

⁸ Synod DRCA 1991 article 36.1 of Church Order

the congregations exist. The chief justice then pronounced that the DRCA exists with all its rights, privileges, properties, assets and liabilities (Appeal Case No. 536/96). He further elucidated that URCSA has the right to constitute itself as a church, but should refrain from taking the properties of the other church.

Notwithstanding the pronouncement of the judge, the newly established URCSA took all the property within the boundaries of the five regional synods in the areas of the Cape Province, Natal, Transvaal and parts of the Orange Free State.

The remaining congregations from parts of Free State and Cape Province formed two DRCA Regional Synods namely, Free State and Phororo. The DRCA background is described mainly to provide information as to how it is structured and its congregation affiliates. The Molopo congregation is one of the congregations affiliated to Phororo Regional Synod. This research seeks to relate how the Molopo congregation was established.

Following on the decision of the Synod of 1824, as indicated herein above, many churches were established by the white congregations through their mission work. Along this line, the Molopo congregation came into existence as a result of the mission work undertaken by the DRC Molopo, a white congregation in Buhrmansdrif. This chapter thus endeavours to provide a history of the Molopo congregation as well as the strengths and weaknesses according to which they have been functioning after 1994. In order to arrive at the root of this objective, the following issues are given attention:

- Background information on the Molopo congregation
- History and context in which the Molopo congregation functions after 1994
- Strengths of the Molopo congregation
- Weaknesses of the Molopo congregation

2.4 Background information on the Molopo congregation

The head office of the DRCA: Molopo congregation is located in Buhrmansdrif, about seven kilometres on the eastern part of Mahikeng town, which is the capital city of the North West Province in South Africa. The congregation was established in the year 1925 and mainly consisted of farm workers who were predominantly Setswana speaking and largely illiterate. The Molopo congregation is the fruit of the mission work of the DRC Molopo congregation and was established along racial lines. The main church building is situated next to the “moederkerk” building signifying it as the “daughter church” (“dogterkerk”) as previously known. The intention *inter alia* was to make it easier for employers to bring along their employees to church. Another reason for this was that it facilitated supervision for those brought by other means of transport.

From 1925 until 1942 the Molopo congregation was under the leadership of the white ministers who served in the Molopo mother church, such as Rev. Kelber and Rev. Olwagen serving as counsellor (*the minister who assists congregations that have no minister of their own*). Customarily, the white ministers served along with the evangelist to assist with translation and to evangelise those who were still in the dark. It can be said that the establishment of the Molopo congregation was as a result of the farmers who wanted their employees to know Jesus Christ. During the year 1942 the first black minister, by the name of Rev. Kgongwane, was called and ordained. He was assisted by two evangelists, namely Evangelist Nicodemus Mothupi and Evangelist Johannes Mogale. Seemingly these evangelists were already employed prior to the arrival of Rev. Kgongwane, but were later called by other congregations. The church council members at that time were as follows (Elder Motshabi, 2013/14):

- Devine Matlapeng
- Jonas Ramoaga
- John Ntokonyane Sebothe
- M. Tshuba
- Matlhodi Motshabi
- Tuis Matlhadisa
- Stagwa Esrom Matlhadisa
- Charles Kolomote
- K. Sedumedi
- Nicodimo Mohapi

The departure of Rev. Kgongwane, after sterling work of almost 22 years, ushered in Rev. Martin Grobblers in 1964 who was working with Evangelist Morake. Elder Kolomote served as translator for Rev. Grobblers. When Rev. Grobblers left to take up a position at the Molopo church in 1976, Rev. Buti Motlhaga was called and ordained in the same year. The period of Rev. Motlhaga brought in new church council members, such as:

- Charles Phuthi
- Lazarus Sebukunyane
- Stephan Badirwang
- Boynyana Mobita
- Cornelius Pienaar
- Ephraim Kolobane

- Khaba Modise⁹

Among the two groups of counsellors, Elder Matlhodi Martha Motshabi (78) was an active youth at the time and provided most of the information. Elder Boynyana April Mobita who was born in 1926, a year after the establishment of the Molopo congregation, is now 92 years old and is still very actively involved as an elder. He is the oldest member of the church council who refuses to rest, asserting that he draws strength and fulfilment from being active in the church.

They are both pillars of strength of the congregation from which young and upcoming counsellors draw a great deal of wisdom. Rev. Motlhaga served in this congregation for eight years until 1984, when he retired due to old age. He returned to his hometown of Moruleng, where he finally succumbed to old age and parted from this world. Rev. Motlhaga was assisted by Evangelist J Ntlhana. A young and energetic minister, named Titus (Tito) Ntsime, was then called and ordained during the same year of 1984.

As it is known that our thoughts are not His thoughts, neither are our ways His ways, (Is. 55:8), Rev. Ntsime did not live up to the expectation and he was relieved of his duties in 1988, after four appalling years that had a negative effect on the congregation (Rev. Kgobokoe 2013/14).

The year 1988 can be referred to as the beginning of the year of turbulence at the congregation of Molopo (Elder Motshabi 2013/14). For 12 years, from 1988 until 2000, the congregation had no clergy of its own. It was during this period that the congregation of Molopo was served by substitute ministers, generally referred to as counsellors, such as Revs. Jansen, Strydom, Kutu and Teu.

The latter two ministers played a significant role, during the demise of the DRCA, to ensure that the Molopo congregation became part of the URCSA.

These events of 1994 saw the demise of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) in the country, in particular the then Transvaal Province, and could be deemed a total annihilation. As already discussed, only two regional synods (Free State and Phororo) remained out of seven, while the other five amalgamated with the DR Mission Church ("NG Sending Kerk") to form the now Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa

According to Elder Motshabi: (2013/14), the URCSA was no longer adhering to the principles and ordinances of the Reformation, as prescribed by the Bible as well as the church order, as

⁹ The photos of some of the former leaders of the Molopo congregation have been attached, at the end of the document, as Annexure 1.

they were accustomed to it. They began to conform to the standard of the world, in negation of the ethos of Christianity. Activities and duties were given priority over the Word of God. Members who transgressed were not being disciplined in accordance with the constitution and as such many felt perturbed. The church order, founded on the Bible, prescribes that having a child out of wedlock is a sin. Those who commit sin should be disciplined, but this process was neglected by the leaders of the church. Whenever cases of ill-discipline were reported to the classis, nothing was done to correct the behaviour. These events contributed to congregants seeking ways and means of returning to the DRCA. During the year 2000, Elders Matlhodi Martha Motshabi and Sara Morwa Keemetswe stood up and said enough was enough and went to seek their original home. It was not surprising that these women were so courageous to take such a bold step to renounce their membership in the URCSA, went to court to claim estrangement from the DRCA and publicly declared their re-joining of the DRCA when men were shying away from being accused of refusing to follow orders. The church council had collapsed and no records of minutes could be found to verify this claim. Women have been courageous since the times of Jesus Christ, when even the disciples were nowhere to be seen. They (women) were seen following Him as He carried the cross (Luk.23:27). These women eventually found comfort when they met Elder Piet Motshabi and Elder I.M. Selebogo who were members of DRCA at the time: Lehika congregation in Montshiwa Township in the Mafikeng Classis and offered to assist them. The church council of Lehika¹⁰ congregation took up the matter and assisted these ladies until final arrangements were made to incorporate the Molopo congregation into the DRCA, with full rights and affiliated to the Classis of Lichtenburg/Zeerust under the Phororo Regional Synod (Elder Selebogo, 2013/14). Rev. Lamprecht, who was the chairman of the Mafikeng Classis at the time, played a significant role in assisting these believers in ensuring that the Molopo congregation was integrated and immediately took up the task of calling clergy to ensure the awakening of the congregation.

It was as a result of the strong influence of these courageous women that Rev. Lamprecht was encouraged to ensure that during 2003 the congregation called Rev. SC Kgobokoe. The process was not without impediment, but it was done speedily and concluded to such an extent that he (Rev. Kgobokoe) was confirmed in March of the same year.

The contract, according to the letter signed by the church council, stated that the minister would receive remuneration of R500.00, with R250.00 as salary and R250.00 as subsistence and travel allowance. This sum of monies remains a figure probably written for the archives as it has

¹⁰ The records of the minutes of Lehika congregation could not be found and as such the researcher relied on interviewing the elders who were involved at the time.

never been honoured. This clergyman has not received any payment since 2003 (Church Council Minutes: March 2003) and how he survives could only be the grace of God, since he has no other source of income.

The Molopo congregation was re-established and as such had to start from scratch. The only available piece of paper to begin to work from was the appointment letter¹¹ ("beroepsbrief") for the abovementioned minister. On the day of confirmation, the presiding clergy¹² read from the Book of Joshua 1:1-9, emphasising that clergy should be courageous in the execution of God's work. He should not be afraid for God will be with him through thick and thin. The following day, a Sunday, this minister read for his first service in the Molopo congregation from the book of Nehemiah 2:16-20. The emphasis was on the latter part of verse 17 that says, "Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!"

The Molopo congregation consisted of only four wards being Buhrmansdrif, Malogage, Braklaagte and Molemane at the time of its re-establishment. Following the enthusiasm created by the presence of the local minister, Rev. Kgobokoe, the church council members worked tirelessly to draw in disgruntled members in neighbouring villages and farms. The work started by these counsellors bore fruit as they added the wards of Lonely Park, Khunotswane, Matlhase, Klipan and Ntsweletsoku to the congregation. As such, Molopo congregation is made up of 10 wards. These wards are far apart from one another, with the furthest being almost 80km away.

Most of these wards are situated in villages, while others are located in rural areas. This makes it cumbersome to administer the affairs of the congregation. The church council of Molopo congregation currently comprises of 38 members (Church Council Minutes: June 2013), 26 elders and 12 deacons. Out of these elders, five are referred to as catechists and possess responsibility similar to that of the minister of the Word, but do not administer the holy sacraments. Only 5% of the Molopo congregation can be described as affluent, while the rest live in abject poverty.

These congregants are predominantly senior citizens who survive on old-age pensions, vulnerable minors who are left in the care of the aged, the many unemployed and a few who have full employment. The Molopo congregation has among its senior citizens Mr. Modibane who was born on 12/12/1912 and recently celebrated his centenary. The congregation prides

¹¹ Refer to Annexure 2 at the end of the document.

¹² Special Church Council Meeting, 15 March 2003.

itself by the valuable contribution made by this aged soul and continues to receive blessings as the Lord Almighty has given him good health to this day, albeit the usual old-age pains.

During 2006 the congregations in the Classis of Lichtenburg/Zeerust and part of Phororo Regional Synod, began negotiations amongst themselves to form a third regional synod. This process continued until 2010 when the Regional Synod of Phororo, where this classis was initially affiliated, gave its blessing to establish a third regional synod. It was on 6 February 2010 when the Honourable Actuarius of Phororo Regional Synod, Rev. Mochubi J. Lebone, together with the Executive of the Phororo Synod, officially instituted the third regional synod called the North and South Transvaal Synod. This newly established regional synod comprised of one classis named Lichtenburg/Zeerust, with 10 congregations namely:

- the Bodibe congregation
- the Leaphatsima congregation
- the Lichtenburg Reserve Congregation
- the Molopo congregation
- the Naboomspruit congregation
- the Saulspoort congregation
- the Saulspoort East congregation
- the Silkaatskop congregation
- the Tshwane congregation
- the Tshilidzini congregation

It was during this inauguration that the Molopo congregation shined by having two of its delegates elected to serve on the executive committee of the synod. The establishment of the North and South Transvaal synod made history as a woman, Elder Matlhodi Onica Mototo (ACTA Tshwane 2010), was elected as moderator. It was history in the making as this was a first for the DRCA as well as for all of the congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church that a woman was elected to such a high position, something wrongly perceived as the preserve of ordained male ministers. The tradition within the DRCA and the DRC family churches was that only ordained ministers were elected to the executive positions of synods, even though the church order does not stipulate this. It is in this regard that history was made when these elders were elected to serve on the executive of the synod.

The fact that two of the delegates of the Molopo congregation were elected to serve on the executive committee of the synod is indicative of the competence of its elders. The number of congregations grew with the addition of those from the URCSA. This regional synod then subdivided itself into three classes during 2012, namely the Lichtenburg/Zeerust Classis,

Saulspoort Classis and Tshwane Classis. The Molopo congregation delegates again showed their leadership abilities when they were also elected to serve on the executive committee of the Classis of Lichtenburg/Zeerust.

2.5 History and context in which the Molopo congregation has been functioning after 1994

The road to unity after 1994 has been very painful, particularly for DRCA members, to the extent that this significant process seems unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future. This could be attributed to issues such as the DRCA's refusal to ascribe to the fourth confession, known as the Belhar Confession. Another factor could be that the majority of the property belonging to the DRCA were taken by the URCSA, despite the appeal court ruling mentioned earlier. This was not easy and often frustrated the good intentions of unification by the DRC family churches.

The Molopo congregation was also deeply affected by the unification of the DRMC and DRCA in 1994. The communities in and around the Molopo congregation had high expectations after 1994. A "Better Life for All and Jobs for All" was one of the slogans the ruling party and its alliance proclaimed during their election campaign. This raised expectations, in particular among under-educated youth and the unemployed who insistently pinned their hopes of a better life on political consideration rather than on developmental programmes. Regrettably the expectation that immediate wealth and success would be attained once the new government is in place proved to be false (Millian, 1998:5). They were not taught that democracy and human rights come with responsibility. These thwarted expectations has brought about a high unemployment rate, teenage pregnancy and the continued prevalence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Notwithstanding the abolition of apartheid, the distinctive racially based groupings within the Dutch Reformed family churches continue to exist in practice. Seemingly the remnants of the philosophy of apartheid implanted into the human nature of the black population will, unfortunately, remain for some time to come.

Democracy has not brought instant relief of poverty in the country. The area where the Molopo congregation is located is especially feeling a sense of despair given the loss of hope and having to live in unhygienic conditions. The highly unrealistic expectations of ordinary people, created by the dawn of democracy, have not been met. The traditional means of generating income have disappeared due to widespread job losses. As transformation takes place, technology replaces labour perpetuating job losses. Learning from the experiences of missionaries whose wives taught black women to sew in weekly sewing classes, a common feature of mission stations, particularly amongst the Tswanas and the Zulus (Elphick & Devonport, 1997:255), the Molopo congregation began to organise youth and women into

groups and assist them to form primary co-operatives. It is expected that the co-operatives will assist them to fend for themselves. It is basically an attempt to teach congregants how to fish rather than providing them with fish. These co-operatives are engaged in activities such as manufacturing and agriculture, to name but a few, whose aim is to create employment opportunities. The creation of employment will enable communities to put bread on the table and thus eradicate poverty and improve the lives of the members.

The years preceding 1994 presented atrocities that eroded the moral fibre of South African society (Vorster, 2007:36). Equally so, the transition gave rise to an increase in criminality and as such, public morality degenerated. Sexual immorality became widespread. Vorster (2007:37) confirms this statement by highlighting the visible increase in prostitution and the promiscuous lifestyle of many young people. When considering the importance and functions of the nuclear family in society, it is assumed to be in turmoil and paints a bleak picture for the nation in making in South African. These are only a few challenges that are apparent in the new democracy, but this list can include HIV, poverty, etc.

The Molopo congregation can be said to have faced a triple transition having to endure the pressures that came with the dawn of democracy, the pressures brought by the simultaneous uniting of the greater part of DRCA and DRMC as well as an absence of leadership for a period of 10 years. The burden of this triple transition had a tremendous negative impact on the development of the congregation, both spiritually and physically. Notwithstanding the above, some positive elements also began to emerge once leadership was in place. This leads to an analysis of the strengths of this congregation.

2.6 Strengths of the Molopo congregation

The DRC has been using the concept of organisations¹³ to engage all members, since missionary work began. Organisations for the youth, women and men are created. This practice is confirmed by Elphick and Devonport (1997:255-256) who indicates that the missionaries' wives were encouraged to pray in groups for their husbands and sons, working in the mines, as well as their families. Women were organised into small prayer groups. These prayer groups of women were later encouraged to focus on the domestic qualities of wife and mother. As these women converted to Christianity, they were encouraged to take part in activities that would benefit them such as sewing and knitting. These women opened their prayers to include others, but most importantly they knew that obedience in spite of fear is what would make them heroines (Silvoso, 2002:143). The concept of church organisations was used

¹³ *Go Ye Therefore* published by the Information Bureau of the DRC

at the DRCA, as the daughter church, and is also being adopted by the congregations affiliated to the DRCA. The Molopo congregation has created the:

- i. Christian Women's Organisation (CWL);
- ii. Christian Women's Fellowship (CWF); iii. Christian Youth League (CYL); iv. Christian Men's Bond (CMB); v. Church Music Choir (CMC); vi. catechism class; and vii. Sunday school.

Most of these organisations primarily serve to pray for the sick and evangelise those who have not yet accepted Christ as their Saviour. These organisations, in particular the CWL, assist the church council by fundraising for the projects of the church. The activities of the organisations strengthen the leadership of the congregation and the impact thereof is described below. The discussion proceeds from the leadership of the Molopo congregation and is then followed by that of the church organisations.

2.6.1 Leadership in the Molopo congregation

The congregation is under very good and well-trained leadership, comprising mature men and women blended with the youth. This council is led by a veteran clergyman, Rev. S.C. Kgobokoe, who is also the moderator of the general synod as well as the actuary of the regional synod (DRC Yearbook, 2012) and his colleagues refer to him as "kerkvader", loosely translated to mean church father. The majority of church council members have never seen the inside of a classroom, while a handful is highly educated. This observable fact, however, is a bit of an impediment to members understanding their roles as custodians of the governance of the church entrusted to them (1 Tim. 3:1) and those who are not conversant with the church order shy away from active participation, particularly during the deliberation of issues. It must be appreciated that because of the lack of insight, the clergy has a mammoth task of training council members to understand their roles and to walk the path with confidence. What is most peculiar about these church council members is that when it comes to giving thanks to God, as Jacob promised (Gen. 28:20-22; Mal. 3:10-12), it remains a tough nut to crack (Church Council Minutes: 11/03/2006). However, the minister believes and understands that Rome was not built in a day and it is thus a process to ensure that these men and women do God's will (John 7:17), because with strong determination success will be achieved. Also, there is distinct manifestation of intention to do God's will among the council members of the Molopo congregation. The Molopo counsellors are making an effort to be committed to the *missio Dei* and permit God to work through them to be the light to the nations. If these counsellors try to

understand their responsibilities and are geared to produce a true church, through fear of the Lord (Is. 51:16), then God will work through them to make His kingdom known to the nations.

The characteristics of these councillors, under the leadership of the astute Rev. Kgobokoe, manifest in their deeds. It took courage and moral leadership to increase the number of congregations in the Lichtenburg/Zeerust Classis to a total of 22 in the past 10 years (Church Council Minutes: 29/11/2008). It was also through the influence and strong leadership of this council that the third DRCA Synod was instated in the country, reflected in the slogan of the Molopo congregation: "Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace". This progress could lead one to believe that these good deeds are all due to the efforts of a growing church. Strangely, it is quite evident that the membership of the congregation of Molopo is declining, despite the positive strides of their leadership. Apparently, the elders who understand the church order and church administration are delegated to the classis. The local minister is also mainly working amongst the congregations within the classis. The activities of the local church are left to those who are not all that conversant with church administration, a situation that is detrimental to the advancement of the church.

Upon realising that the minister is occupied with counsellor work, the Molopo congregation created the position of manager. His responsibilities include *inter alia* ensuring that the resolutions of the church council are carried out and that the various church organisations function according to the prescripts of their constitutions (Church Council 14 June 2003). This is not done by any of the other congregations within the broader DRCA family of churches. Elder D.F. Mototo, who is a senior church council member with vast experience in church activities, has been appointed to this position. His functions include *inter alia* assisting the organisations with their year plans as well as general administration of the church council. The position was initiated by the chairperson of the church council on noticing that council members lack insight into church activities and the manager must assist in training them.

The church council of Molopo congregation has managed to adhere to the dictates of the church order¹⁴. This was attained by holding a minimum of four church council meetings per year with a full quorum and performing the holy sacraments four times a year.

2.6.2 Church Organisations/Leagues of the Molopo Congregation

The organisations are all under the supervision of the church council to ensure compliance with the church order. The president of the Christian Women's Organisation (CWL), Mrs. S.M.

¹⁴ Article 22

Kgobokoe, is charged with the responsibility of being the overall overseer of all the leagues including Sunday school as well as the catechism class. The main objective of all the leagues is to meet regularly at their home cells to discuss the Bible and explore all its dimensions (DRCA: Church Order: 1963). These gatherings are intended to encourage members to desire to understand the Word of God. The gatherings in the home cells also serve as an evangelising tool to attract church members and non-church members alike to join these leagues and not feel left behind.

In the past 20 years, the CWL and the Christian Youth League (CYL) were the only organisations that were functioning. Their contribution to the church in general was always visible. The Christian Women Fellowship (CWF) and the Christian Men's Bond (CMB) did not exist in the Molopo congregation until they were introduced in 2006 and 2004 respectively.

The objectives of various leagues, as determined and guided by their constitutions, can be described as follows:

2.6.3 Christian Women's League (CWL)

The CWL is said to be the pillar of the church within the congregation of Molopo. It comprises of very strong women of substance, who pride themselves on being a driving force in the Molopo congregation. Elphick and Devonport (1997:266) relate how these women respond vigorously to the call of visiting, comforting, teaching and leading when it comes to matters of congregants. The CWL is engaged in visiting the aged and sick to provide solace and also encourage those who have fallen along the way and do not attend services regularly (Church Council Minutes 7 March 2015). During the visits they first ask after the well-being of the one visited as well as that of the family, then discuss the Word of God.

This is done to assure the person that the church is concerned about them holistically and to determine where the league could offer assistance. The CWL conducts prayer sessions on a regular basis among the congregation members and prays for the congregants, the community at large as well as the leadership of the church as well as that of the state.

The CWL league offers support to the Molopo congregation in many ways, including raising funds (Church Council 13 November 2004). The fundraising efforts enable the council to undertake several projects, such as taking care of the widows of clergymen that have passed away whilst still in the employ of the congregation as well as those who served in the classis. The CWL also donates food parcels and blankets to the aged during the festive and winter seasons, in response to the Jesus' call and for which He also set the example by controversially

embraced table fellowship with the outcast and the marginalised in society (Acts 6:2). The CWL's fundraising programmes are very effective in this regard. The CWL has managed to attend classis and synod assemblies in order to fellowship with other congregations and gain spiritual inspiration.

2.6.4 Christian Women's Fellowship (CWF)

This league is a new initiative (Church Council 11 March 2006) of the Molopo Congregation, undertaken in 2006 in accordance with Article 49¹⁵. It comprises mainly of young women who have outgrown the youth league, but do not identify with the CWL's inflexible mission since they consider themselves still young and vibrant. It would not be surprising for the two groups, the CWL and CWF, to be at loggerheads as they battle for more recognition and yet, according to members interviewed (2012/13), these two leagues manage to function peacefully alongside each other. The CWL and the CWF also conduct house visitations and evangelising of those who have not yet found their faith, in response to Jesus' instruction to His disciples to go out and teach the nations all that He had taught them and to baptise all who come to believe in the Name of the Triune God (Matt. 28:19).

The league also serves to support the church council by ensuring that meetings and other church activities run smoothly. The league is furthermore actively involved in the catering and staging of all functions of the church and does so by means of fundraising, inspired by their counterparts¹⁶ in another congregation who donated the funds they raised to the Lehika congregation in Montshiwa to build a church at Mmabatho in the late seventies.

Like all the other leagues, as stated above, the CWF is under the watchful eye of Mrs. S.M. Kgobokoe who is very skilful and diligent in her duties. The women of CWF believe in action and remain committed to their work (Acts 2:42) at all costs. The CWF has managed to attend all its annual conferences and synod assemblies, where they fellowship with other CWFs in the classis.

2.6.5 Christian Youth League (CYL)

The CYL takes the lead in teaching the youth about faithfulness, obedience and a range of other attributes of being a good person. The teachings of the Bible and three articles of faith as well as the catechism book, "Thuto ya Bokreste", are emphasised and taught vigorously at this stage.

¹⁵ DRCA Church Order

¹⁶ DRMC Muizenburg congregation: CWF based in Muizenburg (Cape Town)

Members are encouraged to love the church and to attend all gatherings of the church. The members of the CYL are taught to love Christ deeply and to be His witnesses in every aspect of their lives. The youth is offered supported and prompted to reach out and evangelise their peers who are not actively involved in matters pertaining to Christ.

The Molopo church has developed a coherent and structured plan of action, which is overseen by an elected elder, in order to enhance the activities of the CYL and their greatest effort to grow the church is to inform, educate, teach and enlighten the youth (Church Council Minutes 12 March 2005).

A youth that is edified will be able to understand the import of a commitment to fulfil the mission of God. It then becomes easier to groom leaders and to fully equip members of the church who are able to think independently and creatively and be the light and salt to the community in which they live.

The training that takes place in this league is quite inclusive to ensure that these young men and women will be able to take the church of Christ to greater heights. In other words, from this group of people the council produces leaders for various leagues and leaders of the church in general. The CYL, as a junior partner, responds to the call of the Senior Partner to join Him in His venture to be co-workers on earth (Kritzinger, Meiring & Saayman, 1994:42).

2.6.6 Christian Men's Bond (CMB)

As mentioned, the Christian Men's Bond (CMB) or "Manne Bond", as it is fondly known within the DRCA circles, was inactive for a time after 1994. The CMB is a general organisation in the DRCA. It was formally re-established in the Molopo congregation on 28 August 2004 at Buhrmansdrif church hall, a historic event given the long period of inactivity. Thirty men took the oath and were confirmed as members of the CMB by Rev. S.C. Kgobokoe, who presided over this service.

The CMB provides leadership in matters relating to activities of the congregation (Elder Mototo DF: 2013/14). The primary aim of this league is to play the role of a father figure. The league ensures that the church premises are kept clean and well maintained. It tends to the safety of participants/congregants during functions, while also ensuring that the caterers have adequate resources or facilities. It is generally accepted that men are reluctant to attend church and that they, unlike women, are inclined to prefer entertainment over church. The CMB of Molopo is similarly affected by this tradition. Men are noticeably in the majority at the ZCC and do not

drink either, but this cannot be said of all the men in the Molopo congregation. This aspect, however, falls outside the scope of this study.

The CMB, unlike the other leagues, struggle to raise funds and yet are quite willing to accept financial support and assistance from the other leagues. One example concerns the church building at Khunotswane ward that had long been standing and yet there was still being congregated in a mud house. After the congregation undertook fundraising, through its various leagues, the CMB contributed their labour and built this church in 2005. Even though the building is available at Khunotswane ward, the Molopo congregation has failed to evangelise the neighbouring community about the kingdom of God. Only a quarter of the Khunotswane ward congregants of approximately 122 members regularly attend church. It would seem that despite having a church building available, the leadership and congregants are not taking advantage thereof by doing mission work in the community that they may come to understand the kingdom of God. As such this church building remains the walls that are not fully used to gather the lost sheep. There is an intention to build a second church in one of the other wards, within the borders of Molopo congregation, "Matlhase", along the same lines.

2.6.7 Church Choir (CC)

The church choir, under the baton of Mrs. Matlhodi Mototo, are made up of dedicated children of God. Their main task is leading the congregation, with their skilled and well-trained voices, in the singing of the hymns the preacher for the day selects for a service from the Hosanna Hymn Book.

The choir is growing from strength to strength and support the functions of the congregation and those of the regional synod by providing melodious sounds, brightening and blessing each of these church activities (Church Council Minutes: 11 March 2006).

The CC comprises of young and old, the literate and those who have never seen the inside of a classroom. This group of people does not live in a particular village or township. Members of the CC are a diverse group of people, where one is just as likely to find a professor as an illiterate and yet they display a synergy that is symbolic of the truth that all people are equal in Christ. It speaks of children of God who are not conceited and are willing to praise Him with the talents they possess. Considering the distances they must travel to attend rehearsals as well as the fact that many of them have no means of income, it is unfathomable how they manage to offer such a sterling performance (Kgobokoe, 2013/14). It is startling that they are able to produce the most wondrous sounds, particularly when singing in English, French, Latin and other foreign languages, when most of them are illiterate. The funds the CC raise through

functions and performances mainly serve to cover travel expenses to performances at other congregations or at classis and synod functions. The CC conductor is Elder Matlhodi Mototo, a meticulous lady who is both highly experienced and gifted in music. Whenever the Molopo CC performs, it seems as if they could go on forever.

Unfortunately, it is not possible for the complete choir to perform at ordinary Sunday services, due to the peculiar composition of the wards that are situated far apart from each other as mentioned. It is, therefore, only feasible for the Molopo CC to perform at special occasions and cannot be a choir that edifies the congregation and contributes to its growth as is desired. They cannot adequately fulfil the function of calling the people to believe when they are only able to perform at Easter celebrations, the end of the year, Holy Communion and special functions, but not at Sunday services. Usually only three of the 10 wards will have a very small church choir perform, which could never live up to the standard of the main CC. It is an issue the council aims to address to a degree by ensuring that there is at least a small choir that performs in every ward to encourage the congregation to join in glorifying God. It is highly desirable that the leadership of the CC also extend their efforts to the Molopo congregation that it may reach its set mandate of preparing the congregation to meet with God through music at every Sunday service and not only once in a while, as it is currently the practice.

2.6.8 Catechism Class

The catechism class (Article 43.2) serves to prepare children, who have completed the Sunday school programme, for adulthood and then have them confirmed as full members of the church. This class has the great task of holistically equipping participants with Bible knowledge that they may be faithful and committed witnesses of Christ. This is a rather difficult endeavour these days since these participants only receive instruction on the Bible when they reach this stage and not already at Sunday school, which offers a minimal introduction. Knowledge that has been internalised becomes a weapon to meet the challenges of life. Parents lack the commitment to the promises they made at their children's baptism of providing their children with a good upbringing, thus making it difficult to teach these children without their parents' support. Parents have abdicated their responsibility in Molopo, which Vorster (2003:103) describes as the general trend. It creates problems for the parents and the church in particular, because these children tend to fall prey to new churches that bolster their membership by means of the prosperity gospel. Parents are careful to not contravene Children's Act¹⁷, sections of which came into effect in 2007 and has been met with mixed reactions from society at large.

¹⁷ Children's Act (38 of 2005)

The Act gives girls from the age of 12 the right to use contraceptives and terminate pregnancy without parental consent. It also allows boys from the age of 18 the right to enter into matrimonial contracts without permission from their parents. The Act as it is, clouds and pollutes young minds, shakes and twists their spiritual integrity. This is a serious challenge in that it limits parental control, since it enables children to become independent without any responsibility on their part. Because children perceive catechism class as difficult, they are easily persuaded to leave their congregation and join a church that advocates a prosperity gospel and where in-depth knowledge of the Bible is not required.

The church council ensures that one appointed senior council member assists in this regard, while two senior church members with teaching experience of over 60 years combined, supervise the teachers of these classes. At the end, all the participants/learners write an examination. Those who are illiterate are aided in memorising the Ten Commandments, the Confession ("Boipobolo ba Tumelo ya Bo Kreste") and a number of Psalms (e.g. Psalm 23). It is here where the interest in singing and the importance of taking responsibility is impressed upon them.

Upon completion of this class, these participants are affiliated to the CMC and this ensures continuity. These young men and women are expected to take up responsibilities in the church and become members of various leagues in their capacity as full members. This is the ideal, but remains a dream, because the great majority of these young men and women simply disappear upon completion of this period, usually as soon as they have graduated from high school, and many never return (Church Council: 8 September 2007). Vorster (2003:103) raises the general trend that is affecting the youth at universities or places of employment. He indicates that the youth are confronted with worldly influences and become weak, instead of contextualising what has been taught to guide them. Some of these youths do come back when they are married and settled, yet most of them end up joining other denominations and others don't belong to any church (ACTA Bloemfontein DRCA, 2011). The latter may have the certificates bearing the pledge they undertook on confirmation to be faithful until death (Rev. 2:10), but have completely forgotten all the teachings they received over a period of two years. It would seem that the general trend that Vorster (2003: 103) refers to, is affecting the congregation of Molopo and they are faced with the great task of ensuring that the children understand the will of God, uphold His teachings and remain committed to the *missio Dei*.

2.6.9 Sunday School

Sunday school lays the foundation for every child in church. It is a place where children are taught about the Bible and how to relate the stories in the Bible by dramatising them. This is

where children have the opportunity to ask questions and have a contact with the leaders of the church. The church council aims to produce quality children who are eager to learn about Christ and how His teachings affect their lives. They are also to understand the value of learning about the activities of Christ.

Children should be allowed to know about the activities of the church (Matt.18:4-6; 19:14-15; Deut. 4:5). It is in Sunday school where the leaders of tomorrow are nurtured. Sunday school is the most delicate group that poses a number of challenges, ranging from parents who are uncooperative to those who fail to support their children. Single parents, of children born out of wedlock, often struggle to cope. Sunday school is the only place where some of these children learn about Jesus or God, since no effort is being made in homes to teach the Bible.

Theological instruction is no longer offered at school, a further challenge for the church council of the Molopo congregation.

The church council encourages all parents to support their children and to be involved in all the activities of Sunday school on a rotational basis.

In ensuring that the aims of the Church council are realized, some women and youth have dedicated their time and effort to ensure that Sunday school is taking place, involvement of parents is allocated time and thus becomes vibrant within the Molopo congregation (Church Council: 6 March 2010).

The activities of all the organisations are described. The question that must be asked is whether all these activities contribute to the welfare of the congregation. Many do not always contribute to spiritual growth. In view of the above, it seems that the various leagues are unable to increase their numbers as the general membership of the congregation is declining and this can be ascribed to the leagues' focus on fundraising. This trend of putting material issues first, before the wellbeing of the members, seems to be true of all the leagues of the Molopo congregation. It could, therefore, be concluded that instead of promoting the growth of membership, these leagues actually contribute toward the weakness of the Molopo congregation.

2.7 Weaknesses of the Molopo Congregation

In order to determine the weaknesses of the Molopo congregation, attention is given to the circumstances they live under in a post 1994. The study also investigates the failure to build the church and its gifts. Finally, this study describes the dependency syndrome of the Molopo

congregation, which came as a result of the way the Molopo congregation was established by the mother church.

2.7.1 Circumstances within which the Molopo Congregation Functions

Prior to 1994, the nationalist government only allowed the instruction of Christianity in schools and neglected other religions (Elphick & Devonport, 1997:136-137). Christian prayers were offered at official gatherings, Sundays were kept holy by allowing no sporting activities to take place and no form of entertainment and/or business were permitted to function. In a certain sense, the government took a protective approach to Christianity.

Christian nationalism became the official education policy for South Africa (Bantu Education Act of 1953) and introduced into black schools¹⁸, as in white schools, compulsory religious instruction at all levels.

Religious instruction in schools was discontinued with the dawn of democracy in 1994, in line with the Constitution. Bible instruction, once compulsory at all schools, was no longer considered. This form of compulsory Christian religious instruction was helpful, particularly to parents who were illiterate, because children would receive Bible education in schools as well.

As more parents were working, they tended to rely on the school system to teach Christian values and thus abdicated their responsibilities.

Dissolution of the apartheid regime in 1994 saw the country opting for a liberal democracy. It has been challenging for the Molopo congregation to escape the wilderness in which the broader church finds itself in this globalised post-modern world. It was not prepared for all the changes brought by the dawn of democracy.

The church is facing challenges such as poverty, the sexual revolution among the youth, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, crime and unemployment (Greenway, 2007:11-16). The Molopo congregation is no exception in this regard, despite celebrating over a decade of democracy after the successful and peaceful political transition from apartheid in 1994. The fall out of this new environment is such that the church still faces enormous challenges. It is quite evident that poverty is on the increase, more and more young women who receive the child grant leave their children in the care of their unemployed parents. The Molopo congregation seems to be more affected in that almost 90% of its members are located in the rural or farm areas.

¹⁸ The dawn of democracy has created an enabling environment for all religions and religion ceased to be one of the subjects of instruction.

As Sekhaulelo (2007:6-8) describes, the new political dispensation in South Africa has opened the borders to international trade and created a tendency for individuals and groups from abroad to build links with individuals and groups in the country. This creates a platform for the organised supply of drugs such as cocaine, marijuana and opium that are grown in Latin America and smuggled into the United States of America yearly. These powerful organisations then extend their smuggling activities to South Africa. South Africa has become a much preferred destination for drug smugglers, as Sekhaulelo (2007:7) attests:

- In 2005 an estimated two tons of amphetamines entered South Africa and were used by 1.2 million people who paid R143 million for the drugs, while 100 000 people used a ton of Ecstasy to the value of R610 million.
- The use of *Nyaope* (a mixture of heroin and dagga) is on the rise in Pretoria, while Mandrax is the drug of choice in Durban and Cat in Gauteng.
- In Cape Town, Tik is used by nearly 42% of all drug abusers.

The Molopo congregation is located near Mahikeng, the capital city of the North-West Province, and falls in the deprived area (Statistic South Africa, 2000: 54¹⁹) of the country. Drug lords use a system of introducing young unsuspecting school children to drugs. Once they are hooked, then they are tasked with selling drug to their peers in schools (Kanagaratman, 14/15). Due to the high unemployment rate, this phenomenon especially affects the congregants of the Molopo congregation.

The transformation from apartheid to a liberal democracy has led to a decline in morals²⁰ and an increase in crime. Because the whole of society is in turmoil, what was once acceptable and moral is now questioned. What keeps society intact is now in transformation and, therefore, susceptible to new morals. Because of freedom of religion, other religions now fill the vacuum and this has created new mission fields. In such a context, it is very important for members to be mature in their faith to give guidance to form a moral society. It has become imperative for the Molopo congregation to engage in building the church, but this does not seem to be the case.

2.7.2 Failure to build the church

It is the task of Christians to build each other up in faith (cf. Eph. 4) and strengthen each other, in which the clergy must take the lead. The minister of the Word is trained for this and it is part

¹⁹ This source is used because it specifies the deprived areas in the country.

²⁰ Pretoria News. 14 December 2012

and parcel of his calling. The functions of the minister of the Word, set out in the church order²¹ that is primarily based on the Bible (DRCA: Church Order, 1963), include:

- i. The proclamation of the Word of God and the ministry of prayer
- ii. Administering the Holy Sacraments²²
- iii. Conducting worship services
- iv. Catechetical instruction
- v. Exercising, with the church council, supervision and discipline over the congregation
- vi. Proper house visitations and pastoral care of the congregation
- vii. Presiding over meetings of the church council.
- viii. Evangelising to non-members of the church and to the unbelieving
- ix. Conducting open confession
- x. Solemnising Christian marriages

The proper handling of the above functions will enable the minister to teach members and the unbelieving about the Word of God. When the members and the unbelieving come to understand the Word of God, then they will be taking part in the *missio Dei*. In order to ensure that the above functions are carried out, the general synod advocates that no congregation should remain without a minister of the Word of its own for longer than six months (DRCA: Acta Kroonstad, 2003). This is not possible, unfortunately, due to a lack of ministers.

As it has been mentioned herein, the Molopo congregation has a peculiar formation of 10 widely scattered wards and necessitates that the presence of the minister of the Word be highly visible. The Molopo congregation is affiliated to the Classis of Lichtenburg/Reserve, which in turn is a full member of the North and South Transvaal Regional Synod.

The regional synod has a total of 22 congregations and only one minister of the Word to serve all these congregations. The two other ministers of the Word, who came with their congregations from the URCSA in 2012, have not been given the status of fully-fledged ministers of the DRCA, as the resolution of the general synod stipulates that ministers who return from URCSA are subject to a probation period of at least three years. Only then are they awarded full status (Acta Kroonstad, 2003). These ministers may only serve in their own congregations and cannot be assigned to assist other congregations.

This leaves the minister of the Word of Molopo congregation as the only one that the Synod can

²¹ Article 7

²² This function is strictly delegated to the ministers of the Word, duly authorised by the general synod.

task with ensuring that these 19 congregations receive appropriate services. This has to be done over and above his other responsibilities as the chairman of the classis and the moderator of the general synod. It means he can only preside at a congregation's service and administer the holy sacraments one weekend per quarter. The other nine wards are then delegated to the retired assisting minister, Rev. Mogotsi, to administer the holy sacraments.

The above situation makes it very difficult for the minister to perform his duties as prescribed by the church order. Teaching of the Word is no longer done effectively, as the person designated to carry out this function no longer have the time. Most of the functions are then done by elders or postponed indefinitely, resulting in members who have become disenchanted. If this should continue, as it is in the Molopo congregation, then the building of the church suffers.

It has also become apparent that those elders who are knowledgeable in church matters have been assigned duties either to the circuit or synods. This is all well and good, but these elders tend to disregard the responsibilities of a local church and consider themselves superior to others. This practice results in elders who are less knowledgeable with matters pertaining to the church being left to guide and lead the congregation. Consequently, house visitation is not being conducted in the Molopo congregation and congregants are not receiving spiritual upliftment, making them feel abandoned and disheartened by the Molopo congregation (Motshabi 13/14).

2.8 Dependency Syndrome

The congregation of Molopo, like all other congregations of the DRCA, used to be dependent on the grant and support (Elphick & Devonport, 1997:151) from "moederkerk". Greenway (2007:20-21) emphasises that some Reformed churches within the black communities are still faced with the predicament of a diminishing membership. He attributes this phenomenon to suffering from the deep bondage of culture dependency and as such is unable to fulfil their missionary calling.

The members of the Molopo congregation are trapped by the dependency syndrome created by the "moederkerk" that used to handle all their affairs, probably out of a sense of guilt over the knowledge that their employees are underpaid and are as such unable to contribute reasonable dues to the church. The "moederkerk" used to contribute²³ immensely to each "daughter church", even toward the remuneration of ministers and expenses related to the activities of the church.

²³ The Minutes of Molopo congregation for this period are unavailable and the researcher had to depend on information gathered from the church counsellors.

The parable of the poor widow who gave all she possessed is being misconstrued by the members of the Molopo congregation, as they still contribute meagre amounts during offerings (Mark 12:41-44). The habit of donating coins during Sunday services seems to be stuck with this congregation. They seem to be reluctant or unable to pay their dues. Whenever the subject of tithing is raised (Mal. 3:8-10), it becomes clear that the congregants think that they are being robbed as they are not used to such traditions. This is a remnant of the slave mentality created by the mother church, turning black members into passengers and not drivers when it comes to religious matters. The issue of the church contributions is further clouded by the manner in which contributions are handled.

In any denomination accountability and transparency are key (Hendriks, 2004:185). It is detrimental when the control of the congregation's financial affairs is left in the hands of a powerful few. A congregation should have an independent chairman, secretary and a treasurer, elected from different families (Hendriks, 2004:186). As a result of a few powerful people, the rest feel inadequate and use this as an excuse. All the monies that come in should be handled in a manner that is fully transparent and comprise a few basic internal control procedures for cash receipts and cash disbursements.

When the above practices are adhered to, a harmonious environment will reign in a congregation. It will create an environment conducive to spiritual renewal and permit the joy of giving and offering.

This deep bondage has made the Molopo congregation unable to provide for its clergy and sustain itself financially, as some other Reformation churches. The Molopo congregation failing to keep its contractual obligations of paying its minister has led to some members to offer assistance. These concerned members took it upon themselves in 2005 to contribute towards the welfare of the minister. They do so directly to the minister and not through the church, as the Bible prescribes. This was permitted, because they sought to keep it a secret and the church council does not have any authority in their contributions whatsoever.

The impression is created that the minister ends up being compromised in exercising his duties for fear of losing these contributions by those who hold sway. This state of affairs leads to losing the ability to objectively reflect on one's own condition. When a culture of fear and admiration exists, the object becomes to appease the powers that prevail. This results therein that the broader interest becomes subdued and confused with the desires of the one who applies power, rendering it increasingly difficult to separate the two. It creates internal pressure from within the DRCA, resulting in discomfort amongst the congregants. Congregants (ACTA Bloemfontein, 2011) are continually reminded about these influences, which are regularly

exposed by relatives, friends and the media. The fact is that those who wield power, as a result of their contributions, often influence the local agenda by calling the tune (Hendriks, 2004:180).

This phenomenon creates believers with cold hearts and a diminished self-image as well as community image. This kind of funding by some individuals, which is not accounted for by the church council, creates the appearance of wealth and members conclude that it is no longer their responsibility, but someone else's.

2.9 Summary

The DRCA is a product of the mission work undertaken by the DRC and it was formally constituted in 1963. Towards the end of the apartheid era in South Africa, the DRCA undertook negotiations about unity with the DRMC and the union was formalised in 1994. Theological and procedural considerations kept two out of a total of seven regional synods, with a large group of congregations, from joining the union. They fought for and won, in the Highest Court of Appeal in Bloemfontein on 27 November 1998 (Case No. 536/96), the continuation of the DRCA with all its assets and liabilities. The DRCA now has three regional synods, namely the Synod of Free State with its classis comprising the Eastern Cape, North West Province and Lesotho; the Synod of Phororo with its classis comprising of the Northern Cape and the North West and the Synod of North and South Transvaal with its classis comprising the North West, Gauteng and Limpopo.

The Molopo congregation, which was established in 1925 as part of the DRMC and later formed the DRCA, continued to function properly under the leadership of various ministers until Rev. T. Ntsime was relieved of his duties in 1988. Then the congregation remained without a local minister until the events of 1994 that led to this congregation being swallowed up by the URCSA. Given the circumstances that prevailed while the Molopo congregation was a member of the URCSA, they ultimately rejoined the DRCA through the Mafikeng circuit. The congregation was formally readmitted in 2000. It was during the year 2003 when the Molopo congregation called Rev. S.C. Kgobokoe to be their local minister.

The circumstance under which the Molopo congregation functioned, namely the absence of a local minister and the dependency syndrome, gave rise to its primary weaknesses that contribute towards a decline in membership. Because the leadership is occupied with matters relating to the synod and administration, creates the impression that little time is given to reflecting on the understanding of the will of God. The effort to keep the organisation intact means that the real task does not receive the attention it deserves. It contributes towards a lack of understanding of the calling of the congregation and it as such fails to retain and grow its

members or transform them to fulfil God's command to be the salt and light in society. The church is, therefore, not committed to the *missio Dei* and not missional.

2.10 Conclusion

In light of the above, it seems that Reformation within the DRCA is under immense pressure, in terms of the unity and the calling of the church, from both within and outside (Acta Synodi Bloemfontein, 2011). The pressures from within include *inter alia* a penetrating internal insecurity that impacts the church as well as other Reformed churches, including the DRCA. These internal pressures emanate from the church itself not understating its calling and thus failing in its duty to remain committed to the *missio Dei*.

3 Chapter 3: The Reasons for the Declining Membership of the Molopo Congregation in the Past 20 Years

3.1 Introduction

The *missio Dei* has a church and those who God redeems is part of it and must join a local revelation of God's church. Essentially, church membership means joining a church and belonging to that particular church. This phenomenon is described in different ways in the Bible. The Bible describes a church as a family where God is the Father, Jesus Christ is the family's Redeemer and all the members are brothers and sisters (Col. 1:2). Believers meet on Sundays to worship the Triune God together, to fellowship with each other and to address any family issues.

It can be considered that the traditional means of discussing the nature of a church is to consider the four marks or characteristics by which a church is distinguished in the Nicene Creed, namely: *one* – oneness, which in essence is being held by baptism; *holy* - holiness of the church, which does not in any way imply that all its members are holy, but derives from its creation by the Holy Spirit; *catholic* - originally meaning the universal church as distinct from the local congregation, but it came to imply the church of Rome; and *apostolic* – this pertains to both its church and ministry, the church is historically continuous with the apostles and thus with the earthly life of Jesus.

Further on, the Bible says a church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). God has given the world churches to be places where truth is taught. Churches are to be the shining lights, like a city on a hill (Matt. 5:14), pointing the way forward to the world. The Bible also describes the church as a body, where its head is Jesus Christ who rules and provides leadership to every member (Eph. 4:15-16). Members are, therefore, the different parts²⁵ of the body, each with a specific function.

During New Testament times (Acts 15), there was only one localised church. The range of churches today necessitates agreeing with its doctrine. The introduction of membership cards ensured following of this doctrine and hence, the practice of formal membership as accepted these days (Van Gelder & Zscheile, 2011:4). Church membership is a way of officially identifying oneself with a local body or faith community. This is basically demonstrating agreement with a particular body of believers, willing to be identified as a representative and belonging to a local geographical church. Church membership means joining a church and belonging to that church by making the formal commitment to an identifiable local body of believers who have joined together for a specific, divinely ordained purpose. These purposes include *inter alia* witnessing and transforming society and receiving instructions from God's Word (1 Tim. 4:13); serving and edifying one another through the proper usage of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8); participating in the ordinances (Luke 22:19) and proclaiming the gospel to the lost (Matt. 28:18-20). Most importantly, becoming a member of a church is submitting to the care and the authority of the qualified elders that God has placed in that assembly.

Scripture instructs believers to formally join a local church, as those whom God called, and this biblical foundation for church membership is bolstered by the New Testament. This biblical foundation can be traced to the:

- examples of the early church;
- existence of church government;
- exercise of church discipline; and
- exhortation to mutual edification.

The Bible describes the church as a family where God is the Father; Jesus Christ is the family's Redeemer and all its members are brothers and sisters (Heyns, 1980:29-64). While Peter was preaching, the Lord added believers to them on daily basis in the New Testament (Acts 2:48; 5:14). Undoubtedly, membership was negatively affected by the circumstances prior to 1994, but because this research seeks to provide background information on the reasons that led to a decline in membership, it is limited to the events that occurred in 1994 and thereafter.

3.2 Background Information

Apartheid was abolished in 1994 and democracy came with a number of issues that affected people in various ways. Among these issues is the recognition of the Customary Marriage Act²⁴ in 1998 that recognises marriages performed under African customary law, including polygamy, as legal marriages. The government also encourages circumcision²⁵ of young men as a rite of passage into manhood to be practiced as a means of curbing the HIV/Aids pandemic, while it is essence more about culture. This chapter seeks to determine whether the radical changes that ensued in 1994 contribute to the decline of members (as indicated in point 1.1 of the research).

3.3 The radical changes that ensued during 1994

The new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides freedom of religion to its citizens. Part of the article on freedom of religion in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa reads as follows: "everyone has the right to freedom of conscious, religion, thought, belief and opinion²⁶."

The implication of this provision in the Constitution is that people are free to belong to any church of their choice, without any form of hindrance. It was perceived as good to belong to a church in good standing prior to 1994 and socially accepted. Because of the right to freedom of conscious, thought, belief and opinion, various religions saw an opportunity to evangelise the citizenry of the country. The African Initiated Churches (AIC) also took advantage of the situation and launched robust evangelisation efforts. The government introducing laws such as the Customary Marriages Act has created the impression that the ruling party is biased to African culture, including ancestor veneration, in an endeavour to retain power, subdue the people and prevent them from freedom of thought. It seems that this created an enabling environment for various cultural activities and some institutions, such as the AIC took advantage of the situation.

3.3.1 African Initiated Churches (AIC)

While missionaries planted Western churches in South Africa (Elphick & Davenport, 1997:211), a significant number of AIC arose alongside. The origin and development of the AIC is a very complex situation, differing from church to church, and influenced by the spirit of

²⁴ Recognition of Customary Marriage Act (120 of 1988)

²⁵ <http://www.health-e.org.za>>2014/08/13

²⁶ South African Constitution of 1996, Chapter 2. Section

selfgovernment, self-support and self-propagation (Soltau, 1963²⁷:20-25). This research does not detail their origins, but explores their influence on the members of the Molopo congregation. The AIC's search for independence and their deep entrenchment in the native soil is deemed a positive development of the Christian faith in South African context and not just counter revolutionary. The AIC were yearning to be seen as self-supporting and not reliant on outside funding. Makhubu (1988:5) describes the AIC as being purely black-controlled denominations, with no connections in membership or administrative control with any church that is not of African origin.

The liturgy of the mainline churches was viewed as quite structural, unyielding and against the cultural beliefs of the African people (Elphick & Davenport, 1997:211). The issue is that the mainline churches do not permit observing cultural rituals, such as honouring the ancestors or encouraging practices such as initiation, yet at the AIC these practices are permissible.

For example, many Africans still adhere to most of the traditional rituals such as *ukubuyisa* (the ritual of reincorporation of the living-dead), *imbeleko* (ritual of inclusion of babes into the clan), *ukuwaluka* (the rite of passage into adulthood) and *ilobola* (the traditional process followed in customary marriage) and are often combined with Christian ritual language precisely to accommodate both the African traditions and the Christian faith. Members who cling to these practices and yet have also been Christianised often join the AIC, where they are able to practice both traditions.

Bosch (1991:273) indicates that the early missionaries were not prepared to learn about other cultures. Some of the missionaries, who introduced Africa to the gospel, expected Africans to Westernise upon converting to Christianity. It would seem that Christianity has not been contextualised to African culture, hence many find the AIC as accommodating of both Christianity and African tradition.

Africans believed that the Creator speaks directly to them in a manner that they understand and not through the Western cultural setting. Should they have accepted the Western cultural setting, it would have required them to first learn the missionaries' culture before they could receive the Divine invitation (Van der Walt, 2003:27). It is presumed that in Africa, religion integrates all aspects of life and is neither easy nor possible to isolate. The AIC discovered that polygamy and circumcision are found in the Bible (Makhubu, 1991:24). They then interpreted those portions of Scripture to suit their circumstances and began to allow their members to practice these traditions.

²⁷ This source is old, but it gives a clearer picture of the origins of the AIC.

Mbiti (1997:27) argues that when an individual sheds blood, as occurs during traditional circumcision, he joins the stream of his ancestral lineage. This is the reason the AIC ascribe to traditional circumcision in their doctrine.

The understanding that the spirits of the past as the “ancestral beings” of those who lived before them and communes with the Supreme Being (*Modimo*) is believed to have been the motivating factor that encouraged the establishment of the AIC. It is widely believed that the ancestors of the chiefs have direct contact with *Modimo*, hence they possess natural powers of interceding between God and the people (Amanze, 1998:13-15). The ancestors possess the spirits that guide them in their daily lives and are capable of predicting their future. The chiefs or leaders amongst others are said to have been given prophetic and healing powers. Together with these powers they believe that natural resources such as water, sometimes mixed with plants, leaves, salt or lime as medicinal resources (*iziwassho*) play an integral role in the healing and dispelling of evil spirits. In some instances, the leaders of the AIC make use of bones (*ditaola*) consisting mainly of four principal bones representing the family and different auxiliary bones, each representing part of society. These bones each have its own name and particular function. For example, the chief diviner (*moremogolo*) is the main bone that reveals the cause of a disease, death or any mishap depending primarily on the interpretation of the position of the bone after being thrown (Amanze, 1998:15). The surge in communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and other conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol and obesity in society prompt people to seek quick solutions and the promise of healing by organisations such as the AIC seem to be very appealing.

The most prominent AIC in the country based their strategy on erecting huge structures of worship as their headquarters, in their own architectural styles. Worship festivals are held regularly at prescribed periods, such as Easter and Christmas. Large contingencies of people make their way to these destinations. It is during these festivities where the healing and miracles are believed to be occurring. This strategy is predominantly used by the main AIC in South Africa, namely: the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) and the Saint John's Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM). It seems to be one of the ways in which the AIC attract members from other denominations. Many members find the worshipping that is purported to be taking place at these festivities appealing (Alward, 1991:137-138). The same can be said of the Molopo congregation.

Although symbols are customary to almost all churches, in the Molopo church only those pertaining to the sacraments are used. In the AIC, however, the symbols vary from church to church depending on the natural resources available. The leaders are perceived to have these

extraordinary talents, notably Lekganyane of the ZCC, Shembe of the AmaNazaretha and Christina Nku of the AFM. Christina Nku (Ma Nku, as she was affectionately known) is cited in this research to highlight one reason people join the AIC. She was baptised in 1894 by the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa and experienced numerous visions as a young girl. Plagued with illness as a young woman, she is believed to have been told by God that she would not die. A decade later she received a vision of a large church with 12 doors and then in 1939 a vision to build it not far from Johannesburg. Christina in her dreams recalled the healing of the crippled bystander in John's gospel, which led her to focus on the ministry of healing in her own religious life. Upon receiving these prophetic voices, she established her own church grounded on the African principles of healing powers (Thomas, 1997:65). The St. John Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Ma Nku's church, has the salient feature of elevating women as members and ministers. This is a trend followed by most of the AIC, seemingly a tool to attract more women.

Makhubu (1991:77) states that the AIC attract people by offering them substances such as water and salt to heal. Nevertheless, those whose belief is fortified by proper teachings will not be easily persuaded.

It is against this background of perceived powers of the leaders that the AIC attract many converts, particularly from the mainline churches.

The enabling environment created by the democratic South Africa has strengthened the powers of the AIC, in which the black members of mainline churches are caught between the two identities of Western Christianity and African tradition that many deem the true African identity. The implication is that practicing both Christianity and African traditions without guilt requires joining the AIC. If this impression is anything to go by, then the mainline churches will continue to experience a decline in membership. The Molopo congregation is also affected by this phenomenon and are losing members.

The issue relating to Western Christianity leads to the subject of the Western missionaries who first brought Christianity to Africa.

3.4 The Western missionary background of the church

Immediately after the Reformation in the 16th century, Jan Van Riebeeck came to South Africa. His arrival signalled the introduction of the DRC in the country. Converted slaves as well as Africans were congregating together with the white settlers. As already mentioned in point 2.2, the discomfort of white members in sharing a cup during the offering of the sacraments led to the establishment of the coloured "daughter church" and later that of the black population, which

came to be known as the DRCA. The “mother church” made use of missionaries to establish these churches. Clark (2005) describes the missionaries as people who considered themselves Samaritans, bringing the civilizing influence of Christianity to the uncouth African people who had no religion of their own. Missionaries were part of a larger programme of European settlers to colonise Africans and their beliefs, as Nmah (2010:490) describes. The main aim of the missionaries was to Christianise the Africans, without contextualising it into their traditions. Practices such as sacrificial rituals, beer drinking and paying of *lobola* (a practice of gratitude for a wife) are still found among Christians (Pauw, 1975:21). However, Christians do not talk openly or discuss freely the events of these rituals. The Christian converts refrain from openly declaring their ritual practices announcing during church services and inviting fellow members to attend.

The missionaries perceived most African rituals as evil and referred to them as dualism, because of the strong link with their ancestors. This resulted in many Africans joining the AIC, where these rituals are performed openly, and in this manner the mainline churches lose members. The Molopo church has also been affected and losing members, as mentioned in point 1.1. Because of the Western background, the liturgy that the Molopo congregation follows is Western according to the DRC (the mother church). It seems that the reluctance of the members to sing from the prescribed Hosanna Hymn Book and instead prefer to sing choruses is indicative of their reservations over the liturgy being too Western.

3.4.1 The Liturgy is too Western

Liturgy, as Barnard (1981:51) describes it, signifies the way we worship and focuses on the sermon and Holy Communion. It is to be in an orderly form, because believers are communing with God. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, liturgy is defined as “1. The rite of the Eucharist. 2. The prescribed form for public religious service ritual”. Scripture does not prescribe a particular form for public religious services of the church. However, there are several passages in the New Testament that provide essential elements that should constitute a healthy local church, which include:

- True fellowship of believers as a family filled with love, living in unity of heart, while giving to others that is to the common good (Acts 2:44-46)
- The performance of the decrees of baptism of believers and remembrance of the Lord's Holy Communion (Acts 2:41, 42, 46; 1 Cor. 11:23-32)
- Unwavering adherence to the apostles' doctrine, reading of the Word of God, teaching and preaching of the Word of God (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 4: 13-16; 2 Tim. 4:2)

- Praying and praising with dependence on the Holy Spirit's guidance (1 Tim. 2:1-8; Eph. 6:18)
- Believers undertaking evangelisation and discipleship among all members of the church, using their spiritual gifts to serve Christ (Matt. 20:18-20; Acts 1:8)

It is important for members to appreciate liturgy as a covenant meeting with God and not a shopping centre, yet some members do not interpret it this way. Forrester (1997:45) states: "In worship we receive a new identity and we are formed morally. By encountering God we learn how to be disciples. We learn to love by being loved, we learn to forgive by being forgiven; we learn generosity by being treated generously." Consequently, worship creates community and a lifestyle embodied and sustained.

The members of the Molopo congregation consider Reformation to be too strict, too rationalist in nature in its formal and predetermined order and manner of worship. The Molopo congregation by its very nature of Reformation also follows this liturgical order. The impression is created that the Molopo congregation is so bound to a strict liturgical order that the guidance of the Holy Spirit is disregarded. If a church is too structured, it becomes difficult to allow the Spirit's guidance and members follow their own agenda. The Molopo church came into being as a result of the mission work conducted by the DRC Molopo "mother church" and as such the influence of the DRC ministers' "missionaries" still remains.

Changing liturgy can either be beneficial or catastrophic. It is with this understanding that the church must be aware of the danger of attracting the youth with diluted content and allowing entertainment to come at the expense of evangelism and discipleship. As Rice (1991:37) explains, there is a perception of spiritual experiences that is healthy and in harmony with the broad sweep of Christian tradition. The youth are almost always ready to experience. Rice (1991) warns against permitting the external influences to create experiences that will dilute content. The minute the youth engages in experiences they are susceptible to persuasion. Chester and Timmis (2007:177-178) share this sentiment in their interesting discussion about the great number of youths leaving the church, never to return. If the youth has a good foundation and has internalised the teachings, it would be difficult to sway them in a negative direction. As Chester and Timmis (2007:179) expounds, ornamented Christianity has caused the youth to not attend youth-fellowship activities and to not practice in their faith at all. A diverse range of reasons are cited in explanation and liturgy often comes to the fore whenever this subject is discussed. Liturgy is the window of the church to the outside. Many people do not understand or know the deeper dimension of fellowship in the liturgy. In addition, the following two possible dangers relating to liturgical worship come to the fore:

- Liturgies that are designed by men are imperfect and need to be scrutinised to ensure their spirituality.
- Liturgies that require the recitation of repetitious prayers and responses can begin to be just a routine, without any thought or true worship from the heart. This results in ineffective reiterations. However, this does not imply that it is impossible for a sincere heart to worship God with repetitious songs, as he reflects on the meaning of the words and thus enters into those hymns from the heart. This is because certain hymns and choruses are sung repeatedly over time and pose the danger of being sung casually, with no reflection on what is being sung.

The reasons for leaving a particular denomination should not involve the liturgical, but primarily be concerned with its doctrine. Notwithstanding the above, it would seem that members leave the church because of the promises of advocates of a prosperity gospel and the promise of healing. These churches do not have any particular order to their proceedings and people come to find the orderly manner of conducting services too Western and restrictive, thus not fostering any benefit or growth to their personal beings. The minute this feeling develops amongst congregants, they begin to seek alternatives and thus become vulnerable to be persuaded to join other churches or to not join any church for that matter.

Hendricks (2004:161) suggests that when congregations cling to tradition, they fail to discern God's will for the liturgy to attract members. This is apparently the case within the Molopo congregation. Members are easily attracted by gatherings that do not follow a particular form of liturgy and where the music is easily understood. The New Encyclopaedia²⁸ describes music as "being among other means towards self-fulfilment, integration, self-actualization; for aesthetic existentialist it is yet another crucial department of choice and freedom". The influence music may or may not have on the decline of membership is analysed below.

3.4.2 Church Music

The official hymn book of the DRCA is "Hosanna", which the Molopo congregation uses. The hymn book is designed in such a way that the hymns relate to the sermon of a particular text. The words that are sung are biblical and convey a Christian message. This is to ensure that as congregants sing, they are able to relate the singing to the text of the day and prioritises the worshipping of God. The spiritual message is understandable upon first hearing and yet appropriately insightful for profitable reflection and meditation (Nicholson, 2014:5). It also limits

²⁸ The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Volume 24, Page 496, Micropadea, Founded in 1768, 15th Edition

rhetoric and monotonous choruses with no meaning that are sung only for pleasure and entertainment, relegating the objective of glorifying God to second place. The hymn book (Jacobs, 1967:xvii-xviii) is categorised as follows:

- The Triune God
- God the Father
- God the Son
- God the Holy Spirit
- Church and the church service
- The Word of God and the sacraments
- Praise and worship
- The life of a Christian
- Death and everlasting judgment
- Special occasions
- Choir Music

In order to ensure that the music that is sung at the DRCA remains relevant and leads to selffulfilment, the Hosanna Hymn Book underwent revision in 1966. This was also to ensure that it is designed in such a manner that its words are edifying and speak the modern idiom. The hymn book contains choir music as well as music for special occasions such as weddings, opening of church buildings, official sacramental services and general services. The choir music section is mainly intended to stimulate interest in members, particularly the youth. It has been almost 50 years since the hymn book was revised and it could mean some words are no longer in use or appropriate, thus necessitating another revision. The singing of these hymns contributes to the preparation of meeting with God. It is with this understanding that Hosanna music is sung in the DRCA, in particular in the Molopo congregation, and emphasis is being put on knowing this music. According to Westermeyer (1998:3-6), there are a number of reasons why the study of music is important. These include *inter alia* the fact that church music impacts on a number of areas. People from various backgrounds and disciplines relate to church music from their own perspective. Morris (1997:11) articulates it quite clearly as a dance-like process, whereby a religious group comes to a certain course of action to comprehend the text. He states that it is in the dance where all of the participants' wisdom and gifts, humility, reason, intuition, tradition, religious practices are called forth until the divine presence breaks in and lights the right path, thus offering sight and guidance to individuals and the group. According to Nicholson (2014:5), the text should be one of the major considerations in evaluating Christian music as true. He suggests three criteria in which evaluation is probably based, namely:

- The message must be Christian and biblical. Fables and legends having no foundation in Scripture should be avoided.
- The thought must be expressed clearly and directly. The spiritual message should be obvious enough to be understood at first hearing and yet sufficiently profound for profitable reflection and meditation.
- The language should be fresh, expressive and eloquent. The ideal text makes a kind of music of its own. It is timeless without being old-fashioned, it is relevant to the present generation and it speaks to people at any level. A good text avoids excessive repetition, trivialities and clichés.

Nicholson states that too much repetition exacerbates the problem rather than providing a solution. The members of the Molopo congregation seem to find the manner in which their hymn book is structured difficult and tend to be attracted by the fashionable monotonous choruses. Jesus cautioned against using unnecessary words when praying (Matt. 6:7). Even though it can be said that music is an integral means of worship, it should be music that is in harmony with the text and be edifying for the meeting with God.

Morris (1997:11) supports the practice of the Molopo congregation of involving people of diverse status to sing along in harmony. The Psalmist says,

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land (Ps. 95:1-6).”

Previous practice within the Molopo congregation was for the congregation to take their seats at least 30 minutes prior to the commencing of the service and sing praise and worship songs. This on its own would assist to prepare congregants to meet with God. By the time the minister enters to start the service, the congregants shall have been prepared and ready for the worship service. This practice is no longer being carried out and as such some congregants arrive while the worship service is in progress. The minds of these late-arrivals are still occupied with outside issues, having had no time to settle and seek the guidance of God to lead them in the worship service. It also results in members leaving for easier worship services elsewhere.

It is when we worship in truth and in spirit that we will be able to seek the face of God, as His face is the essence of who He is, before we seek His hand, for His hand is the blessing of what He does (Henderson, 2011:27). When congregants come to church only to listen to the

sermon, without having engaged in proclaiming the character and work of God (Ps. 95:6-7) with proper worship preparation, they certainly miss His face and this impedes their maturity in faith. As Kelley (1972:121) articulates, those who are serious about their faith should not indulge in any violation of its standards and their beliefs or behaviour. He adds that the adherents of a faith should not confuse it with other beliefs or mingle them together indiscriminately. The moment congregants begin to mingle or confuse their beliefs, they become susceptible to persuasion.

The Hosanna Hymn Book endeavours to equip people with its edifying songs. The youth of the Molopo congregation finds the songs in the Hosanna Hymn Book, where it is necessary to practise and learn the music notes in order to sing it, as difficult and not fashionable. They become comfortable with the singing of clap and tap group music, which in most cases is monotonous and does not require the effort to learn and most importantly, it is not edifying. This generation negates what is said by Kelly (1972:121), as they easily confuse and mingle their beliefs with other faith. The right songs are necessary to enable members to adhere to their faith and avoid mixing or confusing their beliefs.

Music is essential, because it is an efficient tool in the teaching and learning process. This is evident from most music teachers, who often quote Colossians: "Let the word Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs of gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). The choice of music, in particular for the young ones, can have a dynamic impact on them. The young generation also enjoys the music that goes with the use of clocks, small pillows and many other fashionable instruments. Steenbrink (1991:3) argues that the members of Christian denominations complain about the music used in liturgy, suggesting that members view these songs as difficult. What they fail to recognise is that these songs are more edifying. The danger of falling for the shallow ones is that they then become easily persuaded and fail to be spiritually uplifted.

The hymn book was last revised in 1966. The language used has evolved with time and become obsolete. These words must be encouraged to be sustained, since music is the focal point, manifesting as liturgical art pointing towards God thus enabling the faith community to meet God in worship. Since the language that in this hymn book is obsolete, congregants find it dull and unappealing. The youth of the Molopo congregation occasionally join the youth of other denominations as part of their fellowshiping (Kgobokoe, 2013/14) and in some instances at schools, universities and workplaces. It is during these gatherings where the youth are being influenced. These encounters lead to the youth feeling that the type of music at their own church is dull and restrictive. This could be one of the reasons that congregants are drawn to

other denominations that are unstructured. In essence, this point towards the liturgy that is no longer attracting the youth of today.

Makhubu (1991:71) distinctively highlights an essential element that corresponds with Morris that music is an integral part of a black person and explains that music is used liberally during various occasions. It may be during funeral, weddings or any kind of occasion regardless of its nature. He cites the example of hymn number 20(1) in the Hosanna Hymn Book, "Re a go baka Morena" (We praise you Lord). The hymn is of a praise-giving nature and usually sung at the opening of the church service. The first two stanzas are as follows:

<i>Re a go baka Morena</i>	-	<i>We praise you Lord</i>
<i>Re ntse re thabela wena</i>	-	<i>We rejoice in you</i>
<i>Re sa phela ga monate</i>	-	<i>While we live well</i>
<i>Ka paballo yaago Ntate</i>	-	<i>By your grace father</i>
<i>Re phologa tshegofatsong</i>	-	<i>We have been saved by your mercy</i>
<i>Ka dineo tsotlhe tsaago</i>	-	<i>By all your gifts</i>
<i>Reko laago le legolo</i>	-	<i>Your compassion is great</i>
<i>Le re thabisitse pelo</i>	-	<i>It has gladdened our hearts</i>

This song, albeit of a praise-giving nature, is normally made fitting to funerals or sorrowful occasions through the comments by the leader. It also highlights the element of black members receiving fulfilment in singing regardless of the situation, be it painful, joyous or relaxing. Makhubu (1991:71) alludes to the fact that black people sing freely from memory and change tunes to fit the occasion. It is by permitting the original version of a song to be sung in the form of a chorus, with a way of clapping and tapping.

The Molopo congregation remains restrictive and structural, particularly in its use of hymns. Because of this, the congregants, in particular the youth, find its liturgy still being Western and not attractive in this day and age and is thus easily attracted to other denominations. This is largely because the Molopo congregation is still confined by the Western liturgy; hence it is still viewed as dependent on the mother church.

3.4.3 Dependency Syndrome

The Western missionaries designed the black church in a way that would make it forever dependent on the mother church (Kriel²⁹, 1961:79). This fact was apparent right from the start, as pointed out in point 2.2 above. As Greenway (2007:201-270) explains, some Reformed churches within black communities are faced with the dilemma of declining membership as a result of their deep bondage to cultural dependency. In essence, this culture has created members who are not taught to take responsibility of the affairs of their own church. Since withdrawal of subsidies came into effect in 1994, as has been the case within the DRCA congregations, people have the misconception that those who are in authority are literally stealing from them. People were not initially taught about their responsibilities as members and were thus reliant on the mother church to cater in all their needs.

The emergence of democracy also created general dependency in that all kinds of promises were made, such as free houses and child grants, things that according to tradition were responsibilities accorded to men. In essence, this dependency syndrome created a society that expects everything to be done for them. Because of this, the members of the Molopo church do not take ownership as they do not see it as their own. Since these members do not take ownership of the church, they become vulnerable to joining another denomination that will finally give them a sense of belonging. This seems to be the manner in which the Molopo congregation is losing members.

In any denomination accountability and transparency are key (Hendriks, 2004:185). It is detrimental when the control of the congregation's financial affairs is left in the hands of a powerful few. A congregation should have an independent chairman, secretary and a treasurer, elected from different families (Hendriks, 2004:186). As a result of a few powerful people, the rest feel inadequate and use this as an excuse. All the monies that come in should be handled in a manner that is fully transparent and comprise a few basic internal control procedures for cash receipts and cash disbursements.

When the members take ownership, a harmonious environment will reign in a congregation. It will create an environment conducive to spiritual renewal and permit the joy of giving and offering.

It has already been stated above that the Molopo congregation does not keep to its contractual obligations to pay its minister. This has resulted in this minister relying on wealthy members

²⁹ Kriel reviews this aspect in great detail and the researcher found it very useful.

since 2005, who are in essence exacerbating the dependency syndrome by contributing to the financial welfare of the minister. These members contribute directly to the minister and not as part of the church, as prescribed in the Bible.

This was permitted, because they sought to keep it a secret and the church council does not have any authority over their contributions whatsoever. The impression is created that the affluent members who support the minister bring division and prevent poor people to take ownership and that compromises the minister. This state of affairs leads to losing the ability to objectively reflect on one's own condition. When a culture of fear and admiration exists, the object becomes to appease the powers that prevail. This results therein that the broader interest becomes subdued and confused with the desires of the one who applies power, rendering it increasingly difficult to separate the two. It creates internal pressure from within the members of the Molopo congregation, resulting in discomfort amongst the congregants. This kind of funding by some individuals, which is not accounted for by the church council, creates the appearance of wealth and members think that their meagre offerings are not needed and leads to an unfounded misconception, demoralising members. The fact is that those who wield power, as a result of their contributions, often influence the local agenda by calling the tune (Hendriks, 2004:180). This situation could be disastrous for building the church.

The dependency syndrome, not only financially but also spiritually, could contribute to reliance on evangelists and other eligible officials to do house visitation.

3.4.4 House Visitations

The Molopo congregation was established as a result of the mission work conducted by the white Molopo church (mother church). The ministers of the mother church only preached and administered the sacraments, while building the church was the responsibility of the evangelists. Later, the ministers introduced other duties to the evangelist, stipulated in the church order of 1963³⁰. The functions of the evangelists were:

- i. to proclaim the Word of God mainly to the unbelieving and those who are without church;
- ii. to administer the catechist to those who are outside the church; and
- iii. to administer the holy sacraments to certain places, according to arrangements.

These functions excluded the import task of house visitations, which was primarily assigned to the minister and elders. Paul urged all the elders to carefully pay attention to all of the flock of which the Holy Spirit made them overseers (Acts 20:28). In the DRCA the missionaries served

³⁰ Article No. 8

alongside the evangelists and black ministers. Over time the evangelists came to focus on house visitation, a function dedicated to ministers and elders, but was left to the evangelists. This resulted in elders who do not understand their responsibilities in their reliance on the evangelists. House visitation mainly served to enrich members spiritually (Act 20:35) and to teach them their responsibilities as members of the church as well as encourage them to attend church service and participate in various church activities.

These house visitations resulted in members being actively involved in the activities of the church. When conducting the house visitations, new members were gained from a particular household. Members would also at times invite their neighbours to the visit with the evangelist, in this manner even more members were reached during the house visitation. House visitations were viewed as very important and spiritually up-building, hence it is one of the functions of the minister (as mentioned in point 2.7.2 (v) above).

When the DRCA General Synod (Acta, DRCA. Deo Gloria 1999) made the decision to do away with the position of evangelist and gave them the higher office of fully-fledged minister, the house visitations suffered. This is attested by the fact that the evangelists were working together with the minister, and they were doing house visitation which was supposed to be done by the elders. The elders were not being taught what their responsibilities are as they were relying on the evangelists. When the General Synod took a decision to do away with the evangelist, this function was neglected as such it suffered.

The actual incumbents, the elders, were not conversant with their responsibilities to the detriment of congregants. The Molopo congregation, as it became as a result of mission work carried out by the Molopo congregation, mainly made use of evangelists to perform almost all the functions, which had a negative effect given their inadequate preparation.

House visitation was no longer being conducted and members became disheartened, as Newbigin (1977:39), describe house visitation to represents the loving and caring relationship of God. A lack of house visitation could leave members spiritually unfulfilled and hence, the Apostle Paul urged the elders to continuously comfort themselves and edify one another (1 Thess. 5:11). When members are not spiritually fulfilled, it becomes difficult for them to remain committed to proclaiming the gospel and transforming society. It is a daunting challenge that is facing the Molopo congregation, leading to members who do not understand their calling and are not committed to the *missio Dei*. They are then easily swallowed up by the pressures of this world and begin to conform to its standards. In essence, house visitation assists in tending, upliftment as well as calling those who have strayed.

As previously mentioned, the Molopo congregation is the fruit of the mission work carried out by the Molopo congregation (mother church). The Molopo congregation, as a fully-fledged church should also engage in teaching. Paul reminds Timothy in his second epistle (2 Tim. 3:16) that the whole of Scripture is divinely inspired and therefore profitable for “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”. The Molopo congregation seem to be unable to conduct house visitations, primarily because the minister is not fully available to this congregation and the elders are not adequately prepared to accept this function as theirs.

The mother church subsidised the remuneration of evangelists, a habit that created dependency. The dawn of democracy *inter alia* brought a halt to subsidies and the DRCA began to encounter difficulties. It then became a challenge for the DRCA to carry on with its calling and the church found it *inter alia* difficult to continue to train its own ministers. The DRCA General Synod at Barkley-West in May 1999 did away with the use of evangelists. The evangelists, who were still in the system and practicing, received further training and made fullyfledged ministers with all the associated rights (Acta, DRCA. Deo Gloria 1999). This decision was taken primarily because the evangelists were in essence already performing the functions of the ministers. Scrapping the position of evangelist seems to have been ill-conceived, since the synod did not consider who would take over the tasks they previously performed, such as house visitation. The impression created by the promotion of the evangelists is that the lack of care it created attributed to the decline in membership within the DRCA. This seems to be the case in the Molopo congregation as well. As indicated above, Article 18 of the church order³¹ prescribes that the supervision, governance and discipline of members should be the responsibility of the elders or counsellors and this was no longer the case, since this was a task previously performed by the evangelists. This is also seen as one of the factors that contributed to the decline of membership.

The Regional Synod Tshwane during June 2010 attested to the fact that house visitations is no longer being carried out by the congregations within its borders (ACTA Tshwane DRCA, 2010).

Bosch (2008:50) says that failure of the calling of believers is aggravated by the fact that churches have turned into institutions that are conservative, passive and yielding to outside influences rather than being progressive, i.e. active and influential. It would seem that members of the Molopo church are falling into this trap, as stated by Bosch (2008:50). They have succumbed to the extensive use of church uniforms, as with the AIC.

³¹ The researcher makes use of the Church Order as a source since there were no available records in the Molopo congregation

3.4.5 Church Uniform

It is a tradition in the Molopo congregation for the minister to wear a white shirt, white tie, black suit and black shoes as well as the Genevan Gown whenever official duties such as church services, funerals, wedding ceremonies etc. are performed. This was a missionary imported tradition, which remains a DRCA custom. According to Bruggink (1998:1), the wearing of worship clothing by the minister signifies the continuity of faith for most congregations. As such, missionaries had to wear clothing consistent with their sacred calling and that would clearly identify them as missionaries of the church of Christ. It is imperative to note that the missionaries did not impose the church uniform on the members of the congregations.

The church council members have similar attire as ministers, but they have added a white long belt over the shoulders of the gown, a tradition that is not found anywhere within the broad DRCA. It is thus said that the Molopo church is conservative, passive and susceptible to outside influences. The various church organisations within the DRCA also have their own church uniforms to identify themselves. The reasons cited for wearing these garments include internal control, uniformity, giving honour to the service of the Lord, reducing the use of expensive label garments and minimising competition among members. It is, however, clear that some members are unable to afford these uniforms, since the material is most often prescribed and their sale centralised. These materials and or garments are often overpriced, since it is one of leadership's methods of fundraising for the church, as the reports of the CWL to the church council indicate (Church Council Minutes dated 13 September 2008).

Wearing uniforms, as found in the Old Testament, primarily pertained to the leadership. Special garments were designed and worn by Aaron and his sons that they may serve the Lord as He commanded (Ex. 28:1-5). These garments were to be designed by talented people and the wearing of these garments signified the responsibilities of the nation they had to bear on their shoulders.

The missionaries also made use of the church uniform as leaders and it was never imposed upon the congregants. Jesus Christ did not give any guidance on this matter and the New Testament does not contain any prescription in this regard either. The congregations following the African traditions adopted church uniform voluntarily (Elphick & Davenport, 1997:223), given their richness in symbolism. The Molopo congregation by nature is a church that is formed on the basis of Reformation. The Reformation recognises only the two symbols of the sacraments (baptism and holy communion). While the minister and elders of the DRC used to wear uniforms in the past, their organisations did not. It would seem that the wearing of uniforms by the DRCA church organisations was in conformation with other African churches.

As stated above, wearing a uniform was confined to the minister. It is unclear where this uniform actually originates. Black believers initially wore leather garments around the heap (*tshega* for men or *seope* for women), which white people found offensive. As Elphick and Davenport (1997:255) distinctly indicate, to be dressed or clothed in Western rather than in African fashion was identified with seeking Christian instructions or baptism. This aspect falls outside the scope of this study, but it is still important to note that the uniform remains a very important part of the DRCA and as such the Molopo congregation in that it gives them a sense of belonging.

To borrow from Paul, "One must be willing to suffer the loss of suit, robe, garment and costume, and count them as refuse in order that I or the congregation may gain Christ". It is highly important that congregants be committed to serving God. It would appear that within the Molopo congregation the significance given to the uniform outweighs serving God, typical of a self-centred congregation. The church council has even instructed that someone be appointed to ensure that members are properly geared in their uniforms and whoever fails are fined (Church Council Minutes, 10 June 2006). A member who is not in a position to pay a fine is deemed to have transgressed and disciplined (Church Council Minutes, 10 June 2006). Imposing disciplinary action over the lack of a uniform has in itself a negative impact and causes members to be disheartened and begin to seek alternatives. This practice contributes to the decline in membership in the Molopo congregation.

It has now come to be that during church services the members who wear a church uniform seem to dominate and occupy the front pews. It is not a practice expressly conveyed to members, but has become an unspoken rule and the church council does not seem to take heed of this. It has the negative result of making members who do not wear a church uniform feel like outsiders. The uniform does indeed serve as a proper tool of identification in the service, but it is a very expensive exercise that the congregation could do without. In terms of Scripture the uniform and its associated aspects is pure tradition and not absolutely necessary (Ex. 28:1-5). It doesn't contribute to the proclaiming of the Word of God and brings with it undue competition among congregants. The uniform places pressure on congregants should be pressurized and subdued to the use of uniforms as against allowing God to show them the way of life, granting them the joy of His presence and the pleasures of living with Him forever (Ps. 16:11). Members are not taught the significance of the use of church uniform, which is viewed by them as a burden that is unnecessarily expensive. In contrast, the AIC attach symbolic meaning to the uniform. For an example, the ZCC's believe that the colour khaki symbolises that human beings are dust and they shall return to dust. White symbolises purity, red the blood

of Lamb (Elphick & Davenport, 1997:223). These symbols express the understanding that those who use them are pure, having been cleansed by the blood of the lamb.

Uniform brings with it distinctions and prejudices in church politics, rendering the “ununiformed” as outcasts in their own church, exactly what it is intended to prevent. It thus creates division among church members and does not enrich fellowship. When members become disheartened by such customs, they jump ship and join other denominations. The absence of a local minister to oversee the correct use of the uniform does have an impact on the congregation as a whole.

3.5 The Service of the Local Minister

As the function of administering the holy sacraments is reserved for ordained ministers, it follows that when a congregation does not have its own minister, another must come to administer the sacraments. When there are a great number of vacant congregations, ordained ministers must take responsibility for these congregations. It suggests that the minister cannot focus on building his own congregation and the other functions of the minister are assigned to the elders. The minister who assists in several churches, ends up only presiding over church councils and administering the holy sacraments once per quarter and where necessary, conducts marriage ceremonies. Because of the lack of a local minister, major responsibilities such as teaching and evangelising are neglected as contemplated in the New Testament.

The New Testament church came into being through the agency of the Holy Spirit as an evangelising, teaching, worshipping and serving fellowship of believers. As Hedlund (1991:199) articulates, the church is to take up the destiny of a true Israel as servant and become missionaries of God. The church is, therefore, called to the task of bringing salvation to all nations through Jesus Christ. Prior to 1994, being a member of the clergy was a respectable career. The “moederkerk” used to take care of ministers of the DRCA financially. Pressure arose in 1986 to unite the church, the DR Church became reconciliatory and agreed to enter into unity talks (Nel & du Toit, 2007: 10) and unity discussions among the family churches were initiated. It was during this time of discussion that the DR Church resolved to phase out the subsidising of the DRCA and the DRMC on a sliding scale. The phasing out of subsidies created a burden to the congregations that were unable to take sudden responsibility of caring for their own clergy.

The resulted in the majority of ministers seeking greener pastures elsewhere. The exodus of DRCA ministers left congregations without ministers and forcing the remaining few to oversee other congregations as substitute ministers. It may be biblical for elders to govern, but they have to be trained for the task prior to taking charge of congregations. Although the Molopo

congregation has its own minister, it is nevertheless affected by its minister's obligations toward other congregations. The minister is now only available once every three months to perform functions at his congregation. When effective teaching takes place in a church, it helps to build members spiritually and thus grows the church. If members are spiritually mature and fulfilled, it will be easier for them to continue the teachings among the "unchurched" and the straying. It will assist members to be committed to the course and not easily distracted or persuaded by other churches, especially those who preach the prosperity gospel.

Another aspect that is neglected is that of teaching, exacerbated by the absence of the local minister. When teaching does not take place, it compromises the essence of the church and renders it ineffective (Heyns, 1980:85). As such, the congregation remains spiritually unfulfilled and find it difficult to connect with God. Congregants leaving the church have to do with not being connected in the church, being revolted by gossip and turned away by conflict, while teaching is ineffective. Heyns (1980:85) indicates that in order to stimulate the religious life of the congregation, teaching must take place alongside preaching. Goheen (2011:139) asserts that apostolic teaching was emphasised in the early church, which means that teaching should be the guiding principle of religion today. In essence, he demonstrates that every component of the body of a Christian that works should be fresh. While his assertion cannot be negated, the reality is that the foundation laid by our forefathers should be the basis of our present religion. History serves as the sturdy foundation for building up a local congregation, as a task of the minister, and forms the basis of daily renewal in life to avert rust, erosion and conformity to the standards of this world. Renewal necessitates the presence of the local minister to continuously provide guidance and teach the members of the congregation.

Makhubu (1991:102) alleges that members feel that a minister who is not always available to his church is a visitor to them and robs them of the fulfilment of fellowship. The Molopo congregation is such a case and this absence does indeed contribute to the decline in membership.

It can be concluded that the members of the Molopo congregation are too dependent on the clergy, given that many of them are illiterate. Evangelising among the "un-churched" does not take place and there are more members that leave the church than there is who join. This issue is demonstrated by a large number of presentations to the synod by the members of the Molopo congregation, as mentioned above. The unfortunate part is that the members once elected to serve on higher structures began to neglect their local duties, forgetting that serving at synod level does not relieve them of their local responsibilities. The absence of a local minister coupled with elders abdicating the responsibilities of the local church leads to disheartened and

spiritually unfulfilled members and contributes to the decline in membership in the Molopo church.

3.6 Summary

Taking into consideration a number of issues, it becomes apparent that there are compelling reasons why the membership of Molopo congregation has been declining over the past 20 years. The lack of effective teaching and preparation for transformation has created members who are disheartened and spiritually unfulfilled. The lyrics of songs that are outdated or have lost meaning create music that is out touch and boring. The persistence of this will defeat the prescribed aims of liturgy (1 Cor. 14:26), where everything should be done for edification. As Hirsch (2006:50-52) indicates, people are more inclined to stick to with the tried and tested and are weary of new challenges. He continues the analogy to point out that the reality is that over the last 2 000 years of the gospel, we are on the decline in just about every Western cultural context (Hirsch, 2006:50-52). The Molopo congregation has failed lately to ensure fellowship among congregants in the form of house visitations, home cells gathering, etc. that the relationship with God and fellow congregants remains fulfilled.

The issue of church uniform comes into play as well. Members are not informed of the significance of the church uniform and they come to view it as an unnecessarily expensive burden, unlike AIC members who take pride in wearing the church uniform to the extent that they even wear it outside of church services. Members of the ZCC church in particular are usually seen wearing their uniform almost every day of the week. It seems that the members of the African Initiative Churches consider the uniform to protect them against evil and bad luck. Mainline churches, in contrast, the uniform is only a means of identification and seemingly often imposed on members.

The void left by the absence of the local minister creates an enabling environment that permits members to be easily persuaded to join other denominations, as a total change of the world creates fear and people flee to their ancestors for help.

3.7 Conclusion

The decline in membership of the Molopo congregation can be ascribed to socio-economic, religious, cultural and political issues. The lack of more cost-effective structures resulted in the withdrawal of subsidies by the white church, although conducted on a sliding scale. The impact of the responsibility created by these events was excruciating to most congregations. It could be deduced that mainline structures that are often supported by theological institutions have to some extent overstated their part and have lost credibility as well as become out of touch with the people.

4 Understanding the *missio Dei* will help the Molopo Church to be Missional and Relevant

4.1 Introduction

It seems that the Molopo congregation does not take part in the *missio Dei* and is, therefore, unable to transform society through their obedient lives to God and proclaiming the gospel. Therefore, their membership is declining. The intention of this chapter is to aid the Molopo congregation to contextualise the gospel and provide them with preliminary mission guidelines that will enable them to fully participate in the *missio Dei*. The Molopo congregation need the following elements: God's compassionate love, teaching and suffering.

Schulz (2009:12) begins by quoting Walter Freytag who states that "in the biblical sense nothing can be called mission that is not geared towards conversion and baptism". He, however, hastens to indicate that this should not be used to discriminate against other activities from being part of mission, but should serve as a guiding principle and constant reminder of what the church should keep in sight as she serves as an instrument in God's mission.

One of the elements of *missio Dei* is God's compassionate love, as demonstrated in Exodus 34:5-6: "Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed His name, the Lord. And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.'" The God Who was made known progressively in the rich variety of His being, such as creator, sustained the Covenant God of Abraham, the gracious God. In the New Testament He reveals Himself as the Father of Jesus Christ and as the Holy Spirit, as the God of the covenant community, namely the church. God reveal Himself as the One who has compassion on the less privileged, the marginalised and the outcast (Bosch, 2006:57).

The second element, which Jesus continuously demonstrated, is that of teaching. This in essence culminated in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20), where the disciples are sent out to make disciples, baptise them and teach them all that they were commanded to do (Bosch, 2006:69).

The third element is to be found in the book of Isaiah, where the universalistic motif of the historical foundation of the Old Testament revelation reaches its high point (Is. 40-55). Bosch (2006:71) emphatically asserts that the biblical foundation of mission is found in the combination of suffering and mission. Here Israel is being shown that it is not in their national triumphant activities that witnessing is found, but in national adversity. The purpose of God is not achieved by being powerful, feared and respected by other nations as Israel believed. Jesus emphasises that He did not come to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:28). It is when we take the position of servants that we will be doing God's will. As Bosch (2008:59) explains, the community is implored not to regard itself as a sectarian group, but to act confidently and intentionally as the church of Christ. It is with this understanding that the church is taken into the *missio Dei*.

4.2 *Missio Dei* with focus on the Molopo congregation

Missio Dei as a concept has been around for over 60 years. The term first appeared in Western theology and missiology at the 1952 Willingen Conference of the International Missiology Council and coined by the German theologian Karl Hartenstein. He was in essence responding to the presentation of Karl Barth of 1932 at Brandenburg Missiology Conference, where Barth envisaged mission as an activity of God - *actio Dei* (Schulz, 2009:87).

The term "*missio Dei*" never featured at the Willingen Conference. It was only with the compilation of the conference report that the secretary, Karl Hartenstein, used the term. He defined mission as the Father sending the Son, with the all-encompassing objective of establishing the Lordship of Christ over the entire redeemed creation. Subsequent to the Willingen Conference, the concept *missio Dei* became a prevalent theological framework for understanding mission in various Christian traditions, particularly in the West. Books intending to interpret *missio Dei* were published by several German theologians, such as Goerg Vicedom in 1965; Johannes Blauw in 1962 and Hans Kung, in 1987. In recent times publications on *missio Dei* include theologians like Christopher J.H. Wright, David J. Bosch and John Flett.

Schulz (2009:14) defines *missio Dei* as God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world; God's involvement in and with the world; and the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world and in which the church is privileged to participate. Mission is

thus based on the Trinity in that God is a missionary God. God sent His Son Jesus Christ to the world (John 3:16), not to judge the world, but to save it (Frost, 2011:23-24).

The term "mission" is rooted in the substantive theological understanding of *missio Dei*, as Bosch (1991:390) explains: "Mission is understood as being derived from the very nature of God. The classical doctrine of *Missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit is expanded to include yet another movement." The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit send the church to carry out His work to the ends of the earth, to all the nations and to the completion of the time (Van Gelder, 2007:88). The mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world, it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church. Mission is thereby seen as the movement from God to the world and the church is viewed as an instrument of mission. There is a church, because there is mission - not vice versa. The missionary obligation of the church comes from the love of God in His active relationship with men (Wright, 2010:42-46). Again it was through the Son that we knew God loves us. In so doing the mission of the Son was not to judge and to eliminate, but to give us life (John 10:10). The missionary God, who sent the Son to the world, calls all the people of God to empower them to be a community of hope (John 20:21). In sending His Son into the world, God's mission becomes a mission of mercy. Just as the historic events of Christ are true, the proclamation must continue to bring Christ into the lives of all people. It is the proclaiming and teaching of the gospel on all the blessings of forgiveness from over 2 000 years ago that must reach the ears of all unbelievers today, if they are to be saved (Rom. 10:14-17).

We are reminded in Matthew (28:16-20) that the church's missionary calling is authentic. Greenway and Mashau (2007:81) demonstrate this by raising the question in Acts 1:6: "Lord, are at this time going to restore the Kingdom of Israel?" Jesus responded to their doubts by explaining that His kingship is not only directed at Israel, but to all of creation and this gave authenticity to their call to mission. The death on the cross and the resurrection on the third day have made the Lordship and honour due to Him possible. From this viewpoint, it is reasonable to indicate that the role of the church has huge and essential consequences for the world. Nonetheless, the missionary role of the Molopo congregation today should focus on:

- witnessing to Christ and the Christian faith;
- serving the needy; and
- sending out people to evangelise to those who are still in the dark.

The intention of God is to make earth into a holy place, where people live in peace and harmony. The earth should resemble the New Jerusalem where God lives among His people. God will come down to be with us; just as good as He became man in Jesus Christ to live among us (John 1:4). The book of Acts (1:8) recounts as follows: "When the Holy Spirit come about you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in Judea, and to the ends of the earth." The church is, therefore, invited by the triune God to be His coworkers on earth.

Mission in the Old and New Testaments is briefly addressed in terms of a full grasp of mission by the Molopo congregation.

The Old Testament is fundamental to the understanding of the mission, as much as it is vital to also understand mission from the New Testament perspective (Bosch, 1996:16). The two can, therefore, not be divorced from each other. The people of Israel were not sent as missionaries to different countries, continents or cultures. Mission in the Old Testament is integrated into the life of the nation of Israel and is centred on God Himself who acts. God acted in the past and He is still acting now and will continue to act in the future. The act of God is eminent and reflected in the manner the nation remembers, worship and receives His promises for the future. The compassion of God is seen to go beyond the borders of Israel, as evident by the interaction between the expression of mercy and the expression of judgement. The missionary found in the Old Testament was God Himself, who wills as His eschatological act of brilliance, bringing the nations to Jerusalem to worship Him (Bosch, 2008:16-20).

As indicated by Goheen (2011:192), the good creation has been corrupted by sin and God has put forward a plan to restore all creation and wholeness of human life from the depreciation of sin. The nations are seen to be enemies of God, but some will come to Yahweh. The past acts of God thus become a sacred tradition and the law becomes something that the people serve and obey. God called particular peoples, namely the offspring of Abraham who became Israel (Gen. 17:7), to faith. God chose Abraham and Israel for priestly service among the nation. The choosing of Abraham and Israel signified the biblical doctrine of election. Election is an act of grace, encompassing both calling and sending. God chose Israel so that He might reveal Himself to Israel and through Israel to all nations (Deut. 4:5-8, 35). God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, the covenant which was to determine their overall history. Israel was called by God to live as a light and salt to the nations, drawing them nearer to Yahweh. The nations outside Israel were to be drawn to Jerusalem through the light that was shining in Israel. This was neither as a result of any savings nor qualities inborn to Israel, but through God's will.

God's selection of Israel was not an act of exclusion of other peoples or nations from the privilege of knowing God and being known by Him, it is a privilege given to Israel to glorify Him among the nations. As Hedlund (1991:32) highlights, God chose Israel so that He might reveal Himself to Israel and through Israel to all nations. Israel continued to fail God in its calling, yet God did not abandon them. He continued to act and reprimand His Israel for not being faithful to their call and never hesitated to use them, even in their disobedience.

Bosch (2008:20-21) views the New Testament as a mission document and says that viewing it in this way leads him to observe that the Jesus we meet in the New Testament was absorbed in His first century Jewish context. Bosch further notes that of late scholarly opinion has come to discredit the accounts of Jesus in the gospels as unbelievable history and moved to a widespread acceptance of historical Jesus. The gospel writers used the information they had about Jesus to creatively and responsibly retell the story of Jesus in their missionary context.

It will be essential for the Molopo congregation to study the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke as they grapple with the understanding of a missional church.

According to Bosch (2008: 56-65), the gospel of Matthew reflects an important and distinct subguideline of the early church's interpretation and experiences of mission. He sees the gospel as a unified whole leading up to the words of the Great Commission in conclusion. Bosch (2008:

56-65) looks at Matthew through the following lenses:

- Matthew was writing to a community that needed to understand its mission. The gospel is thus not a simple account of the life of Jesus, but aimed at assisting communities and this must be the missional basis of the Molopo congregation.
- Bosch noted contradictions such as the gospel being the most Jewish of the four and also that Matthew indulges in a bias towards gentiles, presenting information that might lead the reader to conclude an anti-Semitic stance. The inclusion of material that could be considered offensive by both Jews and gentiles was also a primary contradiction in Matthew.
- Matthew took a hard stance towards Jews, in comparison to Mark and Luke. His portrayal of Jews and their leadership was anti-Semitic.
- The gospel includes the Jewish people among the nations to which the church is sent. This embraced both the Jews and all nations of the world.

Even though it is difficult to unearth Matthew's mission, because of the manner in which he tackles the Jew and gentile issue within the community, Bosch (2008:65-79) identifies a number

of key concepts such as: the reign of God; God's will; justice; commandments; the challenge to be perfect, to surpass or excel, to observe or keep, to bear fruit and to teach that are woven into the gospel and illustrates his approach. In conclusion, Matthew assures us that because of the earthly ministry, the death and the resurrection of Jesus, the road to the unbelieving has been created. All obstructions have been removed and the new order has been initiated. The crucial victory by Jesus over the power of evil should be proclaimed to witness His abiding presence and to lead the world towards recognition of the love of God. Christians find their true identity when they are involved in mission, in communicating to others a new way of life, a new interpretation of reality and God and committing themselves to liberation and salvation of others (Bosch, 2008:83). This narrative should be how the Molopo church views mission and begin to undertake to emulate what Matthew is expounding.

In His first public Sermon, Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-3 as a way of defining His call and His eternal relationship with us. He was clearly demonstrating that He was bringing good news, binding up our broken hearts and comforting us in grief. He declared that "today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Jesus quoting from Isaiah 61 could be understood as the command given to us to proclaim the gospel (Is.61:1). By emphasising that "the spirit of the Lord is upon me", Jesus was in essence demonstrating that while on earth He was dependent on the Spirit. An indication that whenever we proclaim the gospel news, we must rely on the guidance of the Spirit at all times.

Almost over 20 centuries has passed since the significant events of Jesus of Nazareth and a great has occurred over time. The Jewish war, which was forced by the Zealot Movement, had resulted in the destruction of the temple and completely changed what was taking place in Jerusalem. Christianity, once a sect inside Judaism, was becoming a religious movement in its own right. It was in its second generation and in search of identity (Bosch, 2008:85), by asking questions such as "Who do the crowds say I am?" and "Who do you say I am?" (Luke 9:18-20). The miracles of Jesus reminded people of the esteemed prophets of the Old Testament, such as Elijah. They were also reminded of John the Baptist, a great and inspired preacher; however, Jesus' preaching equalled or surpassed that of John. Their answers were unsatisfactory. Jesus asked the follow-up question "but what about you?" (Luke 9: 20) and Peter evidently spoke for them and answered "the Messiah sent from God". Having been with Jesus for three years, they had come to the conclusion that Jesus is more than a great preacher, more than a prophet, but that He is the One, the ultimate King prophesied by the prophets, God's chosen Ruler for all humanity. Jesus confirmed that Peter was correct and clarified that this was revealed by His Father in heaven and not man (Matt. 16:17).

The following discussion is an attempt to highlight to the Molopo church what they should believe about Jesus. Strangely Jesus cautions His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ. He warned them because at that point in time the disciples didn't fully comprehend the significance of the confession, neither would anyone else understand. He was in essence saying this because the disciples were correct about His identity, yet were mistaken about His mission. Jesus knew that before He acted as God's Ruling King, He must first complete a different mission for which His disciples were entirely unprepared. The Son of Man must suffer, be rejected and killed and then be raised from the dead (Luke 9: 21). According to Bosch (2008:85-86), Luke made the profound statement that the present generation is at no greater disadvantage than Jesus' first disciples half a century ago as the risen Lord is still with them. This is through constant guidance of the Spirit into new explorations. Where people obeyed and truly accepted Jesus as Lord and where the community followed the guidance of His Spirit into new conditions of mission, Jesus was still present and available to them. Similarly, the members of the Molopo church are in the same position as the first disciples, they have the Holy Spirit to guide them in their pursuit of the mission of God.

Frost and Hirsch (2011:164) claim to be persuaded to say that the broader category of mission includes various aspects such as evangelism or witness or service or social justice, but is not limited only to these. In order to define mission appropriately, Frost and Hirsch (2011:215) (in a discussion of Bosch) concluded as follows:

"Mission takes place where the church, in its total involvement with the world, bears its testimony in the form of a servant, with reference to unbelief, exploitation, discrimination and violence, but also with reference to salvation, healing, liberation, reconciliation and righteousness. Mission is not in competition with other religions, not a conversion activity, no expanding the faith, no building up the kingdom of God; neither is it social, economic, or political activity. And yet, there is merit in all economy, society and politics-but in a different manner! The [mission of God] purifies the church. It sets it under the cross - the only place where it is ever safe. The cross is the place of humiliation and judgment, but it is also a place of refreshment and rebirth...Looked at from this perspective mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belief. It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of community, for the sake of the world."

As the church, the Molopo congregation is called to live in the present in so much that it is called to the future though this is very difficult, because African identity tends to live in the past. This perspective relates to practices such as going to the mountain for circumcision, obeying

ancestors, etc. It is still the norm among some members to believe that their ancestors will bring them luck and protection against evil. All these things are done while at the same time they regard themselves as Christian. The Molopo congregation as a church should be seen by many as being relevant to the culture and social setting of today, otherwise it will effectively refute the message that is being preached (Watson, 1979:135). It is against this background that the Molopo congregation is being called to relinquish the past and embrace the present. God will renew the world and make good that which has been blemished and restore everything for the sake of His kingdom.

4.2.1 What the true church must be?

Understanding what the true church must be can be investigated in reference to Newbigin (1978:18-19), who asserts that the church indicates that as the Father has sent the Son, so the Father and Son sent the Spirit into the world. Therefore the Spirit created the church and sends the church into the world to participate with God in redeeming all of creation. The church is as a result meant to proclaim the kingdom of God and experience in its own life the presence of the kingdom, characterised by God's justice, love and mercy. As the sent people of God, the church is the instrument of God's mission in the world. Those who God call must respond and join His church.

Mission is not the instrument of the church, not a means by which the church is grown, but the mission has a church to advance the mission of God. Mission precedes the church and the missional church takes directives from the *missio Dei*. Van Gelder (2000:31) concurs with Newbigin, by indicating that the heart of this definition is that God is in action and not the church. God, in other words, has a mission in which the church participates. God has placed His mission in the world and not in the church.

The earliest reformers pronounced the true church to be encompassing the three basic fundamentals, which are:

- i. preaching the gospel; ii. the proper administration of the sacraments; and iii. the right exercise of church discipline (Frost & Hirsch, 2011:160).

If discipline is not upheld in a church, even if correct preaching of the gospel and proper administration of sacraments are taking place, then it cannot be regarded as a true church. Even though the Molopo congregation has highly trained leaders (church counsellors), it appears that family members are still being abused by their partners and Christians are seen

abusing alcohol, but only the single girls are disciplined because their sins cannot be hidden. In doing so, the fundamentals of a true church are being trampled. An apparent perspective of this nature does not represent a true church. The Molopo church should engage decisively with matters of discipline if they are to be a true church.

Frost and Hirsch (2011:215) give an extensive account of the assertion that whenever these three aspects are being practiced, assurance of the church of the Lord is available (as treated in various confessions of faith). Frost and Hirsch (2011:160) make reference to evangelicals having developed an understanding of the nature of the church as being founded on almost 15 different functions. They however concur that there are four key categories of these functions essential to the missional church, namely: worship, community, proclamation and evangelism.

4.2.1.1 Worship “Leitourgia”

Public Christian worship should embrace faithfully gathering themselves around the Word and the sacraments. From these gathering believers are then sent into the fields of mission.

Clayton (2009:40-41) identifies several key theological ideas as follows:

- “Worship is relevant only because God chooses to relate to humanity and to invest God’s self in our gatherings.
- Liturgy consists of the egalitarian activities engaged in by people who gather for worship and who go forth in service in the world.
- The role of worship leaders is to serve, drawing the assembly into an encounter with the One who made, redeems, and sustains them.
- The *Missio Dei* is the mission of the church today: to be called and gathered...and sent forth as the active people of God.”

This distinct understanding of worship provides an awareness of the post-Christendom reality of church life today. Worship is an integral part that permits us offering our world back to God, by bringing all aspects of life under the lordship of God as a central act. Paul provides encouragement to his readers to always offer themselves as a living sacrifice, to lay aside their own desires to follow Him, putting all their desires, body and soul at His disposal and trusting Him to guide them. Worship is thus not purely an assembly of private individuals pursuing an intimate encounter of the divine, but it is a public work in which we participate in the mission of God (Gelder & Zscheile, 2011:152). In essence, worship is key and it is a necessary act that man must endeavour doing in order to remain in worshipful praise and to the glory of God. Worship is central and a defining activity of people of God. Kritzinger, Meiring and Saayman

(1994:38) describe worship as being a public service rendered directly to God or indirectly through serving fellow human beings. In worship we express and establish fellowship and community, because the greatness God's love obliges us to do so. Worship is, therefore, an offering praise, thanksgiving and appreciation to God.

Forrester (1997:45) states that "In worship we receive a new identity and we are formed morally. By encountering God we learn how to be disciples. We learn to love by being loved; we learn to forgive by being forgiven; we learn generosity by being treated generously". As such, worship expresses and forms community.

4.2.1.2 Community "Koinonia"

The word "koinonia" first appeared in the Greek New Testament (Acts 2:42-47), when a salient description of shared life by the early believers in Jerusalem was experienced. Nazi-Ali (1995:50-51) draws the reader to the epistle of Paul to the Philippians, which he refers to as the most vital work as far as mission is concerned. What took place in this epistle is the partnership of the church in Philippi in sharing the gospel with Paul. As such fellowship of believers comes out strongly in terms of mission of the church. The community essentially has to fellowship with God and this fellowship will result to fellowshipping with fellow Christians in reaching out to the outcast, etc. The assertion of Wright (2010:175-178) is that people must work together in achieving the goals of tutoring one another. The Molopo congregation is part of a broader community that includes community-based organisations, health organisations, the homosexual community, the sex-worker community, the aged community, the youth community, etc. It is the responsibility of the Molopo congregation to take the leadership role and participate meaningfully amongst these communities. This will entail *inter alia* providing physical assistance such as feeding schemes, clothing and tutoring. In so doing, an enabling environment for tutoring will be created. This will make it easier for the Molopo congregation to teach the Word of God amongst these communities.

Goheen (2011:141) emphasises that the church's fellowship is expressed as believers living together in a transformed society in brotherly love. He further states that the best way of explaining this phenomenon is by taking note of the reciprocal pronoun "one another", which is to be found evenly spread throughout the New Testament and being an important part of early Christian ecclesiology. Goheen (2011:214) concedes with Wright that the church needs structures and groups that will equip the people of God with the insight they need to advance their calling. These groups may be smaller groups committed to sharing challenges and praying for one another. They may as well be groups destined for a common calling that explores what it means to be Christian in a particular sphere of the public domain.

As Jesus Christ had prayed for *koinonia*, even for those who would believe in Him through the messages of the disciples (John 17: 20), He was clearly envisaging that the witnessing work of the community would remain beyond the first generation of witnesses to the continuous testimony of those who would come to faith. Necessarily faith comes through hearing the testimonies of those who have seen and heard, yet faith requires to be passed on through continuous testimony.

4.2.1.3 Proclamation “kerygma”

John the Baptist began his preaching by calling people to repentance from their sins with the message: “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matt. 3:2). The understanding is that the world is lost in sin, which are destroying us and that God has sent His Son the Saviour to set us free and offer us a whole new life. The proclamation is the starting point where the summons and invitation are made that we may repent. Today people are able to repeat the gospel they heard in church, yet they simply continue to falter in their lives (Van Gelder, 2007:161). We are continually beseeched to proclaim the gospel, as Matthew rightfully prescribed in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). We are to emulate what Jesus did by going from place to place preaching to and teaching the nations, even to those who reject the gospel. He has instructed His disciple to keep on making disciples and that same instruction is given to us today. If we love one another, as Jesus commanded His disciples, we will continue to proclaim the gospel (John 15:12).

Luke demonstrates the importance of the *kerygma*, in the book of Acts of the Apostles, and specified eight sermons of the *kerygma* (Van Gelder, 2007:161). They are as follows:

- 1) Peter’s address to the crowd (Acts 2:14-36)
- 2) Peter speaks to the onlookers (Acts 3:12-26)
- 3) Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8-12)
- 4) The apostles persecuted (Acts 5:29-32)
- 5) Peter at Cornelius’s house (Acts 10:34-43)
- 6) In Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41)
- 7) In Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:15-17)
- 8) In Athens (Acts 17:22-31)

The above-listed sermons display three similar essential elements. Whereas these elements may not necessarily follow the order in which they are listed hereunder, sometimes the three

elements blend the three themes together. These elements are, however, the most consistent and indicated as follows:

- *Effect* - there is usually an event such as healing which in essence generates the audience.
- *Explanation* - then follows the explanation of the event that took place, which in essence is rooted in Jesus Christ and setting out how He fulfils prophecy. At the centre of this explanation is the Paschal mystery that Christ was killed through our sinfulness, yet rose gloriously triumphant. This Paschal mystery is the power through which all healing occurs and this same Jesus, who is now gloried at the Father's right hand, is Judge and Lord of the world.
- *Exhortation*- finally, there is an appeal to repentance and the call to receive Jesus Christ in faith.

The Molopo congregation should endeavour to provide, in any given situation, a thorough explanation of the circumstances of the event. While providing this explanation, it must be made clear that Christ died for our sins that we may be saved and He conquered the grave, victoriously rose so that we may be reconciled with God. There should always be a plea to repent and a call to receive Jesus Christ in faith. It follows from these essential elements that *kerygmatic* preaching is not simply ingrained in reason or discourse, but is rooted in experience: the experience of the miracle of healing and the experience of a transformed human person and most importantly, the preacher himself.

4.2.1.4 Evangelism

It is expected of the church to be submissive in nature, to serve and be obedient to the complete dominion of Christ. The Molopo congregation is thus required to be engaged in the task of equipping congregants for ministry within its community. Wright (2010:286) advocates that there is still an immense task ahead to reach the ends of the earth with the gospel, in order to ensure that the entire universe is filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, and this challenge still faces us with all its diversity and complexity. Evangelising the world in its entirety remains as urgent a priority for the church as it was when Jesus placed it as a mandate on His disciples, before His ascension. From this premise, it follows that it begins with us, thus Molopo church must also undertake this task. The missional task of the church is to fulfil the three functions of sending, going and supporting and these remains obligatory for the Molopo mission. As Van Gelder and Zscheile (2011:148) explain, discipleship requires following Christ into participation in God's mission in the world in the power of the Spirit. This places discipleship at

the heart of the missional turn. Without faithful discipleship, the church cannot witness credibility to or participate effectively in God's mission.

These elements of proclamation, fellowship and service are not to be misconstrued as the other being greater or superseding any of the other elements, as this will weaken the gospel. They are fashioned in line with a pair of scissors having two sharp blades that operate in unison and held together by fellowship, which likewise is not a separate part of the Church's task, but rather the cement that keeps proclamation and service together, being the axle on which the two blades operate.

The church is seen as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). It, therefore, means that the church has to be seen providing love to the sick. It should be ministering to and evangelising the community. The New Testament makes mention of a variety of gifts, such as healing, prophecy, knowledge, service, etc., which enable the church to evangelise to the community. As a result different Christians play different roles. The naked truth is that various situations require various approaches and demand a diversification of forms of intervention. The approach should be determined by the circumstances that prevail at that particular moment, the hungry need food and the thirsty need water (Matt. 25:35).

Jesus Christ as God's Son incarnate is the core of the gospel, as Escobar (2003:12-13) relates, which as a forceful kernel has given birth to countless plants. Even though we may place Jesus in a particular culture, He is in essence available throughout history even today. The history that Jesus created is being witnessed by all nations throughout the world. Jesus travelled frequently to teach the nations. Because He was addressing different nations, the message he conveyed is translated from the languages He originally spoke such as Hebrew and Aramaic. This is a clear indication that the God who initially called Abraham to form a nation and who revealed Himself ultimately in Jesus Christ had a purpose that His revelation must reach all of humanity. A message Jesus articulately expressed in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) by instructing His apostles to go and make disciples of all nations. Similarly this instruction was expressed by Paul in a statement such as "God our Saviour...wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). Throughout the years of difficulties and challenges, the Holy Spirit has persistently driven Christians to obedience such that today we have a global church.

Mission is the applied demonstration, either by deeds or words, of the glorious Lordship of Jesus. Mission is in a sense a place where we get to sample the kingdom of Jesus, which has come and which is still to come in entirety. The church is then afforded an opportunity to acclaim belief to all. It is afforded an opportunity to work to eradicate injustice here and now.

The church's mission today is to overcome issues such as grief, mourning and suffering. Mission is seen as an act of worship, since it also involves offering our world back to God. Bosch (1991:332) alleges that whenever the church concentrates on church planting as a principal means of mission, the church fails to point to God or to the future and focuses on itself. However, the mission of God is being continued through Israel, through Jesus and through the early church (Goheen, 2011:195). The New Testament is modelled after Jesus and so is the community that begins as eschatological people to take up the mission of God. If a true church constitutes these characteristics, it can then be said that such a church can be made missional to ensure that it participates in the *missio Dei*.

4.2.2 The Molopo congregation as a Missional Church

The Molopo congregation must be a missional church that glorifies God; retains and gains members; and transforms society. In the main, as Goheen (2011:40) describes, the very essence and identity of the church should be to take up its role in God's story in the context of its culture and participate in God's mission to the world. The Molopo congregation must resemble such a church. The congregants are to understand that they are the gathered community of God's people. They gather around Christ and a body of divinity, embedded by the Holy Spirit, united as blood-brothers. We can create all sorts of artificial communities, but the church is an organism and not an organisation. It is a living, dynamic and organic entity of the redeemed.

Ideally, being missional teaches that the church has a mission because Jesus had a mission. A missional church is essentially a community of God's people that defines itself and organises its life around its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world (Frost & Hirsch, 2011:159). The church, as Goheen (2011:3-6) explains, should receive its role from God's story in the context of its culture and participate in God's mission to the world. A church is called to be a critical participant in its cultural setting and not be fashioned by its environment. The church needs to remember that it is God's story and not that of the church. Ecclesiology, therefore, is about us understanding who we are and why we are.

DuBose (1983:23), in trying to understand missional accurately and faithfully, believes that there are theological distinctions and he hastens to reflect on three major theological distinctions that assist in the missional conversations as follows:

1. The missional church is about the missionary nature of God and His church. Members of the missional movement recognise both God and the church being inherently and predominantly missional in nature, i.e. God is a missionary God who sends a missionary

church. The term “sending”, in its various forms in Scripture, denotes the missionary nature of the Triune God and the very core of the church. The redemptive activity of God, His relationship to the world and His dealings with mankind is described in Scripture by the very word “sending”. Scripture is full of sending language that explains the missionary nature of the Triune God. God the Father sends the Son and God the Father and the Son sends the Spirit and God the Father and the Son and the Spirit send the church. As it can be found in the gospel of John alone, either from the evangelist or Jesus Himself, Jesus being sent appears approximately 40 times. This sending, in the gospel of John, culminates in Jesus Himself as the One who is sending: “as the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

The church is, therefore, an important part of the missional conversation and it should be noted that the purpose of the church is derived from the very nature of a sending God, which in turn obliges it to be sent as a missionary people, both individually and collectively.

2. Missional Church is about incarnational ministry (versus attractional/extractional) in a post-Christendom context. The missional church is primarily concerned about sending the people in the church out among the people of the world. This is as a result of those with a missional perspective no longer seeing the church service as the primary connecting point for those outside the church. Missional churches see their primary function as one of actively moving into a community to embody and personify the word, deed and life of Jesus in every nook and cranny. As DuBose (1983:23) explains, the church should embody itself with such elements for it to be seen as the light and salt that will shine among the community and this should be the case with the Molopo congregation.
3. The missional church is about actively participating in the *missio Dei* or mission of God. God’s primary activity is in the world and the church is God’s instrument sent into the world to participate in His redemptive mission. As such, making a distinctive difference between a church with a mission programme and a missional church is a primary concern. A church with a mission programme usually deems mission as one activity and the Molopo congregation saw it as a programme of the mother church. They did not have ownership of mission, thus they perceived mission as the task of others. A missional church, on the other hand, focuses all of its activities around its participation in God’s agenda for the world. Thus God’s mission must form and inform everything. All activities of the church must be initiated and organised according to God’s agenda, which must also be that of the church.

The fundamental purpose of a missional church is rooted in God's mission to restore and heal creation and to call people into a reconciled relationship with Him. It is God's mission that calls the church into existence. This means that when thinking about mission, we can no longer see the church as starting point, but the church must be seen as the result of God's mission. In the words of the South African missiologist David Bosch, "It is not the church which undertakes mission; it is the *Missio Dei* which constitutes church" or stated in a slightly different manner "it is not so much that God has a mission for His church in the world, but that God has a church for His mission in the world" (Wright, 2006:62).

The study of the church has previously concerned itself with matters such as church order, sacraments, ministry and discipline. Though these concerns are important, they are not to precede ecclesiology which is about identity and self-understanding. It is only when identity and self-understanding are achieved that the church can consider what it ought to do and how it participates in the *missio Dei* (Wright, 2010:72).

Necessarily, a missional church is about the manner in which things are done and being a church that surpasses certain specific preferences of its members. It is in a sense advocating a return to the centre, an absolute and a holistic church, a rediscovery of mission as its organising function. According to Bosch (2006:198-201), humans in their own nature have limitations and as such require guidelines to give them greater clarity of what is expected of them. However, such guidelines remain relative. The understanding in what Bosch relates is that as the apostles were teaching, we are also too to engage in teaching. The apostles were in essence doing mission work throughout and that is precisely what the church should to be doing. Nurnberger (2007:9-10) is in agreement with Bosch in that according to him, no man is an island. He alluded to the fact that Christians should see their lives in the context of God's mission in the world as a whole including social factors, political factors, economy etc. In a sense, man is not created with full knowledge thus capable of falling into sin, hence, the need to continue doing mission work. Man must be taught to confess sin and acquire knowledge in order to be reconciled with God. For this reason God has provided teachers, who forever ensure that humans continue to receive knowledge. God's specific concern will be directed at everything that is lacking in nature and whenever He discovered a need, He will provide. Thus the church today must be seen to be participating in God's mission, by emulating Jesus.

4.2.3 Continuing the mission of Jesus

According to Goheen (2000:171-172), the New Testament defines a church by means of several images. He, however, hastens to indicate that one of these images of defining a church is: "The

provisional incorporation of mankind into Jesus Christ.” He suggests that his definition unfolds in four points, namely:

- Jesus is the representative man who has revealed and accomplished the end-time kingdom and in order to participate in that kingdom means that being incorporated into Jesus. The church exists to enable man to relate to Jesus in continuing His life in the world and conforming itself to His death. Secondly, we are related to Jesus who is risen, alive and present in the midst of His church. Lastly, being related to Jesus means being related to Jesus who is coming. Members of the church are not responsible for its growth as earthly institutions, but it is called forward into the future in which it already participates and the true future of the human race.
- The church concerns itself with humankind. It is not for the benefit of its adherents.
- The church is a provisional incorporation of humankind into Jesus Christ. In the first instance, the members of the church make up a small part of humankind and exist for the sake of all humankind. Secondly, the visible form of the church is provisional in that it does not reflect the variety and richness of the life of all humankind.
- Finally, God has accomplished the end in Jesus’s life, death and resurrection. The church is therefore that community which has been incorporated into the life of the kingdom as a deposit, first fruit and sign. It, therefore, enjoys communion with the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit - the blessings that will be wholly known at the end.

Bosch (2008:47-49) highlights five major ingredients of the missionary ministry of Jesus and the early church. If the Molopo congregation applies these ingredients, it will become missional. The implications are discussed in detail in the following chapter, when implementation of the *missio Dei* is addressed. These ingredients are as follows:

- Firstly, the early Christian mission involved the person of Christ Himself.
- The early Christian mission was political, indeed revolutionary. The Christian movement of the first century was a radically revolutionary movement and it should be that way even today. Being revolutionary should neither be evaluated in terms of the terror it spreads, nor of the destruction it causes, but rather in terms of the alternative it provides. Christians confessed Jesus and rejected all other gods, thus demolished the supernatural foundations of prevailing political theories.
- The revolutionary nature of the early Christian mission manifested itself *inter alia* in the new relationships that came into the community. Jew and Roman, Greek and Barbarian, free and slave, rich and poor, woman and man accepted each other as brothers and sisters.
- The early Christians did not usher in utopia in their mission, nor did they attempt to do so.

Their invocation “Maranatha” (Our Lord Comes) expressed a deep hope that had not yet been fulfilled.

- Jesus defied logic and ministered in weakness, as Paul describes as in defiance of reason: “It is when I am weak that I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

It was difficult to convince all of the legitimacy of Jesus and Bosch (2008:50-51) notes three weaknesses of the early church, namely:

- Jesus had no intention of founding a religion and the community of Jesus became a religion. The followers of Jesus were not given a name, they had no doctrine of their own, they had no distinguishable grouping, nor did they have any geographical area earmarked for their operations. The apostles were to be the forerunners in Israel and beyond. The community around Jesus was to function for the sake of all others, working for everyone. This community was not supposed to separate itself from the others. This high level of calling was not maintained and with time, the Jesus community became an institution with self-interests governed by regulations.
- Then this movement ceased and turned into an institution. An institution is conservative and protective of its boundaries, while the movement is very aggressive in nature and crosses frontiers. Over time the churches became less concerned about the world outside and instead began to formulate laws and regulations that would guarantee the dignity of their worship meetings. The struggle for survival, as a separate religion, also consumed a great deal of time and energy that could be used to further their original calling.
- Finally, the church was unable to include the Jewish people. As indicated earlier, the movement was to be aggressive and crossing borders, reaching to all communities. It, however, became an institution and concentrated on the chosen few. Paul continued to feel very passionate about the conversion of the Jews. Similarly, the same mission field still exists today within the community in which the Molopo congregation functions.

4.3 Mission field of the Molopo congregation

The farm workers did not live a life that characterises that of Christians. The farmers noticed in 1925 that this state of affairs provided a great mission field that needed attention.

The church that takes part in the *missio Dei*, according to the gospel of Mark (16:15-16), must go into the entire world and preach the good news to all creation, baptising those who believe that they may be saved. This perspective clearly demonstrates that Jesus commissioned all of us to be His witnesses in the world to which the Father sent Him (John 20:21). It is a call of Jesus Christ to those who follow Him to go out and witness for Him in all four corners of the world. This call encompasses all of His disciples and no one is exempt from this task. Anyone

who falls short to bear witness to Jesus is disobedient to this call. All Christians are included in this missionary call as potential missionaries. As such this call is also general in that it includes all unbelievers as the missionary field. This indicates that it is a call to be ambassadors of Christ to unbelievers, without cognisance of the places where they are and which is in essence meant for Him.

The "Great Commission", as it has become known in all four gospels, is to be engaged in a worldwide proclamation of good news (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49 and John 20:21-23). It is widely accepted these days that the so-called Great Commission should be regarded as the key to the understanding of the entire gospel of Matthew (Bosch, 1987:27).

It is in this regard that the followers of the earthly Jesus are to make others into what they themselves are (Bosch, 2008:74). The emphasis is that they are to teach them what they are taught. Further on, the disciples must accept disciples by the holy rite of baptism. The baptism should be done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is by the authority given from heaven and not of man. As His ministers do so by the authority from the Triune God, their commission is under a great seal of heaven that has put honour on the ordinance (Hendrickson, 1994:362). We are to emulate Jesus by choosing to be Christians, in the course of serving Jesus as Lord, throughout our whole life, and worshipping God in the marketplace. We need to realise that our workplaces are indeed our mission fields. Love and compassion should be demonstrated at all times. Those around us will notice when we are simply being Christians in our workplaces. The gospel must be taken to the people rather than seeking to attract people to the programmes of the church (Wright, 2010:72-73). In essence, the Molopo congregation must practice love to the poor, the sick and the detainees. The organisations, in particular the CWL and CWF, must be assigned to care for the sick, the terminally ill and the aged. These organisations should be encouraged to provide care for the neglected in society that they may give attention to the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:4; 2:42). Caring for the neglected creates a fruitful seed for preaching, which is identified as a powerful means by which God's people may be nurtured and empowered for the missional calling (Goheen, 2011:204). The love they demonstrate should not be seen as a spoken language, but it must be practiced as a natural expression of faith that will attract members.

As is highlighted herein, Africans to cling to the past. If this clinging to the past persists, even at the Molopo congregation, it will hinder the nurturing and empowering of the people for the missional calling. People will be unable to notice the scope of the mission field ahead of them.

Jesus was aware of the vast scope of the mission field to be covered and so His selection of disciples deviated from the norm of the priestly class and instead He went for fishermen,

taxcollectors and the like (Bosch, 2008:467). This was to highlight that the service ministry should not only be the responsibility of ordained ministers, but be for all who have been shown the light and accepted Jesus as Saviour.

Luke (Acts 1:8) calls us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, while not neglecting Jerusalem. Essentially, Luke indicates that it is incumbent upon Christian disciples to identify those who have the least exposure to the gospel within our communities and reach out to them. The least-reached communities may as well be found in our midst. Wright (2010:27) indicates that the mission field is essentially in all places, including our own streets, wherever there is ignorance or rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus rescued Paul from his own people and the gentiles, sending him to them to open their eyes and show them light that they may be freed from the bondage of sin and have a place among the cleansed (Acts 26:17-18).

Within the boundaries of the Molopo congregation there is a number of “un-churched” people, who are themselves a mission field. Many farm dwellers leave their homes to settle in the townships and villages within the Molopo congregation’s boundaries. The university enrolls new student communities of which some end up being accommodated within the boundaries of the Molopo congregation. The various government departments employ people from different places and this presents a new mission field for the Molopo congregation. It presents an opportunity for the Molopo church to conduct mission work within its borders. If Christians in the Molopo congregation are not careful, they will miss the opportunities to reach their least-reached neighbours. It is important to determine how it affects the way the church reaches out to these people or how will it be continued in the church of today to reach out to these people?

4.4 Continuing the Mission field

Quite frankly, the concept “*missio Dei*” brings with it a clear understanding that it is oldfashioned and a misnomer to say mission is being executed by Western church sending missionaries overseas. Mission is fundamental to the nature of the church, it should be missional regardless of its location. The church is missional in all dimensions of its existence, but there should be specific missionary intentions and defined acts by which the church engages in mission. There has to be a point of concentration in the life of the church for the missionary intention, which is a proper and specific activity that takes its role in God’s story in the setting of its culture that participates in His mission to the world (Goheen, 2011:4), otherwise the whole life, essence and identity will be lost. God is continually sending the church into the world. Mission is integral to

the life of the church and the church should not mistake mission as the exclusive programmes such as taking care of the elderly, visiting the sick or feeding the needy.

It is when the church of today, in particular the Molopo congregation, becomes consistent in their purpose by accomplishing ministering without prejudice that they will be considered effective. In addition to being effective, the Molopo congregation needs to be faithful in bearing witness to the kingdom of God and to participate in God's mission in their context (Van Gelder, 2007:162-163). Central to thinking about congregational faithfulness, effectiveness and efficiency should be the biblical and theological perspective as well as an organisational perspective.

The coming of Jesus Christ to earth signalled the birth of a church with the pronouncement (Jn. 3: 2), "the kingdom has come", indicating that it was time for His people to be gathered. This gathered flock was the nucleus of the church. Jesus gathered this community and gave it the instruction: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you to continue (John 20:21).my mission" (Goheen, 2011:194). The church itself is being sent into the nations and thus given clear role. The church must be understood as someone who is on the expedition of God, who as a sign and service continues to bring others to worship the Triune God, who proclaims His love to the world to transform society. It can, therefore, be said that the church has to function holistically in order to achieve its calling.

4.5 What does the church need to be doing?

Since the Church has been sent to the nations, it has to ensure that its role of being on the expedition of God is being acted upon diligently. Bosch (2008:44-45) asserts that in a church there must be equality, regardless of the nature and background of the believers. He adds that the church must be a community with a concern for the people they have never met. It is in this light that the missional programmes are to be designed and implemented. The church needs to go back to basics. Van Gelder (1999:121-122) highlights three basic areas of renewal, if a church has to be strengthened, namely:

- *The church needs a renewed commitment to preach and teach the truth of the Word of God.* People have lost confidence in the church, thus losing confidence in the Word of God. The Word of God stands for good and thus has to be preached and taught in our churches, since this is the highest calling of the church. The Word of God should never be compromised, as this will be compromising the calling of the community. Today's world seeks meaning and the church must take charge in reaffirming this calling courageously.

- *The church needs a renewed commitment to communal discipleship.* The church's discipleship should be founded on biblical living for it to be communal. It should be characterised foremost by praise and hope. Regardless of the challenges and experiences, the church as an elect community that is called to live its life for the glory and praise of God (1 Pet. 2:9) must give its life for the truth.
- *The church needs a renewed commitment to be the place that equips people for ministry.* The ministry of Christ, in and through the church, is a special calling that is characterised by obedience to the truth and love for each other. For the discipleship to be shaped by both truth and love and become the rhythm of the community in each place and time, it must take the call to be a place that equips people for ministry (Eph. 4:11-13) seriously.

The church is called to the unique task of shaping people to be servants. For the church not to fail in its God given mission, it should be characterised by ministry or service. The equipping function of the church should be comprehensive in nature, aiming at becoming servants of the world community. The church has to concentrate on the function of nurturing and over time they should be focusing back to the original mission of Christ of making more disciples. In this fashion, the church will be permitting God to grow the membership. We are called to live "alongside with" our neighbours as servants. We are called to serve people according to the purpose of God (Van Gelder, 1999:123). Similarly, the Molopo church is called to live as servants with its neighbours.

As Hedlund (1991:199) states, the church came into being as an evangelising, teaching, worshipping, servicing and fellowshiping of the people of God. As such, it is called to undertake the task of bringing to all nations salvation in Jesus Christ. Similarly, the Molopo church is an integral part of the plan of God for salvation of communities. The Molopo church is, in accordance with the New Testament arrangement, called into the world through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 20:21) to be a disciple to the communities (Matt. 28:20). The Molopo church is called to be an instrument of God in mission. As the apostle Paul suggests, "they can only preach to them if they are sent" (Rom. 10:13-15). The Molopo congregation is called to be the light and salt to society that they may understand that God loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to the world, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but receive eternal life (John 3:16) and not for the judgment of the world, but for its salvation (Frost, 2011:23-24).

4.6 Summary

Missio Dei refers to God's mission, i.e. God Himself working to redeem man in His own creation that has been blemished by human beings. It is in essence seen as a Triune God that is God

the Father sending the Son, and Father and Son together sending the Spirit to the blemished world to redeem it. As the Father has sent His incarnate Son, so the Father and Son sent the Spirit. Thus the Father and Son and the Spirit also sent His Church to the world to redeem it. The church is not to see itself as being the source of mission work, but partaking in the *missio Dei*. In this regard the church should not only consider its growth by the scientific growing numbers of believers, but by the enrichment in the spiritual growth of the congregants.

Members must live in the community as God's instruments. According to Thompson (1994:69), God is a God of mission, which means a God who sends. The Molopo congregation should be the salt and light to the communities in which they live. They should ensure that there is a point of concentration for the missionary intention, missionary dimension, which is appropriate to the life of the church if they are to be seen to be taking part in the *missio Dei*.

4.7 Conclusion

The Molopo congregation, as a church that takes part in the *missio Dei*, should be in a position to equip and teach people to safeguard all that the Son of Man has taught. It must proclaim the good news, make disciples and be able to engage in social, economic and political liberation. Serving humanity, as Jesus did, must be among the things that the Molopo congregation undertakes.

It is when the Molopo church understands and takes part in the *missio Dei* that they will become a missional church that retains and grows its members, nurturing them to be transformed that the church may fulfil God's command to be the salt and light in society.



5 Chapter 5: Preliminary Guidelines Found On the *missio Dei* for the Molopo Congregation to Fulfil Their Calling

5.1 Introduction

The essence of this study was to investigate how the Molopo congregation understands and takes part in the *missio Dei* in the context to remain committed to proclaiming the gospel and transforming society to glorify God. The main objective of this study is, therefore, to develop preliminary guidelines to equip members of this congregation with the Word of God, to ensure that they understand and remain true to the course of Christianity. Consequently, the following can be stated:

5.2 Findings and Observations

Chapter 1: The background underlying the study is outlined in detail.

Chapter 2: Background information about the DRC is provided, mainly to understand the formation of the DRCA, which planted the Molopo church as a result of mission work conducted. Furthermore, the history of the Molopo congregation and the context in which they have been functioning after 1994 is also provided.

Chapter 3: The study investigates how the radical changes that ensued after 1994, the Western missionary background of the church and the service of the local minister have contributed to the decline of membership in the Molopo congregation.

Chapter 4: The study aims to assist the church in understanding the *missio Dei* that it may be missional and relevant. The chapter relates how the *missio Dei* will aid the Molopo congregation to remain committed to proclaiming the gospel and transforming society, according to the Word of God.

5.3 Guidelines

The following guidelines are suggested for the Molopo congregation in order to be missional:

- **Positive history of the DRC**

The DRC has a rich history from which the Molopo congregation can draw strength. This history reveals a range of examples and role models that could assist in encouraging the counsellors and the congregants at large. The DRC as well as its daughter churches have a very good church order that is used to govern the church and if properly applied, can

assist to advance the programmes of the Molopo congregation. There are DRC ministers who serve as examples for the congregation to follow. A perfect example is Dr. Beyers Naude who demonstrated and conveyed a story of a positive Christian witness in South Africa, within the realm Christian mission, through his ministry and contribution to the victims of apartheid (Masuku, 2010:4). Dr. Allan Boesak, who courageously delivered a speech at the WARC on the situation of South Africa and argued against racism and apartheid, is another example of from whom the Molopo church can draw strength. He continues to lead the church even today by ensuring that he imparts knowledge to the students at the University of Stellenbosch in the Western Cape. The late Rev. Mochubi Lebone, who against all odds and courageously voted against the unification of the then DRMC and DRCA into the URCSA, was a model of boldness emulating Peter and John as models in witnessing (Acts 16:15). The current local minister, Rev. Kgobokoe, is the strongest model they can emulate and can draw from his knowledge and experience to grow.

- **Strengths of the Molopo congregation**

The Molopo congregation prides itself on the strong leadership of its local counsellors. The knowledge and experience of most of the counsellors of the Molopo congregation has enabled them to be elected to serve at higher structures, such as the circuit and the regional synod. If the congregation can tap into this knowledge and experience, they will be able to learn from these experiences.

- **The Western missionary background of the church**

The Western missionaries planted churches with the good intention of improving their lives, both mentally and spiritually. This is demonstrated in their good deeds of establishing hospitals and schools. In order to ensure sustainability of these institutions, the missionaries made use of the church organisations such as that of men, women and youth. They trained the members of these organisations to work at the hospitals and the schools to assist in various functions. The Molopo congregation can similarly establish feeding schemes to assist orphans and child-headed households as well as old-age homes and home-based centres.

The Molopo congregation makes use of the Western liturgy, which they consider too structural and unyielding for the African tradition. The introduction of committees will assist in different aspects, such as the following:

- A liturgical committee that is inclusive of the youth can assist them to be accommodating and progressive.

- A music committee, which is also inclusive of the youth, will assist in making sure that the music is edifying, spiritually fulfilling and entertaining.
- A Bible study committee will assist in making sure that learning takes place.
- A programmes committee will ensure that the programmes that the church embarks on are carried out to the benefit of the church.

- **The Service of the Local Minister**

The Molopo congregation has the advantage of a local minister with a wealth of experience. The local minister can be requested to encourage the congregations he is serving as substitute minister to call their own ministers. In this fashion, this minister will be available for the Molopo congregation to teach and grow spiritually that they may be able to attract new members.

- **House visitation**

House visitation was a function largely assigned to missionaries. This function proved to be a very useful tool to build members spiritually. It was also a fitting opportunity to proclaim the gospel to the “un-churched”, thus presenting an environment conducive to attracting new members. This function has been found to have collapsed since the discontinuance of the evangelists. Training of the elders to understand that the house visitation function is their responsibility will aid to reinstate it. Reinstatement of the house visitation will enhance the functioning of the Molopo church and thus assist in building up the church.

- **Church planting**

The Molopo congregation is a product of mission work conducted by the mother church. The Molopo congregation should continue this valuable work and replicate it by serving the needy and those who are still in the dark. In the process they will be able to do church planting, thus responding to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). Matthew and the other evangelists present the Great Commission as coming directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, thus it has to be carried out to the letter.

5.4 Comments

Having undertaken this study, the following broad comments can be made:

The radical nature of the early Christians evidenced itself among the new relationships that arose in the communities through partnerships. Notably these partnerships were seen among the Jew and Roman, Greek and Barbarian, free and slave, rich and poor, woman and man

accepting each other as brothers and sisters (Bosch, 2008:48). In essence, Bosch credits this as one of the five highlights of the early Christian mission that involved the person of Christ Himself. The Molopo congregation can take advantage of various bodies such as Operations Blanket, Multy Vision, etc. that are currently in operation in the area and form partnerships with them. These partnerships will assist in overcoming Satan, his plans and schemes that he has released against the church that is provided by Jesus' highly priestly prayer for all believers (John 17:20-26). If the Molopo congregation forms partnerships, by following the model of humility and servanthood in the most effective way presented by Christ Himself, will eradicate evil (Philip. 2:5-9). Learning to network and building strategic partnerships is a key principle that will enable the Molopo congregation to implement the *missio Dei*.

The New Testament distinctly dictates the missionary purpose of Christ's coming into the world. The Lord Himself told us of that purpose when He said: "For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). He also said: "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me" (John 6:38). John wrote much later that "God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9). In view of the above, Jesus Christ was a missionary sent with a purpose. His missionaries have received the same calling, in service to Him, to save the lost (Cook, 1979:28). This calling is still intended for the Molopo congregation today.

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7 ANNEXURES

7.1 Annexure 1

The graves of the former evangelists of Molopo congregation.



i Evangelist Mohapi's Daughter

Evangelist and Mrs. N.J. Mosadi-

Standing with are: Elders M. Motshabi and P.K. Modise

7.2 Annexure 2

Calling letter of Rev. Kgobokoe

DE NEDERDUITSE GEREFORMEERDE KERK IN AFRIKA
SINODE PHORORO
BEROEFSBRIEF



Aan: Da. SC. Kgebokwe
Posbus 2342
Mufika 2745

Geachte broeder

Gnede, barmhartigheid en vrade van God onse Vader en Christus Jesus onse Here!

Die gemeente Mufika van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika het deur 'n vergadering van sy Kerkraad u wettiglik beroep as leëre van hierdie gemeente.

Die gemeente wester die hoop dat u geliefd sal word om die beroep te aanvaar, en versoek u van sy voorbeelding by die oeweging daarvan.

Die gemeente verwag van u dat u, as getroue dienskneg van Christus, u bediening by ons sal verrig volgens die eise van Gods Woord en die Kerkorde van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika, en ook u ampwerk sal bevestig deur 'n voorbeeldige lewenswandel.

Indien u die beroep aanvaar, betoel die gemeente van sy kant om met u hardik saam te werk en aan u die gepaste agting en eere te betoon. Verder verbind die gemeente hom om vir u lewensonderhoud die volgende aan te stel:

Trekkers: R. B. B. B.
Rechtspraak: R. B. B. B.
Woning: Gee
Ander: Gee

Gedeken te Ottoburg op hierdie 18de dag van Januarie 1920

[Handwritten Signature] (Voorsitter)
[Handwritten Signature] (Skrifal)
Adres: Posbus 545
Mufika
2745
R. B. B. B.

Leë van die Kerkraad:

P. M. K. K. K.
E. M. K. K. K.
K. M. K. K. K.
S. B. K. K. K.
E. F. M. K. K. K.
M. M. K. K. K.
M. M. K. K. K.