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Free Reformed Churches in South Africa – Support for ministers needed.

Synopsis

Our Lord has planted churches in South Africa through the emigrants that came from Europe. The federation of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) is small and counts eight churches, of which three came as a result of the mission work. These three churches are situated in the less affluent areas and are not self-sufficient in supporting their ministers. Of the other five churches, another two are also relying on support via 'deputies needy churches'. This has the result that the federation is not able to support the needy churches from funds within South Africa. The shortfall will be more than R500 000 for the next two years.

Background.

As from 1652 reformed church members from Holland emigrated to the southern tip of Africa. The churches, especially where Dutch and later Afrikaans was spoken, adhered to the reformed doctrine. But after it became the state church, politics and other influences resulted that it became a traditional church for the Afrikaner, called the "NG kerk" or "Dutch Reformed church" (DRC).

The "Gereformeerde Kerk" – also called "Doppers" – or in English the "Reformed Church of SA" (RCSA) was instituted 150 years ago when they broke away from the DRC over doctrinal issues. The RCSA kept correspondence with the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, also after the Synod of 1944, from which the Reformed Churches (liberated) originated.

The reformed emigrants that settled in South Africa after World War II had to make a choice to either join the RCSA (who still kept correspondence with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) or to institute a Free Reformed Church. After the RCSA neglected a call to break up the relation with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the first Free Reformed Church in South Africa was instituted in 1950.

Although the RCSA broke their correspondence with the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in 1976, no unity could be reached between the RCSA (±120 churches) and the small FRCSA (8 churches), mainly due to issues of life and discipline.

Mission

Since the 1960's members of the FRCSA started mission work under the black population. Sent by Drachten in the Netherlands, rev. Agema was the first missionary in SA starting in Mamelodi in 1964. In 1991 the mission work was taken over by the churches in South Africa with three missionaries. In the year 2000 we had five missionaries. April 2009 we have six, and Lord willing at the end of 2009 we can have nine missionaries (of which five are black) each with his own mission point from where, over time, a church can be instituted. Up to this time three churches have been instituted as a result of the mission work and a fourth congregation is likely to get instituted in 2011. Although the FRCSA contribute substantially, the majority of the money comes from our supporting churches in the Netherlands.

Should we not reduce the mission efforts in South Africa since we cannot support the new instituted churches?

Financial situation of young instituted churches.

Due to the cultural differences (African believes), but also due to the political philosophies governments adopted and implemented in South Africa (colonialism and apartheid), the black people of South Africa have had less exposure to education, skills and business opportunities. As a result of the above, the average member in the black churches have lower skill levels, less education and therefore a lower income than the average white church member.

Although the political situation changed in 1994, it is a fact that it will take more than one generation to get the skill levels up to the average of the more blessed church members of the older churches in SA. Another trend is that those who have been uplifted and are getting better income, often move to more affluent areas and leave the church.

The above-mentioned trends have a direct impact on the black congregations of the FRCSA which are located in the poorer black areas. Poverty, unemployment and low wages have the result that the churches are relying on support from the federation to support their ministers.

One can assume that Christianity based on the reformed doctrine will result in church members to do their work to the glory of our Creator and that He will bless them in terms of income. Over the last five years there has been growth in the income levels but unfortunately also a decline in the membership of the recently instituted churches. Two of the needy congregations' own contributions have increased from 8% to \pm 25% of their full annual budget. It is therefore reality that it will take years and could take even generations before they can fully support their own minister. Therefore the FRCSA has to be realistic and plan to help our brothers and sisters in these congregations for the next 10 or even 20 years.

Income levels in South Africa

Income levels differ vastly in South Africa. Area, educational levels and age are factors but the main factor is that there is an oversupply of unskilled/semiskilled labour which results that low wages are paid for this type of work.

Income per person per month	SA Province	
	Gauteng	Western Cape
Average	R 21 000	R 18 000
Aus. \$	\$3 281	\$2 813
Can. \$	\$2 800	\$2 400
Low (25%)	R 2 000	R 1 800
Aus. \$	\$313	\$281
Can. \$	\$267	\$240
High (75%)	R 45 000	R 40 000
Aus. \$	\$7 031	\$6 250
Can. \$	\$6 000	\$5 333

(Based on 2005 Unisa report - Figures are adjusted to 2008.)

Social up-liftment responsibility

Over and above the financial support, a number of initiatives are being run by the more blessed FRC members in order to help our black brothers and sisters. This has been going on for years with the support of donors from within South Africa, but also from overseas. Some of the initiatives are:

- Transferring of financial skills
- Church administrative support
- Thusano fund supporting ± 40 students in obtaining skills and tertiary education.
- AIDS patients support and awareness
- Support for reformed schooling

The aim is to teach our brothers and sisters skills and knowledge in order to obtain better jobs with a higher income to be able to support their families and to be responsible in their tithing to the church.

Financial situation of the older FR churches in SA.

The average income of members of the three older and bigger churches is above the South African average income. However, it is still lower than the average income of the Netherlands. Due to the fact that we run two reformed schools which are only subsidised for ± 10% by the state, as well as other synodical obligations like mission, needy students, needy churches and theological training, we can candidly state that the majority of church members have reached a ceiling in tithing and donating for church related initiatives.

Overview of FR churches in SA

Church	Instituted	Members	Comm.	Baptised	Self-support
1Pretoria	1950	434	293	141	Yes
2Belville	1952	409	262	147	Yes
3Johannesburg	1957	100	70	30	Mainly
4Bethal	1996	55	37	18	No
5Pretoria-Maranata	1997	332	202	130	Yes
6Mamelodi	2002	168	115	53	No
7Soshanguve North	2003	182	114	68	No
8Belhar	2008	103	63	40	No

Support

Over the past years, deputies needy churches (but also the mission deputies) have received donations from a number of churches in Australia and Canada. This has really helped the deputies to plug some holes in our budget and enabled us to support the young instituted churches.

With the institution of Belhar (Nov 2008) , and with the Mission Deputies of SA (MDSA) that are reducing the support with the agreement of the Dutch sponsors, we are now facing a new challenge in providing for the ministers. As can be seen from the budget below, the need is increasing from R423 000 per year to R1 100 000 for the next two years from now.

We took the liberty to put an amount on the budget from our overseas corresponding churches i.e. Australia for R184 000 (Aus \$30 000) which is in essence what Bethal requires and an amount of R300 000 (Can \$42 000) for Canada which is the amount received in form of donations from Canada for 2009.

Our prayers are that the church in this world be provided with the necessary financial means so that the Word of salvation can be spread to those outside. We pray for you in Australia and Canada that the Lord may also provide in your needs.

On behalf of the deputy needy churches

Dec 2009