

UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
HISTORY
ELDORADO PARK & NOORDGESIG



info@urceldradopark.com

www.urceldradopark.com

Part History of our Congregation

By Eddie Makue

January 2012

History should in fact be pronounced as his story. It is an essay, a story of life experiences. To be all embracing we thus also need to talk about her story and their stories. For the purposes of this exercise it is important to note that my story has inextricable links with the stories of others.

Let me begin this story by reminding you and myself of the hymn:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Refrain:

This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long;
this is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long.

Text: Fanny J. Crosby, 1820-1915

Music: Phoebe P. Knapp, 1839-1908

The truth about us Africans welcoming every opportunity to sing, can also be found in this story. This is my story and this is also my song. Note that my story is not about me, but about others and about our Creator. This is not strange at all, as you will notice that your story is also not only about you.

One great philosopher asserts that “that which lives in the midst of life is living”. You cannot gauge the meaning of life if you live amongst the death. My story and my life is therefore about the life-experiences I have been able to endure; even when such experiences may not have been pleasant.

History is also about re-memembering. We are all members of one or the other household, family, community and eventually members of the human race. During the course of life we tend to become estranged from certain members of the family.

**UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
HISTORY
ELDORADO PARK & NOORDGESIG**



info@urceldradopark.com

www.urceldradopark.com

Our history and the recalling of our history is accordingly an attempt to re-member that which has become broken. It is an attempt to recall, to record and to revitalise.

You may not agree with my premise and way of thinking and that is fine. It is your prerogative to have a different opinion. Please do not feel that you are doing something wrong. Know that you have the right to disagree. Know that you have the right to an opinion. Know that you have the right to differ and to be different. Such dynamics has been part of our history in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA).

It fills my heart with joy when I recall the glorious days of growing up in Kliptown (Paddavlei) and attending Sunday school classes and church services at the Dutch Reformed Mission Church/Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sending Kerk (DRMC/NGSK). This church used the staff room at Kliptown High School for its Sunday gatherings (coincidentally all services were only conducted in Afrikaans as that was the congregation's lingua franca of the time).

Attendance of Sunday school and church services was compulsory in our family. We even had to attend the Anglican Church because of my dad's affiliation. Did we enjoy this duality! It allowed us access to two amounts of money for "collections", you know the offerings made in church. It allowed us opportunities to dress-up (show off our Sunday clothes) and walk the long distances to both gatherings. The journey enabled us to meet friends along the road and to explore what was happening in our community.

As indicated earlier, these journeys involved other people: my brothers, sisters and cousins. More than often it also involved friends (no, no girl friends yet). The involvement of members of the extended family and friends interestingly served to introduce us to ecumenical worship, at this early stage in our lives.

This causes me to reflect on how my early ancestors worshipped. You should know that I refuse to believe this crap that the missionaries brought Christianity to Africa. Instead, I want to believe that my ancestors knew God and worshipped God differently from how the missionaries did. The point here is that my ancestors worshipped in community with those they lived with, their neighbours. This may be why, our ancestor, Jesus Christ, commands that we should 'love our neighbours as we love ourselves'. This notion became a major struggle during the days of my youth and continues to trouble many people even today.

**UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
HISTORY
ELDORADO PARK & NOORDGESIG**



info@urceldradopark.com

www.urceldradopark.com

The first missionary that I had the luxury of meeting was Rev Esterhuizen. He was our pastor (dominee) during the good old days when we met at Kliptown High School. He was indeed a person deserving of all the reverence practised by members of the congregation. Many of us simply called and referred to him as “Meneer”, a term ordinarily used for a school teacher. It may also be equated with the Jewish term Rabbi.

By the way, this is supposed to be the story of the old DRMC –Witwatersrand South, that has subsequently become known as the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)- Park & Noordgesig.

It was the missionaries who first established the DRMC in the Cape. These missionaries had a problem with worship services for the coloured slaves they supposedly converted to Christianity. Their problem was having worship services where the white slave-owners gathered before God with the coloured slaves. Some used the old cultural excuse that the “coloureds” would feel free/better when allowed to practise their culture in church services. This shamefully led to the formation of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church.

Having a white pastor for the predominantly coloured congregation of Kliptown was not a problem even in the other black churches. And these clergy were good men. They were highly respected and graciously honoured; so much so that many of the supporters of the diabolical apartheid regime found a way of discrediting them. They maliciously developed a derogatory definition for “the title of “meneer”. When black people addressed white racist as “meneer” they would retort “ek is nie jou meneer nie, meneer is a kaffir predikant”. Roughly translated as “I am not your mister, mister is a preacher of barbaric people”.

Even such realities did not deter our congregation from listening to the voice of God, owning that voice and preaching it to ourselves and others. This commitment found new shape when Eldorado Park was developed in the late 1960’s.

Rev Olivier took over after Rev Esterhuyzen and contributed with his soft spoken kindness to the growth of the congregation, consisting of Noordgesig, Coronationville, Bosmont, Western, Kliptown and Nancefield.

Combined services were held at a church building in Fietas (Frededorp now Fordsburg). Traditionally such services were held to celebrate major events like eucharist/communion, Christmas plays of the Sunday school, confirmation of new

**UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
HISTORY
ELDORADO PARK & NOORDGESIG**



info@urceldradopark.com

www.urceldradopark.com

church council members and catechist. All of these gatherings were memorable and lasted for hours. On several occasions congregants would bring pack-lunches (our pots) to the service that had one session before and another after lunch. For us kids those remain days to remember.

The ground on which our church building presently stands became available after the white agriculturalists who farmed in this area moved to greener pastures. The area was called Nancefield. The Coronationville part of the congregation became independent and subsequently called and appointed its own pastor.

Our first black pastor in this newly acquired church was Rev Kannemeyer. This was his first parish and his first exposure to Transvaal- as he was from the Cape. If his predecessors were good he was even gooder. The congregation grew in numbers and spiritual depth.

Sunday school, catechism and the choir were always part of the congregation. During the years that Rev Kannemeyer served even the church youth group grew. The saved souls were so many that you had to arrive early in order to be guaranteed a place to sit. During combined services (with Noordgesig) space became an even bigger challenge. But as it said "in my Father's house there are many mansions and there is always room..."

It is important that space be made, at another time, to name the many committed members of the church council, choir, youth and Sunday school teachers who selflessly served during this time. Allow me however to isolate some of those who immediately come to mind-

Oom Danie Latola was an outstanding elder as well as the catechism master;

Oom Willie Kruger was a Sunday school teacher and leader of the choir;

Oom Jarrie of Noordgesig was an elder blessed with the gift of prayer;

The father of Ike Abrahams was a no nonsense elder who led by example;

Eunoch Buys who was huge in stature and faith;

Brother Arnolds who carried his bible and hymn-book in a unique way-consistently.

Ouma Bougaardt who exemplary and gauntly led a huge family.

All these men could only succeed because they had GOOD women standing next to them, urging them on, praying with and for them. Sadly, women were not allowed to serve on the church council

**UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
HISTORY
ELDORADO PARK & NOORDGESIG**



info@urceldradopark.com

www.urceldradopark.com

(let us please add further names to this list as we re-member the gifts bestowed on this congregation).

During the early seventies Rev AD Stevens accepted the call to serve in this congregation. We were so blessed that we broke at the seams. Every church service overflowed with worshippers. Every church organisation angered the devil with the sterling witness offered. The youth lived by example and took full responsibility for the Sunday school teaching. The choir was a major attraction to all who offered their voices in praise and worship.

Throughout all the phases of the congregation the women's league served as the main source of energy, stimulation, leadership and support. Amazingly, the sidelining of women by the institutional church failed to curtail women's faith and commitment. No wonder God uses women to give life to the 'crown of creation'.

There are those people who are the church of today as well as the church of the future. They are the young people, the youth. During the early and up to the late 1970s we had a youth group of more than sixty members. This group attracted and accommodated young people from many other churches (ecumenism) and provided a spiritual home. Interestingly such young people were not recruited into the DRMC, but capacitated to participate in the ministries of their churches of choice.

This was a time when relations with the Catholic and Pentecostal church were taboo- at least in this part of the world. It was during this same time that the Grace of God enabled some people of these churches to bear testimony with the DRMC and subsequently became leaders in this church. We give thanks to God for utilising this fallible institution in such a divine manner.

Let us recall two of the many attributes of Oom Steve (Rev Stevens). He was charismatic and angered some members of the excellent church choir when he often prayed, "Here, hoe wanklankig klink ons stem in u ore". Roughly translated as, "Lord, how falls do our voices sound in your ears..." The continuance of this prayer explained what he was driving at; "...one day we shall sing in the heavenly choir where all voices and melodious are sweet".

Many of the congregants complained that "hy gooi skimp", he is hinting at us, through his sermons. These same people were the ones that would do everything possible to sit under his sermons. They did this because the word became flesh, it became real, it was contextual and addressed us- with our human fallibilities. People

**UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
HISTORY
ELDORADO PARK & NOORDGESIG**



info@urceldradopark.com

www.urceldradopark.com

want to be at the centre of matters, even when it may at times be hurting and negative.

When Oom Steve left he was followed by yet another humble servant, Rev Stander. Oom Stan had the task of “rebuilding the walls of Jericho” and how well he did. He became renowned in ministering to the frail, the sick and the elderly. The wife that he had been blessed with rebuffed performing a secondary role. She confidently and aptly asserted herself as a person endowed with extra-ordinary skills.

While the congregation may have become used to long sermons, Oom Stan taught us that you can be as effective while being economical with words. A new church building was erected during the priesthood of Oom Stan.

Note that by now we have moved away from referring to our pastor as Meneer. The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa has been formed when the two black Dutch Reformed churches were led by the Spirit of God to become one. This unification was sadly not embraced by the Reformed Church in Africa (Indian) and the white Dutch Reformed Church. The same Spirit that guided the URCSA in its unity endeavours also led it to adopt the Confession of Belhar (more about this in another space).

Oom Stan served with dedication until he reached retirement age. Rev Brian Coraizon responded with favour to the congregation’s call. It is just wonderful to notice (on hindsight) how each of these servants of God brought their own and unique skills and gifts to bear on the life of the congregation.

Pastor Brian is blessed with an angelic voice and used that to the glory of God. He became known as ‘the singing priest’, as he would robustly sing from the pulpit. At times he would join the praise and worship team while strumming his own guitar. He was blessed with ‘the gift of the tongue’, could speak both English and Afrikaans equally well. This is important as the language of especially the children in the congregation had over time changed to English.

Mercia Coraizon is a pillar of strength and support to Brian and the congregation. She nurtured the women’s league and induced new energy. Various church organisations increased in confidence due to the leadership so generously provided by Rev Brian.

UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
HISTORY
ELDORADO PARK & NOORDGESIG



info@urceldradopark.com

www.urceldradopark.com

Unfortunately the Coraizons returned to their home area (Cape Town) and a 'replacement' had to be sought. Fortunately for us there was a young couple living only a few kilometres from Eldorado Park. After prayerful consideration Malin Fisher was approached when he had just completed his theological studies. He accepted the call and was ordained in the congregation of Eldorado Park/Noordgesig.

Rev Malin Fisher found a congregation that learned how to survive without a pastor. This has its advantages and disadvantages. Adaptation to this environment was like a walk in the park to the Fisher family. Be mindful that a walk in the park, especially Eldorado Park, may require hair on your teeth. For the Fisher family the teething problems of their latest son (Traverse) was less unnerving as listening to the voice and doing the will of God.

Cleona Fisher has been blessed with a voice. When we first heard her singing "His eye is on the sparrow", the congregation was in awe.

Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heaven and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Refrain

*I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
For His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.*

"Let not your heart be troubled," His tender word I hear,
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Refrain

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;

UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
HISTORY
ELDORADO PARK & NOORDGESIG



info@urceldradopark.com

www.urceldradopark.com

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.
Refrain

We know that the risen Christ, our Saviour, watches over our congregation ...

END