

The Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Swaziland - A dream come true

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This article covers the time from 1652 onwards when employees of the Dutch East India Company – most of whom were members of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands – arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in present South Africa. With time, a new church, the Dutch Reformed Church, was established in the Cape. In 1836, a number of pioneers moved from the Cape to the east of South Africa and some of them eventually made Swaziland their new home. Although most members of the white Dutch Reformed Church opposed any integration with Christians from other races, there was nevertheless a desire that they should join a Reformed Church. In 1922, the first Dutch Reformed congregation in Swaziland was established in Goedgegun in the southern region of the country, intended for the exclusive use of white, Afrikaans-speaking church members. In 1944, the first Reformed congregation for Swazi members was formed, which later became known as the Swaziland Reformed Church. This article documents the history of this church and concludes with a description of the Swaziland Reformed Church in 1985, with four missionaries from South Africa ministering in the four regions of Swaziland.

Background and methodology

The emergence and growth of the missionary church in Swaziland is well documented.¹ Furthermore, the first 35–40 years of the presence of the Dutch Reformed Church in Swaziland have been described in a number of publications; unfortunately, these are inaccessible to people unable to understand the Afrikaans language. In 1982, Crafford published a book about the mission work of the Dutch Reformed Church within the boundaries of South Africa, in which a section is dedicated to the history of the Reformed Church in Swaziland.² Also in 1982, Kritzinger published a book on Swaziland as part of his research on the unfinished missionary task in the then northern and eastern Transvaal.³ In 1987, Benade received his PhD on the history of the Dutch Reformed Church in Swaziland, which also includes a section on the missionary work of the church.

No research, however, has as yet been published on how it came about that the Dutch Reformed Church, which has its origin in the Cape, commenced missionary work in Swaziland. Using a secondary data analysis approach, the present research attempts to indicate the link between the arrival of the Dutch colonists in the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 – most of whom were members of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands – the then eastward movement of a group of around 10 000 pioneers from 1836 onwards which led to some of them finding a new home in Swaziland, the establishing of a congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in Swaziland meant for the *exclusive* use of white, Afrikaans-speaking members of the church living in this country and the resulting missionary work of the Dutch Reformed Church which led to the forming of a *separate* Reformed congregation for siSwati-speaking⁴ people who converted to the Christian faith. From early on, it was the dream of the white Dutch Reformed Church that four siSwati-speaking congregations should be formed, one in each of the four districts of Swaziland, that is, Shiselweni, Manzini, Hhohho and Lubombo. This initial goal was reached in 1985 when four missionaries from the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa were ministering in Swaziland and also forms the *terminus ad quem* of this article.

The article makes use of existing published sources, but is unique in the sense that numerous documents, including the official minutes of meetings of various missionary bodies such as the

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1. Researchers who contributed greatly towards this topic include Perkins (1974), Froise (1996), Nyawo (2004) and Maartens (2012).

2. Swaziland borders South Africa on its north, west and southern sides and Mozambique on its eastern side.

3. Before 1994, South Africa had four provinces, that is, Transvaal, Orange Free State, Natal and the Cape Province. Northern Transvaal coincides more or less with the present Limpopo Province and eastern Transvaal with Mpumalanga Province.

4. siSwati is the official language of Swaziland while English is also commonly spoken by a large part of the population.

Swazilandse Sendingraad, as well as church bodies within Swaziland, have been accessed for the first time in an academic publication. This provides a better view on how those who were involved in this initial missionary task of the Dutch Reformed Church in Swaziland understood their calling. Furthermore, the history of the siSwati-speaking Reformed Church after 1982 has never been documented. This article wants to address this gap.

Introduction

Among the approximate 100 employees of the Dutch East India Company who established a trading post at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, most were members of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands (Van der Watt 1976:4). From early on, the church saw it as their responsibility to Christianise the indigenous people of South Africa, and where these people converted to the Christian faith, they became part of the local Reformed congregation (Saayman 1979:44). Although some of the white church members were unhappy about the presence of 'non-white' members, the synod of 1834 confirmed that no distinction should be made between black and white church members (Saayman 1979:44). In 1857, after the synod had once again considered the desirability of having both black and white members in one congregation following complaints by some of the white church members, it was decided that, because of the weakness of some of the white members, it would be better for the black and white Christians to meet separately in different buildings (Saayman 1979:45). This inevitably led to different congregations being formed for the respective racial groups in South Africa (Saayman 1979:46). Eventually, four churches coexisted, sharing the same doctrine and confessions of faith, but only distinguished on the grounds of ethnicity:

- White people: Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*).
- Mixed race: Dutch Reformed Mission Church (*NG Sendingkerk*).
- Indian community: Reformed Church in Africa.
- Black people: Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (*NG Kerk in Afrika*).

The first missionaries in Swaziland

In Swaziland, it is commonly known that king Sobhuza I (also known as king Somhlolo), who ruled from 1815–1836, had a dream which led to the first missionaries entering Swaziland. Shortly before his death, Sobhuza dreamt of 'white skinned people with hair like the tails of cattle' (Swazi Observer 2014) who would enter Swaziland in 'houses built on platforms and pulled by oxen' (Swaziland Reformed Church 2011) with *umculu* [scroll or book] in the one hand and *indilinga* [metal disc or coin] in the other (Swazi Observer 2015). The following morning, Sobhuza called his councillors together and, after recounting his dream, advised them to find these people and accept the book (later understood to be the Bible), but to be cautious about money. Furthermore, he warned them that they must never harm these white people, 'for if they spilt a drop of the white man's blood their country

would be destroyed and they would disappear as a nation' (Matsebula 1972:13).⁵

When Sobhuza died in 1836, his senior son, Malambule, acted as regent. In 1840, Malambule handed the reins of government to his half-brother, Mswati II (DACB 2014) who endeavoured to fulfil his father's wish. When news reached the king about a group of people resembling those who Sobhuza had seen in his dream, a delegation was sent to them with the request that they come to Swaziland. In June 1844, a group of people from the Wesleyan (Methodist) church, led by James Allison and Richard Giddy, arrived in Swaziland, or *baRaputsa* as it was then known (Eldredge 2015:232). After being introduced to the king, a piece of land close to the present Mahamba border post was allotted to the missionaries, where a mission station was then built (Kumalo 2013:52–53). Not only were Swazi residents introduced to the Christian faith, but classes were also started to teach people how to read and write (Swazi Observer 2014).

Unfortunately, the missionaries' peaceful stay was short-lived. It transpired that Malambule, before handing over the throne to Mswati II, had hidden some of the royal cattle. After being forced to return the cattle, Malambule and some of his brothers fled to the Kunene people who lived in the Mahamba area. Mswati then sent 1200 of his soldiers to punish the Kunene clan for giving refuge to Malambule. Upon hearing about the planned attack, the clan fled to the missionaries for protection. The regiments arrived at the mission station during a Sunday morning service attended by between 700 and 800 people. In the ensuing attack, 50 to 60 people, including women and children, were killed (Froise 1996:8). However, the missionaries were not attacked, following a stern warning from Mswati II not to hurt them (DACB 2014).

As a result of the attack, a large area surrounding the mission station was depopulated. One of the mission's outstations was burnt to the ground. On 17 September 1846, Allison decided to move out of Swaziland together with a number of the congregants, and eventually, they established a new mission station at Edenvale in the vicinity of Pietermaritzburg in South Africa.

Requests by the Berlin Missionary Society in 1859 and the Anglican Church in 1871 to establish a mission in Swaziland were denied by Mswati. He died in 1868, but it was only after the new king, Mbandzeni, ascended the throne in 1875 that churches were once again allowed into Swaziland (Froise 1996:8–9).

Afrikaans-speaking people in Swaziland

After the initial establishment of a trading post in 1652 by the Dutch East India Company, an increasing number of

5. On 04 October 1968, the Times of Swaziland reported that the prime minister, Makhosini Dlamini, had said at a meeting of the Organisation of African Unity held in Algiers: '[O]ur leader King Somhlolo had a vision of the coming of a white strong and clever nation. These people would be carrying a book in one hand and a round, buttonlike object in the other. King Sobhuza I warned: never lift your hands against this strong nation. Let there be no bloodshed in this my [sic] country. Take the book and use it. Treat the round, button like object cautiously' (SSR 1969:7).

people arrived in the Cape of Good Hope. Although the intention was to only establish a trading post, it wasn't long before more people started emigrating to this southernmost part of Africa. Most of them came from the Netherlands, although there were also a number of people from Germany (Van der Watt 1976:3). Four years after his arrival, Jan van Riebeeck, who had headed the team who had arrived in the Cape in 1652, applied for permission to establish a colony where people could live and where they could also farm on small pieces of land (Van der Watt 1976:2–3). From the start, the church played an important role in the lives of the colonists, and ministers from the presbytery of Amsterdam in the Netherlands were regularly sent to serve these colonists. By 1795, the six congregations that had been established in the Cape Colony were known as the Reformed Church.⁶ After the Battle of Blaauwberg in 1806, which brought the Cape Colony under British rule, the generally accepted way to refer to this church was *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church), later approved as the name of the church when it was officially formed in 1842 (Van der Watt 1976:10–11).

A number of reasons led to the desire of some Afrikaans-speaking people in the Cape Colony to move eastwards to make a new living. These reasons included a lack of arable land, a lack of capital, a lack of labour and a lack of security. However, many of these Afrikaans-speaking farmers considered the integration of white and black people into the community as well as in churches, as was the practice of the London Missionary Society, to be unacceptable. Many of them made a sharp distinction between *Christian* and *heathen*, whereby they also differentiated between people with white skins and black skins. Furthermore, they increasingly detested being under British rule and therefore decided to move away from the Cape. The *Great Trek*, as this movement of around 10 000 people became known, started in 1836 (Van der Watt 1977:3–5).

It was common practice that these pioneers (*Voortrekkers*) would establish a small republic wherever a group of them finally made their home. On 25 July 1846, the national council of Ohrigstad (one of these small republics) convinced King Mswati to sell them a piece of land, which includes the areas where Middelburg, Barberton and Carolina are situated today. Relationships between these farmers and the Swazi king were fairly comfortable. This improved even further when Mbandzeni⁷ succeeded Mswati in 1875. Another of these small but lesser-known republics was situated to the south-east of Swaziland, about 20 km from the present town of Piet Retief, and was known as the *Republiek van Klein-Vrystaat* [Republic of Small Free State]. This area of around 12 850 hectares was bought from Mbandzeni in 1876. Swaziland offered excellent grazing for farmers during the harsh *highveld* winters, and many farmers, prospectors and

traders from the Republic of Small Free State, Ohrigstad and other areas around Swaziland obtained concessions to live within this kingdom, primarily in the southern part of Swaziland in the areas where the towns of Hlatikulu, Nhlanguano, Dwaleni and Hluti can be found today (Benade 1987:24–27).

Establishing churches in Swaziland

After Allison and the other missionaries of the Methodist church moved from Swaziland in 1846, Christian missionaries were no longer allowed to work in Swaziland. It was only during the reign of Mbandzeni, which lasted from 1875 until 1889, that Christian missionaries were once again given access to Swaziland. In 1871, Father Joel Jackson and George Hales of the Church of the Province of South Africa⁸ and members of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (Glasson 2015; Watts 1922) established a mission in Transvaal, close to the present Oshoek/Ngwenya border post. For several years, they worked on winning the confidence of the king which, in 1881, led to a piece of land on the banks of the Usutu River being given to them to build a school, not far from the royal residence (Crafford 1982:376; Watts 1922).

Soon after, other churches and missionary organisations also moved into Swaziland. The Lutheran church started their ministry in Swaziland in 1887 while a number of Scandinavian missionary organisations, such as the Norwegian Mission Union, Norway Free Evangelical Mission, the Swedish Alliance Mission and the Scandinavian Alliance Mission, also entered Swaziland. In 1910, Harmon F. Schmelzenbach started missionary work for the Church of the Nazarene and established a number of mission stations, that is, at Piggs Peak (1914), at Stegi⁹ (1922) as well as at Bremersdorp.¹⁰ In 1925, Dr David Hynd, who was associated with the Church of the Nazarene, opened the Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital in Bremersdorp. In 1913, the Roman Catholic Church also made its appearance in Swaziland (Crafford 1982:376–377).

In 1911, the first mission conference for Protestant churches in Swaziland was held. In 1929, it was constituted as the Swaziland Missionary Conference, which met biennially. In 1964, it became known as the Swaziland Conference of Churches, an organisation which represents all the evangelical churches in Swaziland (SCC n.d.).¹¹

8.The Anglican Church in the Cape Colony was officially constituted in 1870 and adopted the name, *the Church of the Province of South Africa*. This name was retained until 2006 when it was renamed to the *Anglican Church of Southern Africa*.

9.Stegi's name was later changed to Siteki (Raper n.d.:225).

10.Manzini was formerly known as *Bremersdorp* but took its new name in 1960 (Raper n.d.:297).

11.Swaziland has three religious umbrella bodies, that is, the Swaziland Conference of Churches which represented all churches in Swaziland until 1976, at which time churches related to the World Council of Churches withdrew to form the Council of Swaziland Churches. These include the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Methodist Church (CSC 2016). At the same time, the indigenous African churches formed the League of African Churches (SCC n.d.).

6.This was a free translation into Dutch of the French *l'Eglise réformée*.

7.Benade (1987:26–27) uses the name *Mbandini*, but this is not correct. The correct name is *Mbandzeni* (Kingdom of Swaziland Monarchy 2017).

The Dutch Reformed Church in Swaziland¹²

Most of the Afrikaans-speaking pioneer farmers who had found a home in Swaziland were members of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. As early as 1890, at an extraordinary general meeting of the church, it was reported that the farmers in Swaziland had a need for spiritual care. The minister of the congregation in Utrecht in Natal was instructed to take care of the 'Dutch-speaking'¹³ farmers in Swaziland with the help of other ministers. In 1894, at the general meeting of the Dutch Reformed Church, the minister of the congregation in Vryheid (Natal) was delegated to visit members of the church in Swaziland. The presbytery of Utrecht, which included the congregation in Vryheid, had the responsibility to ensure that the church members in Swaziland were cared for. From 1894 until 1922, these members were visited by ministers of their church in South Africa.

The desire to establish a congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in Swaziland started growing. An increasing number of Afrikaans-speaking people moved to Swaziland, towns started growing, traders entered the country and schools were established. The possibility of forming a congregation became a greater reality. At a meeting of the presbytery of Utrecht in February 1922, a request to form a new congregation in Swaziland, with Hlatikulu as its hub, was approved. On 10 June 1922,¹⁴ this congregation was officially constituted as the congregation of 'Welgegund'.¹⁵

Rev. J.S. Bosman, who was the minister in the town of Piet Retief, about 30 km from Mahamba, took partial responsibility for this new congregation which consisted of 238 members. In 1924, the newly appointed church council had a meeting with the Swazi authorities in order to obtain a piece of land in the present Nhlanguano. This request was granted, and on 21 June 1924, the cornerstone was laid for the proposed church building. The church members took full responsibility for the erection of the church building, and on 19 October 1924, the new building was inaugurated.¹⁶

Soon after the forming of the congregation of Goedgegun, church members residing in the northern part of Swaziland – north of the Usutu River – requested that they also be taken

12. Unless otherwise indicated, the following paragraphs are based upon the research performed by Benade (1987:28–46).

13. Afrikaans had developed from Dutch, and although Afrikaans was only recognised as an official language in 1925, it had already been in use since the middle of the 19th century.

14. Crafford (1982:378) says that the congregation was constituted in 1937, but this date seems to be incorrect.

15. In 1926, the name of the congregation was changed from *Welgegund* to *Goedgegun* (a Dutch word meaning 'graciously granted'), the name of the town in which the church building is situated. After World War II, King George VI of England met King Sobhuza II in the town to thank him for the country's assistance during the war. As a result of this historical event, when Swaziland became independent in 1968, the name 'Goedgegun' was changed to 'Nhlanguano' which means 'the meeting place' (Raper n.d.:179; Mkhonta 2008:140). However, the congregation retained the name 'Goedgegun'.

16. This church building is still used for regular church services by the small Afrikaans-speaking community in the southern part of Swaziland belonging to the Goedgegun congregation.

care of spiritually. In this request, it is mentioned that there were 15 families in the Bremersdorp and Stegi areas who were members of the Dutch Reformed Church. There were also 12 young people who wanted to become members of the church and three children who had to be baptised. The church council responded by arranging a church service in Bremersdorp on 21 September 1924.

In the meantime, a process was underway to find a permanent minister for the congregation in Swaziland. At that time, the practice in the Dutch Reformed Church was that a congregation 'called' a minister who could then either accept or reject the 'calling'. After a number of unsuccessful attempts, Rev. W.C. Malan accepted the calling in 1925 and was installed as the first minister of the Goedgegun congregation. He had the task of visiting the church members all over Swaziland. This meant that he was often away from home for weeks and even months on end. Church services were conducted every Sunday morning. Those families staying closer to Goedgegun travelled to the church by horsecart, whereas those who lived further away seldom attended church. Many church members in the outlying areas only attended church when communion was celebrated every 3 months (Benade 1987:33).

As from 1927, afternoon services were conducted every second Sunday in the outlying areas, but this had its own challenges. The minister had to travel on horseback to Gollel¹⁷ – a distance of approximately 90 km, or he had to travel to Mooihoek – a distance of approximately 60 km. When motorcars were introduced to Swaziland, it also had the advantage that Rev. Malan was now more enabled to visit the outlying areas. However, in 1929, because of financial constraints, the church council decided to abandon the practice of having church services in the outlying areas. Henceforth, church services in these areas would be restricted to once every 6 months (Benade 1987:34).

When Rev. Malan left Swaziland, it was decided that the elders would conduct the church services while the Goedgegun congregation waited for a new minister to arrive. As from 1934, elders also became responsible for church services in the outlying areas, which meant that the church members could regularly attend a service (Benade 1987:35).

The Lord's Supper was celebrated four times a year. Ox wagons were packed and the church members readied themselves for the weekend in Goedgegun. They usually arrived on the Thursday and the wagons were unyoked on the large grounds surrounding the church building. Ox wagons and tents were set up all over the grounds. On the Thursday evening, a concert was held by the women or the youth to collect funds for the church. On Saturday morning, a bazaar was held, also with the aim of collecting funds. Saturday afternoons were used for church council meetings, and in the evening, a church service was held in preparation for the following morning's Communion. On Sunday

17. On the Swaziland side, Gollel is now known as 'Lavumisa', while it is known as 'Golela' on the South African side (Raper n.d.:182).

afternoons children were baptised, and this was combined with a children's service, and in the evening they had a special thanksgiving service. Monday morning, they had a prayer meeting before the members returned to their homes (Benade 1987:36).

For 22 years, from 1922 to 1944, Goedgegun was the only congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in Swaziland. However, as from 1925, the Lord's Supper was also celebrated in Bremersdorp. In 1944, a second congregation was constituted in Bremersdorp, although both congregations were served by one minister who resided in Goedgegun.

Dutch Reformed Mission¹⁸

Surprisingly, there was little enthusiasm from the members of the Goedgegun congregation towards mission. Swaziland was a peaceful country, relationships between the races were fairly good and most of the Afrikaans farmers were also fluent in siSwati. In 1929, Rev. Malan decided to conduct church services at his home for a number of Swazi people. However, the Afrikaans church members were evidently unhappy with his decision, and during a meeting of the church members, they complained that he conducted services for Swazis on church property (Benade 1987:48).

In 1936, the presbytery of Ermelo¹⁹ paid a visit to the Goedgegun congregation to discuss the possibility of starting missionary work in Swaziland. In 1938, after a new minister, Rev. W.H.B. Ebersohn, had started working in Goedgegun, the possibility of calling an evangelist to Swaziland was discussed. It took a further six years, until 16 January 1944, for this dream to be realised, at which time *Swaziland Sending* [Swaziland Mission] was officially formed and Efraim Khumalo was installed as evangelist in the town of Goedgegun. In the meantime, a farm had been bought at Dwaleni,²⁰ not far from Goedgegun, where a mission station was planned to be built. Only 22 years after the Dutch Reformed Church had established its first congregation in Swaziland, mission among the Swazi citizens commenced. It is noteworthy, however, that this work was initiated by Christians outside of Swaziland, while the church members of the Dutch Reformed Church within Swaziland seemed to have little interest in this work.

In 1945, Rev. Frikkie Malan was called to Swaziland as the first missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church.²¹ He had grown up in Swaziland and knew the country and the siSwati language well. On 19 January 1946, he was installed in his office at Dwaleni. The entire Swaziland formed his congregation and he regularly undertook long trips throughout the country to visit church members and to share the gospel with the Swazis.

18. Unless otherwise indicated, the following paragraphs are based upon the research performed by Benade (1987:46–52).

19. Ermelo is a town situated about 150 km from Nhlalango (Goedgegun).

20. Dwaleni means 'the place of the rock'.

21. Unless otherwise indicated, the following paragraphs are based upon the research performed by Crafford (1982:378–383).

When he left Swaziland in 1954, Rev. J.H. Greyling was called and installed in his place. He focused his attention on the southern parts of Swaziland. Soon after a decision was made to call a second missionary to Swaziland, in 1955 Rev. L.J. Swanepoel was installed as missionary to serve the area to the north of the Usutu River.

In 1957, part of a farm was bought where a mission station could be established in the northern part of the country. The name 'Phemba' was chosen for the farm, which means 'to kindle a fire'. In September 1961, a new church building was inaugurated at Phemba. Coinciding with this event, a new congregation, Swaziland-North, was formed.

The missionary efforts of the Dutch Reformed Church were coordinated by the *Swazilandse Sendingraad*²² (Swaziland Missionary Board) with a number of bodies with an interest in the work serving on the commission. In 1964, the first black minister, Rev. H.T. Vilakazi, was called and installed in the northern congregation. The following year, another black minister, Rev. S.J. Gulube, was called to the southern congregation.

On 31 January 1967, the two Swazi congregations, the one in the south and the other in the north of the country, were reunited as one congregation under the governance of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA). Rev. O.C. Britz was then called to this congregation and served as minister from 1967 to 1970. He was succeeded by Rev. J.S. Malan (also commonly known as 'Swazi Malan' because of his ability to speak siSwati) and brother of Rev. Frikkie Malan. He resided at Phemba. During this time, the Swazi congregation became part of the presbytery of Piet Retief (in South Africa).²³

One congregation becomes three

After the Afrikaans-speaking Dutch Reformed Church in Goedgegun had divided into two congregations, that is, Goedgegun and Bremersdorp, the ministry among their exclusive white members continued throughout the entire country. However, after Swaziland became independent from the United Kingdom on 06 September 1968, a large number of Afrikaans-speaking church members left Swaziland, uncertain of what the future would hold for them. It was therefore decided that the congregation of Bremersdorp would be dissolved and that their members would once again become part of the Goedgegun congregation. As their manse in Manzini was no longer used by the Dutch Reformed Church, it was offered to the Swazi congregation in which to house a second missionary, in exchange for certain tasks which the missionary would do for the benefit of the Dutch Reformed Church (SwSK 1972a:4). On 06 October 1972, discussions were started with the Dutch Reformed Church to have the manse made available to the Swazi congregation

22. This body is still in existence to assist in certain aspects of the missionary task in Swaziland, but the constitution and name was changed to the *Swazilandse Sendingkommissie* [Swaziland Missionary Commission] on 28 July 1972 (SwSK 1972:1).

23. The first reference to the presbytery of Piet Retief is found in the minutes of the Swaziland Missionary Commission dated 07 May 1976 (SwSK 1976:1).

with a view to call a second missionary (SwSK 1972b:2–3). On 28 October 1973, Rev. D.P.P. Lubbe and a black minister, Rev. M. Mbungela, were installed as ministers. All three ministers worked in one congregation, with Rev. Mbungela stationed in Goedgegun, Rev. Malan at Phemba, focusing on training and evangelism, while Rev. Lubbe lived in Manzini and helped to promote education in different areas of Swaziland (SwSK 1974:2). On 17 May 1978, it was decided to divide the one Swazi congregation into three different congregations, with Manzini, Mbabane and Nhlangano as the three main centres. At that stage, there were three missionaries working in the Swazi church, that is, Rev. H.A. Pretorius (Manzini), Rev. W.F. Fourie (Mbabane) and Rev. P.J. Erasmus (Nhlangano), with Phemba and Big Bend seen as two further focus points (SwSK 1978:5). On 14 July 1979, a second congregation in the south of Swaziland, Swaziland-Ningizimu,²⁴ was formed, and during the weekend of 02–03 March 1980, a new minister, Rev. J.P. Kriel, was ordained in this congregation. On 09 February 1980, a third congregation, Hhohho,²⁵ was formed with Mbabane as its main centre. Rev. Fourie was ordained as the minister, while Rev. Pretorius remained in Manzini as minister of the Swaziland congregation (SwSK 1980a:3). The church in Swaziland was also requested to give attention to the possibility of forming a fourth congregation in the Lubombo area.

On 09 November 1979, a letter was written by Rev. L.K. Louw from the Dutch Reformed Church congregation Arconpark in Vereeniging (South Africa) in which five congregations in the town, Arconpark, Risiville, Drie Riviere,²⁶ Drie Riviere-East and Vereeniging-East, together committed themselves to fund a fourth missionary post in the north-eastern part of Swaziland (SwSK 1980a:4; 1980b:3). In November 1980, it was decided that the fourth post would be situated at Siteki (SwSK 1980d:8).

Four Reformed missionaries in Swaziland

After Rev. Fourie left the Hhohho congregation, Rev. J.M. Louw was called to the congregation, and it was decided that he would be installed as the new minister of the Hhohho congregation on 05 February 1984 (PB 1983:2). During the same meeting, it was reported that Rev. Kriel had received a calling to a congregation (Alkmaar) in South Africa, and on 26 February 1984, he was released from his work in the Swaziland-Ningizimu congregation (PB 1984a:3).

The three congregations of the Swazi church had been part of the presbytery of Piet Retief, but on 25 June 1984, during a meeting of the DRCA Synod of northern Transvaal which was held in Mamelodi, east of Pretoria in South Africa, a new presbytery of Swaziland was formally constituted (RVS 1984a:1).

24. Ningizimu is the siSwati word for 'South'.

25. Hhohho is one of four districts in which Swaziland is divided. The main town of Hhohho is Mbabane. The other three districts, with the main towns in brackets, are Manzini (Manzini), Shiselweni (Nhlangano) and Lubombo (Siteki).

26. This literally translates to 'Three Rivers'.

On 02 September 1984, Rev. H.E. Basson was installed as minister in Siteki (PB 1984b:2), although the Lubombo district was still officially part of the Manzini congregation. In the meantime, Rev. Pretorius had also received a calling to a congregation in South Africa (Chrissiesmeer), and on 09 December 1984, he was released from his work as minister of the Swaziland congregation (RK 1985:11).

On 27 October 1984, the church council of Swaziland-Ningizimu called Rev. A. van Wyngaard as their minister. He accepted the calling and was welcomed and ordained on 13 January 1985 (PB 1985a:1).

Although still part of the DRCA, it was approved, during a special meeting of the presbytery of Swaziland held on 30 January 1985 that the official name of the church would be changed to the Swaziland Reformed Church (RVS 1984b:4; 1985:6).

Rev. W.C. Bester accepted the calling to the Swaziland congregation (Manzini) and was welcomed and installed on 14 April 1985 (PB 1985b:1). For the first time in the history of the Swaziland church, there were four missionaries in the four districts of Swaziland:

Hhohho (Mbanane) – Rev. J.M. Louw;

Swaziland (Siteki) – Rev. H.E. Basson;

Swaziland-Ningizimu (Nhlangano) – Rev. A. van Wyngaard; and

Swaziland (Manzini) – Rev. W.C. Bester.²⁷

With this, the dream of having four missionaries in the four districts of Swaziland, which had been expressed by the Swazilandse Sendingkommissie at its meeting on 30 January 1979 (SwSK 1979:3) came into fulfilment.

Conclusion

The Dutch Reformed Church, which had its origin in the Cape, continued expanding and forming new congregations as church members who had moved away from the Cape found new homes in other parts of the country. Although most of the white, Afrikaans-speaking church members resented having 'non-whites' worship with them in one building, there was nonetheless a desire that these people should hear the gospel, convert to the Christian faith and become part of a Reformed congregation, albeit in their own structures and totally separated from the white church members.

Inexplicably, the Afrikaans farmers who had found a home in Swaziland where they also established their

27. All four ministers had a keen interest in mission and between them they had decades of experience in working cross-culturally: Rev. Koos Louw had served his entire ministry in congregations of the DRCA, from 1959 to 1963 at Maandagshoek, from 1963 to 1966 at Bronkhorstspuit, from 1966 to 1973 at Ratanang (Bourkes Luck) and then from 1973 to 1984 at Bethesda (Dendron) after which he started his work in Swaziland. Rev. Hennie Basson started his ministry in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Namibia (Lüderitz) in 1982 after which he moved to Swaziland in 1984. Rev. Arnau van Wyngaard had been a chaplain in the South African Defence Force from 1983 to 1984, where he had ministered to Zulu soldiers at Mtubatuba in KwaZulu-Natal. He had completed a Master's dissertation in missiology, focusing on youth ministry in black churches and had already commenced a PhD in missiology when joining the church in Swaziland. Rev. Wessel Bester served in the Reformed Church in Zambia from 1960 to 1980, part of which was as lecturer at the Justo Mwale Theological College in Lusaka. From there, he moved to the DRCA Sekhukhuneland until 1985 when he moved to Swaziland.

own congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church showed little desire to spread the gospel in the country. This missionary task within Swaziland was therefore initiated by the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. As the group of Swazi believers grew, the need was identified to form one Reformed congregation in each of the four districts of Swaziland. This goal was achieved in 1985 when, for the first time in the history of the missionary work of the Dutch Reformed Church in Swaziland, four missionaries were ministering in the four districts of the country. This was a dream come true for the Swazilandse Sendingkommissie who coordinated this missionary work in Swaziland.

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Competing interests

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