

THE ORIGINS TO THE PRESENT

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Introduction

The history of the Church in South Africa begins with the coming of the History Dutch (1652) History French Huguenots (1668) Dutch (1652), the French Huguenots (1668) and the early German History German Lutheran Settlers a little later. With perhaps a few exceptions, these settlers were all Protestants. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), controlled by hierarchy in Amsterdam, was the established church into which the Huguenots, with the exception of the German Lutheran, were assimilated. By 1875 most of the non-state churches (those in the English group) in the Cape Colony became known as 'free' churches. These churches became known as the 'English Free Churches English speaking Speaking Churches. ♦

The term 'English Speaking Churches ♦ is one designated to those churches English Speaking Churches of ♦British♦ origin and does not necessarily refer in any primary sense to some common doctrinal or liturgical commitment or practice, nor does it include those who use English as their main language of communication and worship.

The Free Baptist Church is then neither by definition, a state church, nor is it part the ♦English Speaking Churches♦. The founder of the Church, the Reverend Johannes Buchler, who had been admitted to the Congregational Church in 1893 was led through divine guidance to step out in faith and start a new church- which he did on 23 March 1885. A name was selected for this new church. It was based upon Hebrews 12:22-23, where reference is made both to Zion and to Church, hence the name, ♦Zion Church♦. It was many years later, due to the confusion which arose through the confusion of the name with some several hundred "Zion" churches which had sprung up. After consultation with the Baptist Union, the Church was renamed "the Free Baptist Church of South Africa". At no stage did the Free Baptist Church have any connection with any other movement or association within the Baptist Union of South Africa.

Each congregation and Church is constituted in a manner which takes into account the nature and character of the ethnic group it comprises. It is presently structured with two Synods in sitting, one Synod, multi- racially based, operating in the Gauteng district, and one Synod ethnically based, operating in the Free State district. Both are organized in such a way, that they serve their particular ethnic groups independently, but both being subject to the International Synod, which serves as an advisory and vigilant body. By virtue of its Protestant origins, the Free Baptist Church reveals a kinship with those churches which were born out of the Reformation.

The basis of the Free Baptist Churches ♦ beliefs

1. Complete agreement with the Protestant Bible principles and the fundamental belief of conservative Evangelistic. Further, the church believes with other Christians that the Word of God is the only tenet of faith and revelation of God.

2. The acceptance of the Fundamental articles of Christian Faith as laid down in the three early church symbols, viz.

Apostilicum, Nicaea Constantmopolitum and Athenasium. More simply addressed- as the acceptance of the Twelve Articles as the foundation of the churches creed.

Zionist

Origin

The Zionist Movement in Southern Africa has its origins in the labours of three men:

Johannes Buchler, Daniel Bryant, and P L le Roux. It is with Johannes Buchler that we will be concerned and his work which gave rise to the modern day Free Baptist Church.

The Period 1864 to 1899

Johannes Buchler was born in 1864 at Herinsou near Appenzell in Switzerland and died in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1944. It was in 1860 that a spiritual revival broke out in the Herinsou district of Switzerland which had a great impact upon the Buchler family. Buchlers' parents "received the Holy Spirit according to the promise of Christ. ♦ As a result of persecution from the revival - the burghers seeing this revival as a sign of madness and thus rejected those involved - the Buchlers' sold their belongings and immigrated to South Africa and settled in the Cape along with other like-thinking pietists. It was while in the Cape that the young Johannes Buchler met and became involved with other pietistic thinking peoples, such as P.L. Le Roux, who, later would have a great influence upon the Zionist Movement.

In 1870 Johannes Buchler traveled with his parents to Kimberly and after the discovery of gold on the reef in 1889, he traveled to Johannesburg where he, with the aid of a government grant, built and opened the first English-medium school in the Transvaal. The school was built in Lilian road in Fordsburg, to which he was appointed as principal. Buchlers' wife, Alida Margaretha Buchler (nee Conradie) who was born in Robertson in the Cape, came to the Transvaal in 1889. After her marriage to Johannes Buchler, she managed and taught in the school together with him. She also assisted Buchler in his ministry of preaching to both the white and coloured peoples. The school was first at Ferreiras camp, and later moved to Fordsburg which was then a fashionable section of Johannesburg.

A strong possibility exists that the church first started by Buchler was registered under the Old Transvaal Republic through the soliciting firm of Van Huysteen, Feltham & Ford. The church appears then to have been situated in an area known as Ferreira's Camp. Religious work under the coloured miners was initially managed by the Presbyterian, the Dutch Reformed, the Baptist, as well as the Congregational Churches, while the building used for Congregational services was Buchlers' school hall, which, was the first brick structure to be erected on the Reef.

Services were held on a rotational basis for the coloured folk, but as there was no follow-up, visitation or real interest in them, the work started to decline. A section of the coloureds then formed an independent group and called themselves The Ebenhaezer Church. They called a Mr Maclain to be their minister, but as he could not accept, he recommended Johannes Buchler to them - he accepted their call to the pastorate.

Buchler borrowed money from a well-to-do businessman, a Mr Stoffels, who hailed from Richmond. With the money Buchler purchased a piece of ground on the corner of Main and Wolhuter streets, Ferreiras' Camp. He built a flat roofed brick hall out of green Kimberley bricks and soon services were held in the newly built Ebenhaezer Church. It was soon after this that Stoffels demanded his money back, and as the Congregational Church

could not supply funds to aid Buchler, the congregation raised the money and within 18 months had paid off all their debt to Mr Stoffels. Buchler then studied under their congregationalists and at the request of his own Council, was ordained as a minister into the Congregational Church at Queenstown in the Cape in 1893.

Buchlers' first council meeting consisted of the following members: Messrs Howells, Christiaanse, Ortong, Davids, van Schalkwyk, van Amsterdam and Adams. Due to problems which Buchler found with aspects of infant baptism, he resigned from the Congregational (Ebenhaezer) church and started his own work of faith which he called the ♦Zion Church♦, basing the church title on Hebrews 12: 22-23, where both the names 'Zion♦ and 'Church' occur.

In 1895, Buchler acquired the West End school hall on contract for his church services and held the first Zion Church service on 24 March 1895. The 1890's were years of turmoil and Buchler had many pains in building his church. Perhaps a short description of the situation in the country and in Johannesburg will throw some light on this aspect.

♦ First, the problem of the control of Swaziland by South Africa whose hopes of getting a short cut to the coast did not materialize.

♦ Secondly, trouble with the native tribes of the North-Western Transvaal and the Low veld was growing. Punitive expeditions were sent from one area to the other- attended by all the horrors and suffering from incidents of atrocities without medical aid. At the same time hordes of natives deserted from the mines and had to be forcible prevented from going to the assistance of their northern countrymen.

♦ Then there was the rebellion in Southern Rhodesia, as well as the dreaded stock disease of the Rinderpest making it's appearance in the country and by 1896, spreading itself from farm to farm. Many hundreds of tribesmen died as a result of no livestock.

♦ At this time Johannesburg was plagued with a very low standard of morality, virtue was abolished, illicit liquor dealing thrived, bribery and corruption was prevalent, murders and robberies rampant, honesty had taken flight and the police seemed unable to control the situation. To crown it all, Johannesburg was seething with discontent as a result of certain prohibition laws, and the town was in a state of tension, alarm and turmoil. Public meetings were being held, appeals were made to the government for aid, while lawlessness prevailed. This all led to the Jameson Raid.

♦ Johannesburg only became a municipality in 1897 and the water supply to the town was inadequate. Water was being sold from carts in the streets at 10c a bucket. At the same time another calamity occurred. Ten railway trucks laden with dynamite accidentally exploded at Bloemfontein, killing people, injuring about 500 and leaving a number of about 1500 homeless.

Buchler concentrated his efforts upon pastoring the coloured community, and used baptismal pool at Witpoortjie for baptisms - he came across the teaching of George Mueller as well as that of John Alexander Dowie, who published a news publication celled "the Leaves of Henling." It was perhaps the latter publication which influenced Buchler the most, particularly as the teachings of Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer and Coming King appealed to his own theology. In 1897 he recommended the publication to his friend at Wakkerstroom, PL. Le Roux. Buchler now resided in Ophirton and started an all white work in Janie street in Jeppestown.

In 1898 he began to correspond with Dr John Dowie while at the same time became known in Faith the country for his "faith healing." He traveled widely, and it was while on his travels that he prayed for one Edgar Mahon who later married Buchlers' step-sister. Mahon was a Salvation Army Officer. He was originally a transport entrepreneur and had an

extensive transport agency in Johannesburg. Edgar Mahon was saved by grace and left his business to join the ranks of the Salvation Army by enjoining himself to the Beaconsfield Training Institute near Kimberly under staff-captain Smith. While he was undergoing training a certain miss Buchler attended the Corpse...and his heart went out in longing for the girl. Edgar Mahon was given command of the Corps at Vryheid and after a while became sick, but, was nursed to health by Mrs Buchler (Johannes Buchlers' wife) as she was also a qualified nurse. It was only much later "while Mahon was at Oudshoorn, that a happy wedding took place, and Miss Buchler became Mrs Mahon."

The Mahons were sent to the Lewis settlement in Natal, while at the same time Edgar Mahons' lungs diseased with tuberculosis and were giving him much pain. It was at this time that Johannes Buchler visited the Mahons and prayed for Edgar who was miraculously healed. Mrs Mahon had been baptized at the age of fifteen and Edgar now felt the need for baptism too. Buchler baptized him and after he restored much of the Salvation Army's work in Pietermaritzburg and at his own settlement (due to illness), he was reprimanded for being baptized and left the work. He left the Army to play a great role in the beginnings of the Zionist movement under the Sotho's.

In Buchlers' Bible he notes that he baptized "Edgar Henry Mahon aged 31 (born 19 July 1865) at Zuurfontein, Helpmekaar Natal on 12 May 1898"

It was after his corresponding with Dowie, that Buchler started his 'Divine Healing Home.' This work began in 1899 and was called by Buchler a faith work which become known as 'The Divine Healing Home' The home was situated in Jeppestown (at the same venue as his white church work) and was attended by many who sought after a healing from the hand of God and through the prayers of Johannes Buchler. The home was later called the SA Faith Mission. Buchler was assisted in the management of the home by his family and also by a Dutch born friend, Mr Huizenberg. After a considerable time the home was forced to close its' doors due to an epidemic of smallpox and the fact that the authorities pressurized by certain local churches, prescribed that both a qualified doctor and a nurse be employed to look after the sick patients who were housed in and who visited the home.

In 1899 Buchler was forced to leave the Transvaal as he came from the Cape. He left his work in the hands of a certain Dr Jarvis who because he could not speak Afrikaans fluently, invited a Mr van Niekerk to manage the church and take the services. van Niekerk corrupted the work, and took illegal possession of the church building in Vrededorp. Buchler moved to Kimberley and after the siege of Kimberley he moved with his family to Robertson in the Cape. But it was while still in Kimberly that Buchler toured the Kroonstad region, and while staying in Hopetown brought to conversion a certain Naude family. Buchler baptized the family and invited them to join the Church which was operated by Buchler in the area under the name of The SA Faith Mission. Buchlers' stay in Hopetown brought several other families to join the church and after he left for the Cape, this work was left in the hands of the Naude family.

The period 1900 to 1908

In 1902 after much letter writing and communicating with John Dowie, Buchler left his family in Robertson and traveled to Chicago to meet with Dowie. It was there that Dowie made him the tempting offer to become overseer of his work in South Africa, but Buchler, who was appalled at the praise Dowie acclaimed for himself and seeing the sycophantic cult which Dowie encouraged, became disillusioned with the prospect of being involved with Dowie and his (Dowies') Zionist Movement, returned to South Africa. He returned to South Africa with the Boer War in full swing

and immediately broke all ties with Dowie and his Zionist Movement. He attempted to rename his own work from Zion Church, to ♦The Apostolic Faith Movement.♦ This was unsuccessful as the Secretary of Native Affairs rejected the application. Buchler then stayed in Robertson and ministered amongst the Baptists and the Plymouth Brethren.

It was just before Buchler moved back to Johannesburg that he once again requested the Secretary of Native Affairs to consider the re-registering of his Zion Church under the name Apostolic Faith Movement. The request was declined. Zundkler writes that at the time Buchler also applied to be appointed as a marriage officer and that this joint application was not successful - being refused by the Secretary of Native Affairs on 23 February 1903. However, after moving to Johannesburg Buchler once again applied to be registered and was appointed as a marriage officer, as he did perform marriage ceremonies. The Free Baptist Church archival marriage register and correspondence records the marriages performed by him. It was in 1908 that Buchler once again picked up the threads of his earlier work and started once again to minister to the coloureds on the Reef. This he did with the support of a few faithful members who had remained loyal to both the Lord Jesus Christ and to Buchler. As the work grew, services were held in the areas of Vrededorp, Sophiatown, Newclare and Newlands.

The Period 1908 to 1924

In January 1908, broken in health, Johannes Buchler left his family in Robertson, and although in very a strained financial position, arrived in Johannesburg to find his old home and all his furniture gone. His church which he left in care of a friend Dr Jarvis, was now occupied by a false sect and his congregation was gone, except for a few souls as already mentioned that remained faithful. He engaged a room, boarded himself, and started cottage meetings in a semidetached home in Vrededorp where half the building was occupied by a Moslem family-who conducted worship services in their home at the same time as Buchler held his. A compromise was reached with each other, as neither could hold services at equal times. So it was that Buchler once again picked up the threads of his earlier work and once again started to minister to the coloureds on the Reef. Services were held in the area of Vrededorp, Sophiatown, Newclare and Newlands.

Once the work was established, Buchler, aided by the police, evicted Van Niekerk from his Church building, by changing the locks on the door and by producing the Title Deeds to the police, who were only too willing to oblige Buchler in his endeavour to regain his church for the proper use of services. Buchler then held meetings in his own church. The services were well attended, and were supported by the old faithfuls ♦ folk who had remained faithful to the Lord during Buchlers' absence.

As the work started to grow and was blessed of the Lord, Buchler started to hold cottage and open air meetings in the surrounding areas. Meetings were also conducted for a small group of Europeans in the German Baptist Church in Mayfair. This work moved to Sophiatown, and came under the influence of two Americans, Tom Hezmalhalch and John Lake, who brought dissension through the advocating of 'tongues♦ within the church. This split is often reputed to be the start of the modern Apostolic Faith Mission Church. Buchlers family now joined him, with his son, John Buchler apprenticing him for the ministry. Through Buchler, God performed many healing and miracles, which was a great attracting force to the church. Buchler also had to go outside his doors and evangelize the townsfolk who by and large were not accustomed to seeing or hearing such goings-on as did occur in Buchlers♦ meetings.

Ollie Raper, a minister pastoring in Bearea in Johannesburg has asserted that it was indeed Hezmalhalch and

Lake who brought dissension in Buchlers' church-resulting in a split in the Sophiatown church. Needless to say the European work did come under the influence of the 'tongue' movement as well as the teachings of Dowie, whereupon Buchler resigned himself from the European work and concentrated his efforts upon the coloured work. It must be said that many of the Europeans did in fact move with Buchler across to the coloured work, and it was not until 1924 that Buchler once again established a work amongst the Europeans. During this period, a great deal of 'Pentecostal Awakening' was experienced in Johannesburg. The founding of the AFM, 'revival meetings, healings and church growth amongst the coloured, white and black peoples testify to this fact. The war years (WWI) did not seem to affect the church too much, especially seeing that Buchler concentrated his efforts upon the coloured community of Vrededorp.

However, ill-health, lack of funds and the stretching of his funds to the limit in keeping the church maintained during the bleak war years, led to a situation where he could not afford to carry the church finances alone; thus Buchlers' son, John Buchler left his ministerial studies, joined the mines to do reduction work, thus easing the brunt of carrying the financial burden of the church by Buchler. John Buchler still aided his father where he could, by preaching and holding Sunday services when his father became overcome with ill-health. It was on 5 August 1923 at a special meeting of the members of the Zion Church that Buchler along with his coworkers proposed, adopted and published the Zion Church's first Constitution and Deed or Trust, encompassing both the coloured and the new white (European) works. The Constitution in its then final form was ratified by the Church Executive and published a second time (for public usage) in 1926 by a Johannesburg firm, Gover, Dando & Co.

The Rev H D Stiglingh joined Buchler as a worker in 1924. He took over as 'superintendent' of the coloured work, thus enabling Buchler to concentrate upon establishing a strong white (European) work in Johannesburg. Buchler was now also able to visit and encourage the Free State families who continued in the faith due to Buchlers' spiritual insight and his writing ability concerning spiritual matters. (Families such as the Naudes were kept informed of the Church's and of Buchlers' progress through the close correspondence maintained between themselves).

The period 1925 to 1944

The work amongst the whites did not grow at first as Buchler had majored upon the coloured communities. However, in order to cater for the whites who mostly held joint services with the coloureds on Sundays, Buchler held weekly cottage meetings. Then in 1927 he was called to the home of his Mr Macfarlane to lay on hands and pray for his sick wife.

Upon the healing of Macfarlane's wife the family joined Buchlers' church. Soon after this two other families, the Lee's and the Tudhope's who resided originally in Hopetown also joined the church; mainly as a result of the healing ministry given to the Macfarlane Family. These families bolstered Buchlers' work. Mr Lee was also destined to become a pioneer worker later on in Buchlers' work.

Buchler continued to hold joint services and cottage meetings and it wasn't until 1929, when the white section of the work had become so large, that a fixed abode was sought as a permanent meeting venue for their meetings. The lower hall of the YWCA was rented for the prayer meetings and Sunday services. As time went by the space proved to be too small and the YWCA rented their main hall out to Buchlers' church. It was while in the YWCA that the first white church council was elected to manage the now growing white work.

During this time Johannes Buchler also published several

works for distribution, the works include "Holiness in the Light of His Coming," "Divine Healing and Wrecked constitutions," "Geschiedenis van de Christelike Doop" (in Dutch), and "De Ware Uitverkiezing" (in high Dutch). Buchlers' daughter, Eva Buchler also published several works of which only one is still in existence called "I have chosen you." In 1932 a new white extension work was formed in Booyens Reserve under the leadership of Buchler with the assistance of the Rev Stiglingh - a most willing and able worker.

The coloured people too prospered as time went by and in 1934 a new extension work was begun under the leadership of a Mr Neil Gordon - a member of the 'YWCA' section of the church. In 1935, due to pressure, and for reasons of health, Buchler handed over the reins of managing the coloured work to Rev Stiglingh on a full-time basis. The coloureds' Sunday School was still managed by Buchlers' daughter, Mrs Kathleen Lategan. Sunday preaching was by the Rev (Mrs) Eva Buchler, Buchlers' other daughter, one of the two ordained and licensed women preachers ever to take such a leading role in the (Zion) Free Baptist Church Movement. It was in 1936 that the (white) church moved from the premises of the YWCA to the center of Johannesburg to Becketts Building, situated on the corner of Harrison and Presidents streets. The church rented the second floor of the building for all their activities. The movement continued to grow with both the white and the coloured works showing signs of blessing and growth. The coloured work in particular showed signs of healthy growth as the work continued to extend into surrounding areas from a central church at Vrededorp.

By 1939 the meeting hall at Becketts Building proved to be too small for services, and the church moved to new premises situated at Ockerse House. The new building stood at the corner of Simmons and Market streets, and was a much quieter section of town compared to the previous site occupied for church services. It was while in Ockerse House that the church committee decided to allow the laity to be elected on to the Church Management Council. Elected white and coloured workers now sat together around the table. This brought about a consolidation of the work amongst the white and the coloured communities.

The work of the Zion (Free Baptist) Church was divided into several sections namely, City Church, Booyens Reserve, Vrededorp, Northern Free State and a new extension, Modderfontein, each with their own minister and local church council. At an Executive meeting held on 9th April 1940 it was unanimously decided that persons not baptized "could not become church members, as the church had a responsibility of maintaining a high standard."

The same year saw growth amongst the coloured communities and the church at Modderfontein started an extension work at Benoni. By 1941, the Benoni work was granted church status under the leadership of the Modderfontein church minister, the Rev Neil Gordon. At the same time a christian Indian community was brought into the confines of the Zion Church by one of its ministers, the Rev Sorrenson, who, prior to joining the Zion (Free Baptist) Church had started an independent work amongst an Indian community at Germiston. This work consisted of a wayside Sunday school consisting of 100 children, as well as Sunday services attended by many of the Indians in the area. The Executive adopted the Germiston Indian work under the supervision of Rev Sorrenson, with full rights to continue under the Church's name with the Executive as final authority.

On 13th August 1941, at precisely 06h35AM Johannes Buchlers' wife, Alida Margaretha Buchler (nee Conradie) died at the age of 72 at their home in Brixton. The Rand Daily Mail which reported on this loss to the Zion Church, paid tribute to this great lady: "Mrs Alida Margaret Buchler, wife of the Rev J. Buchler who died recently at the age of 72 was

responsible for opening two of the first government schools at Fordsburg under the old Republic - first at Ferreiras Camp and later at Fordsburg- which was then a fashionable part of Johannesburg." The report continues "...since 1983 when she and her husband founded the Zion Church, Mrs Buchler devoted all her energies to ministerial work among the European and Coloured peoples of the Reef, and also among the farming communities of the Northern Free State"

It was soon after the death of Buchlers wife, that the Central branch of the Zion (Free Baptist) Church moved from Ockerse Home to de Villiers street where they rented the Danish Hall for services and functions. The hall (and stand) was bought in the same year for the princely sum of R4500.00 which was 25% below the market value as the property (stand) was valued at R3250.00 and the building at R6200.00.

Centrals' move and permanent place of abode seemed to mark the beginning of a new era in the life and growth of the Zion (Free Baptist) Church. In the period of time after this, the church expanded through a process of self-extension, where each individual church played an integral part in either the forming of a new work, or in the securing of the laying of the foundations of the Zion (Free Baptist) Church. The Zion Church extends its borders. After Buchlers death, the Zion (Free Baptist) Church grew beyond the several churches that it had come to be known by.

The Church as a whole did not grow exceedingly fast, or suddenly become a large spiritual giant overnight, but grew steadily at its own pace, into a church with branches in all the population groups present in South Africa.

Church growth was a matter for the individual congregation or individual person. Church growth was never an issue with the Church as a whole, and was seen in terms of white-coloured/black paternalism, which no doubt was a thought inherited by the church fathers from missionary movements, political global expansion as those other churches who were involved in missionary outreach into the [coloured and black] peoples of South Africa. Church growth did not really become a concern of the church until the early 1980s, when the Free Baptist Theological Seminary was established, when students and 'academic' ministers questioned the Free Baptist Church's growth rate.

Welkom

The Welkom congregation and past mission activity have their origin in a farming couple. David and Gertruida Naude, who because of a severe drought moved to the Free State farmlands from the Karoo Hopetown area, where, after their conversion due to their encounter with Johannes Buchler, they were baptized in the "Groot Rivier" (Orange River) by Buchler - in 1900.

Buchler baptized ten people altogether on that occasion; three men and seven women, among whom was Mrs Gertruida Naude (nee Badenhorst). The Naude family came to settle in the area now known as Welkom. The area was comprised of several farms, one which was purchased by the Naudes and became known as "Vlakplaats". The farm was later divided due to mineral rights and today the St Helena Gold Mine stands on part of this farm.

The Naudes were religious people, and on many occasions arranged to have services held at their farm. Prayer meetings were held on a monthly basis, while Pentecostal services were held once a year. The Naudes themselves traveled by horse & cart to Kroonstad every three months to attend a service at the "Grote Kerk" - which was the only established church available for services and in which no boundaries existed between those of differing 'church viewpoints. Such journeys were usually undertaken

to partake of Communion.

As the farm ♦Vlakplaats♦ expanded and the crops yielded their grain, the Naudes found it increasingly difficult to travel away to attend a worship service and so started holding services on their farm. These services were held at the farm house and included the farm laborers, visitors, neighbors and their kin-folk, and was open to all who wished to attend. The services later became an institution at "Vlakplaats" and soon a venue other than the farm house was needed. A hall was built on the farm for the services, and is still used today for black services held at the St Helena Free Baptist Church. These services, soon became of an outreach nature. The Naude's custom was to invite preachers from various denominations to preach at "Vlakplaats". This led eventually to an ♦alliance' between the Reformed Baptist Church and themselves working amongst the blacks in Welkom and surrounding areas.

Although the services were still mainly ♦white' orientated, blacks were evangelized. A hall, as already noted was built for these purposes; David Naude would lead the service and often bring the Word, while his wife would play the 'pump' organ for musical accompaniment. So it was that after David Naude became ♦schooled' in the things of God, and studied himself as a ♦workman who could rightly divide the Word of Truth', that he became the first minister of the Free Baptist Church at St Helena, and then later at the Welkom Church proper. The Naudes♦ strong ties with Buchler and their firm belief in the truth of his (Wesley-Armenian doctrinal) message held them in good stead during the years when Buchler would only visit the Free State work on occasion- as the bulk of the work was on the reef and his health would not allow major journeys to be undertaken.

In 1953 the hall was given over to be used by the blacks for their services (under the ♦Black Mission Committee"), and the Naudes then moved back to the house for services. Prayer meetings were then held on a regular basis at a Mr P. Steyns, as well as David Naudes' houses. By 1953, the congregation had grown to the extent that services could no longer be held in the farmhouse. The services were then held in a building in the Welkom business area. The building was owned by the Naudes and thus constituted no problem. The entire second floor of the building was utilized for services, and presently, the first floor of the same building is utilized by the various christian youth groups as a venue for a coffee bar.

Services were held in the building until 1959, when on the 21 March, the new church was inaugurated in the fashionable suburb of Naudeville. (Naudeville was, and still is part of the farm "Vlakplaats." Today the Naudes' still farm on the part of the original farm- sections being bought by the St Helena Gold Mine for gold exploitation, and a section being bought by the authorities for housing purposes in Welkom in the Naudeville area. (The Naude family too is still active in the church at Welkom, with the nephew of oom David Naude, young David "Oubaas♦ Naude and his family still worshiping at the Welkom church, while other members of the Naude family serve and worship in other Free Baptist Churches,) David Naude was the first minister of the Welkom congregation; his brother, Eben, who was also an ordained minister, served under Naude, him as elder in the congregation. David Naude passed away in the year 1965, and the Rev James Scott together with his wife Rina, was called and accepted to become the pastor of the Welkom congregation. He remained at Welkom until 1979, when he left and is today serving full-time as a worker with the Leprosy Mission.

One of the Naude brothers, Eben, was of a very strong character, and after the death of Johannes Buchler, became president of the Free Baptist Church. There does not seem to be any major reason why Naude succeeded Buchler, excepting that he seemed to continue to peruse a driving passion to see the unconverted saved. (A similarity between Buchler and

Naude may be found in the fact that both gave rise to the birth of a **work of grace** among the poor folk of the land-Buch1er the coloured and Naude the black peoples).

Naudes' ministry at Welkom had far reaching effects upon this church as a whole, especially for the black work and certainly the Malawian work has which it's roots in the Naudes' "Vlakplaats" ministry. Services held by the Naudes for blacks on the farm saw the birth of what is today a strong black work. It was during the fifties that Eben Naude, then the President of the Free Baptist Church, formed a "Missions Committee" to evangelize the blacks in the Welkom and surrounding areas.

Moses Mlangeni, a black preacher, was invited by Naude to preach and decided that because the work was so needy, and because he liked the message of the Free Baptists, to move from the Afrikaans Reformed churches to "Vlakplaats" to minister to the Malawian migratory workers. Moses joined the Free Baptist Church and pioneered much of the Black work in the Orange Free State. The Naudes worked fervently through their "Missions Committee' and went about building-up various (black) works in the Free State. The Welkom work blossomed and by 25 March 1959 had 'mission works at St Helena, Kroonstad and Odendaalsrus. St Helena was, for obvious reasons, the largest of all the 'mission' works. Services were held regularly for the blacks, and a Sunday school was well attended by the black children of the area.

1968 also saw the start of the Malawi work in reality, as Moses Malangeni, establishing a work and later a church at Limbe and in Melobi in Malawi, baptized 9 converts into the Christian faith and accepted these converts into church membership. Later in the year, a new work pastored by Rev Phiri, with Moses's help was established at Selima, and continues to this day. Many of the converts who joined these Malawian churches, were convened and pastored (at the St Helena "black mission church") and while working at the St Helena Gold Mines in Welkom.

Since January 1980 Loukie Delport has been the minister at the Welkom church. Rev Delport grew up in the Welkom church, studied at the Africa Evangelistic Band. He then pastored full-time at Bothaville before accepting the call to minister at the Welkom Free Baptist Church.

Stilfontein

Stilfontein

It was the faithful vision of two holiness preachers, Messrs Buchler & van Rensburg who caught a glimpse of the perishing souls digging for black gold, who went to Stilfontein and together with several other Christians known to the Free Baptist Church, started a tent mission to evangelize the mining community of Stilfontein.

One of the already present members residing in Stilfontein was oom Steve, a mine worker who had been converted in Johannesburg under the preaching ministry of the Rev J. Stiglingh. [Oom Steve was one of the early worshipers of the small congregation situated in Booyens, Johannesburg. His own ministry was to the coloured community of Johannesburg; here he labored with 'open air' meetings on Saturdays and Sundays bringing the message of salvation to the coloured community. Upon his resignation from the mines in Johannesburg, oom Steve moved to Klerkedorp where once again he worked on the mines. Here he witnessed to the miners in the area of Klerksdorp / Stilfontein. Stilfontein became the growth point for oom Steve and soon opened a Sunday School and afternoon services were held. Stilfontein was in need of a permanent meeting place. A tent 'tent mission' was used for this purpose.

Rev Naude of Welkom was the primary move behind the tent mission, and under his leadership, a call was

given on the 18 September 1957 to Mr Fred J Buchler to move to Stilfontein and to take over the reigns of pastoring the now growing [tent] congregation. The tent meetings were managed from a stand at 5 Cloete street Stilfontein. Buchler declined the call and on 27 December 1957, Rev Stiglingh accepted the call to pastor at Stilfontein. The tent mission was furthered by Stiglingh's presence and by 1958 a Scout Hall, which was rented by the congregation for their services, were used.

In 1960, with the aging Stiglingh no longer able to bear the burden of the church, Rev D Naude - the then Moderator - brought a young AEB worker, Hennie Coetzee, to Stilfontein. As the AEB workers were known for their stand on holiness and the 'faith-life' the Church foresaw no problem with his coming to labor at Stilfontein. In the same year Rev H Coetzee applied to be a full-time worker in the Free Baptist Church, and was duly appointed minister of the Stilfontein church. The congregation which was few in number purchased a church stand for the sum of R300.00, from which it has steadfastly continued to preach the Word of God.

Bothaville

'Oom' Stef and 'Tannie' Freda Buys were people of vision - they traveled from Stilfontein where they had been active church members, to Bothaville, where no Free Baptist Church existed, that is, not until they arrived. The Buys family arrived in the farming community and town of Bothaville in 1962. Upon arrival the couple sought spiritual company in another Free Baptist Church family, the Badenhorsts', who themselves had traveled from Welkom to Bothaville to make a living. Stephanus Buys also approached the Harmse family to join their ranks - which they did - and once their ranks had swelled, proclaimed Bothaville a congregation.

Services were held at the home of the Buys family, with preachers coming from as far afield as Welkom and Johannesburg to take the services. David Naude, the president of the Free Baptist Church took a special interest in Bothaville, and felt that the Church had good prospects in Bothaville. However, he did not realize that opposition to the establishing of a Free Baptist Church in Bothaville was increasing. An offer to purchase the old AFM church property was turned down creating a negative situation for the congregation in which to continue working. The congregation was split. Sides were chosen. Some were for the purchasing of the AFM church and grounds, while others were for obtaining their own grounds and building their own church.

The congregation decided on the latter, and at a congregational meeting, it was decided they would approach the town council to obtain permission to build a church on a residential stand in Kerk Str. Oom Stef Buys was delegated the responsibility of applying for, administering, and legalizing the plans with the Town Council for a church site and building. The stand bought for the church site had no servitude on it, neither was the Town Council, or rather some of its members, keen on the Church being built in Bothaville. Many of the opposers were from other denominations, who themselves, strictly opposed any new church denomination establishing itself in their territory. From 1964 until 1967, the congregation debated, applied, reasoned, fought, and appealed to the Council for the right to build a church on the Kerk street property. Then in 1967, when all hope seemed lost, Stephanus Buys approached the Town Council to have an open debate and discussion with the entire council concerning the matter of building the church. As events would have it, the night of the discussion also saw a new Town Council presented and sworn into office.

Stef Buys presented his case, and found support in a lawyer newly elected to the Council, who was up to date with the church's plight as he himself gave legal advice to them. Oom Stef informed the Council that no municipal law existed to prevent

him from building a bio scope, theater, night club, or drinking hall on the property, and yet it seemed strange that certain councilors were opposed to a church being built on the property. He mentioned that he had often been informed that the Council did not want to create a precedent for building privileges, and that upon his arrival in Bothaville several years before, the Town Council had given permission to another denomination to build a church on a residential site in the near vicinity of his house.

A decision under the Mayor, Councilor Senekal gave permission for the church to be built; however as no funds existed, work could not start right away, and members were asked to sponsor the stand and the church building. This action created a split in the church council, as many members felt that sponsoring the stand and the building was dishonoring their faith and un-biblical. Work was eventually started on the church in 1974, when, after confronting the church council with the words ♦I'm willing to trust the Lord for the funds for the building of the church - you lot can either join me or do as you please♦. Oom Stef Buys stepped-out in faith. And found that not only did he have the support of the people, but that the finances for the budding were taken care of.

In 1975, Rev L Delpont was called to pastor the small congregation. Due to a lack of funds, he had to find employment at the Vetsak farmers co-op to supplement his income. Bothaville grew and in time also supplemented and aided with the Churches' Black Mission work. A small church building for services on one of the Free Baptist Church members' farms. The church attracted a great deal of interest and was later blessed not only with support from the local people, but also with an outreach program, by means of a tract and Bible stall- which was financed by the Bothaville farmers and manned by the church workers themselves. [This tract mission is supported by the FBC, while funded and aided by the mainstream Afrikaans church of South Africa.]

Rev Delpont left Bothaville congregation in 1980 to become the minister of the Welkom congregation. The church then continued for eight years without a minister, relying on visiting preachers and her own elders to do the work of the minister. Bothaville called their second minister, the Rev Hannes Nolan, also an AEB worker, who was worshipping at the Robertsham Free Baptist Church in Johannesburg and following a full- time outreach service with the YMCA in Johannesburg`s Hillbrow area with his wife, Marilise. The couple pastored the church for four years and experienced extensive church growth, necessitating the building of an additional classroom and youth hall facilities. Rev Nolan has since moved back to Johannesburg, where he now assists the Central Congregation with their Sunday services, while also providing a very necessary support work in the form of visitation and counseling.

Rustenberg

Rustenberg. The name is perhaps synonymous in South Africa with the export minerals of platinum and uranium. This young city is also fast becoming a center for national growth as South Africa seeks to expand it's mineral wealth through the exploitation of it's earth resources as well as those of it's neighboring states.

The Free Baptist church in Rustenberg, was born out of necessity and a desire to see the church expend it's territory into an area where the 'holiness gospel' had not yet made it's mark. A young mining (Free Baptist) family moved to Rustenberg in the seventies, and due to their not being able to fit into the NG Kerk or any of the other ♦suster kerke', requested the Free Baptist Synod to send a worker to Rustenberg to crater for their needs, and to explore the possibilities of starting a new work.

The Free Baptist Aviation Mission work took up the challenge together with the Church's Moderature, and flew

speakers to Rustenberg weekly to hold house services. Evangelistic campaigns were also held under the wings of the Moderature, with several ministers speaking at meetings. The house meetings grew and a church stand was acquired to build a church and to cater for the now growing congregation. The congregation, under the chairmanship of the Church Moderator, called a young Afrikaans minister, Leon Redlinghuys and his wife to pastor the flock.

A small church was built by Redlinghuys, with the individual support of ministers, friends and church folk alike. The church was dedicated in 1977. Leon Redlinghuys resigned his ministerial involvement in the Free Baptist Church, and joined an organization where he could minister the Gospel to the workers employed. Soon after this the congregation called a young Seminary graduate and his wife to pastor the flock. Jurie and Belinda Denysohen accepted the call to Rustenberg in 1985. Today, Rustenberg with their third and very mature minister, Evangelist Fred Schwab, is once again making headway, reaching the spiritual maturity that will place this church upon the map of church growth.

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