Sustainable seminaries, reliable leadership:
The NetACT story, 1999-2008

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1   INTRODUCTION

A person needs no convincing that Africa must have reliable leadership; this can be taken for granted. The one success story in Africa, especially after the colonial period, is the growth of the Christian Church. In South Africa and in the rest of Africa, churches have, by far, the highest level of public trust (HSRC 2000; HSRC 2008, Erasmus 2008)[1]. Here, the church and faith-based organizations are the most strategically based institutions that can contribute towards Africa's moral regeneration (Swart 2006:346-378) and towards the development of African leadership. The NetACT story tells how some seminaries have accepted this challenge.

This presentation begins by critically outlining and illustrating the growth of the church in Africa. To illustrate some of the discrepancies of the growth of the church in Africa, and especially the dire need for reliable leadership, we shall examine two case studies: one from the Presbyterian Church in Nigeria (PCN) and the other from the Anglican Church in Kenya. Projected against this scenario, the NetACT story will be told to illustrate a way of developing reliable leadership.

2   THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

The Christian world's centre of gravity is shifting southwards to Africa, Asia and Latin America. The *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Barrett *et al*. 2001), as well as many other authorities (Cox 1995; Jenkins 2002; Walls 2002:85; Sanneh 2003; Hendriks 2007), make this clear. In Table One, the "South" represents Africa, South America and Oceania while "North" includes North America, Europe and Asia.

Table One
Southern Shift in Christianity

	1900 Popul	1900 Christ	% Christ	2005 Popul	2005 Christ	% Christ
South	179	73	41%	1 479	954	65%
North	1 441	449	31%	4 975	1 131	23%

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[1] The HSRC 2008 report has tables comparing the layers of trust in the different sectors of South African society. The report states: "Over the decade, the majority of citizens (81% on average) have consistently and resolutely shown that they are most likely to express greatest confidence in religious institutions, such as churches. This is a typical pattern across sub-Saharan Africa."

Total	1 620	522	32%	6454	2085	32%

The numbers are in millions.

This proves that the growth of the Christian Church in Africa is phenomenal.

Table Two
Growth of the Christian Church in Africa

✟ **1900**   **9 million Christians =**   **9% of population**
✟ **4 Muslims for every 1 Christian**
✟ **2005**   **411m Christians**   **46%**   **of population**
✟ **2005**   **355m Muslims**   **40%**   **of population**

Lamin Sanneh (2003) points out that the growth of Christianity in Africa has accelerated after the departure of the missionaries (data from Sanneh 2003 and WCD).

Table Three
The post 1962 growth of the Church in Africa

✟ **Independence came to Africa; missionaries started to leave.**
✟ **1962: 60m Christians and 145m Muslims.**
✟ **2005: 411m Christians and 355m Muslims.**
✟ **1970-1985 Christianity grew by 16,500 conversions a day– mostly in poor areas.**
✟ **During the same time, 4,300 people were leaving the church weekly in the West.**

Sanneh (2003:18f) discusses the reasons for this significant growth in African Christianity.[2]

1   **The rapid expansion of Christianity took place *after* the colonial period** and actually started during the period of national awakening (post 1962). In many ways colonialism was a stumbling block for the growth of Christianity (Sanneh 2003:18). Once Africans were in a position to allow the Gospel to address their religions and cultures, they realized that God was present in Africa even long before the missionaries had arrived. Now they were in a position to rectify their cultural heritage in the light of the Gospel (:55, 82). In the words of Sanneh (:43): "Christianity helped Africans to become renewed Africans, not remade Europeans."

2   **The translation of the Bible in African languages played a major role in the growth of an African Christianity** according to Sanneh (2003:18,55,73,85,95-130), who calls it a "delayed effect" (:18), since many of the translations were done before 1962. His basic argument is that, in the same way in which Greek became the major language of the New Testament church and entered into dialogue with the Hellenistic culture, the use of the vernacular makes the Gospel accessible to African culture. The problem with many missionaries and mission agencies was that they preferred not to take the Acts 15 decision (Hendriks 2003), disparaged African culture as being inferior to that of the West, and made proselytes. As soon as Africa became unshackled from this Western bondage, the same phenomenon occurred as experienced in the first three centuries when a growth rate of approximately 40% per decade was maintained (Stark 1997:6-7).

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[2] The discussion of Sanneh's explanation for the post 1962 growth of Christianity in Africa is from Hendriks 2007:33-36.

3   African leadership and the role of women freed the church from the disadvantages of foreign compromise and Western denominationalism. Bediako's work (1992, 1995) on African Christian identity is crucial for an understanding of the growth of Christianity in Africa. African leadership understands the African worldview (Mbiti 1969; Turaki 2006), which, in general, missionaries could not do; only exceptional individuals who crossed the cultural boundaries and actually listened to Africans succeeded in doing so.

African indigenous leadership is a key for understanding the phenomenon of the African Independent Churches (AICs), the growth of which accelerated after the independence phase (ML Daneel 2000:iv-xviii, 2004; Maboea 2002; Kalu [ed] 2005:309-329; Oosthuizen 2003:314-327; Oduro *et al.* 2008). The realities of the AICs have much in common with the church of the first centuries when there were no academically trained clerics and no church buildings (Stark 1997). See Table 4b below.

4   Christian expansion is virtually directly linked to those societies whose people preserved the indigenous name of God. Sanneh (2003:18,31f,43,78) explains that few people noticed that, behind the statistical growth indicators, a theological factor played a major role. Africans responded best to Christianity where the indigenous religions were strongest and the indigenous name of God was used. In the same way that Jesus was called *kurios* in New Testament Greek, God's name in African languages related the Gospel to every facet of the structure of a traditional society - from its agriculture to its religion.

Tables 4a and 4b are from another source, the *South African Christian Handbook 2005-2006* (Symington 2005:27-85; see also Hendriks 2007:23-40), which discusses the religious scenario and trends in South Africa, based on the 1911-2001 census data. Note that tables 4a and 4b overlap; 4a depicts the mainline denominations that are all declining, while 4b depicts the AICs and Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches comprising approximately 70% black Christians. The denominations in 4b are all growing and expanding their market share. In 1911, only 25% of black South Africans were Christians. This percentage rose steadily to nearly 80% in 2001 – typifying the mission–evangelization process that was taking place across Africa (Oduro *et al.* 2008). A more detailed analysis reveals that there is a movement away from the mainline denominations towards the AICs, as well as towards the Pentecostal/Charismatic and new independent type of Christian Churches. The latter movement is visible in all population (racial) groups.
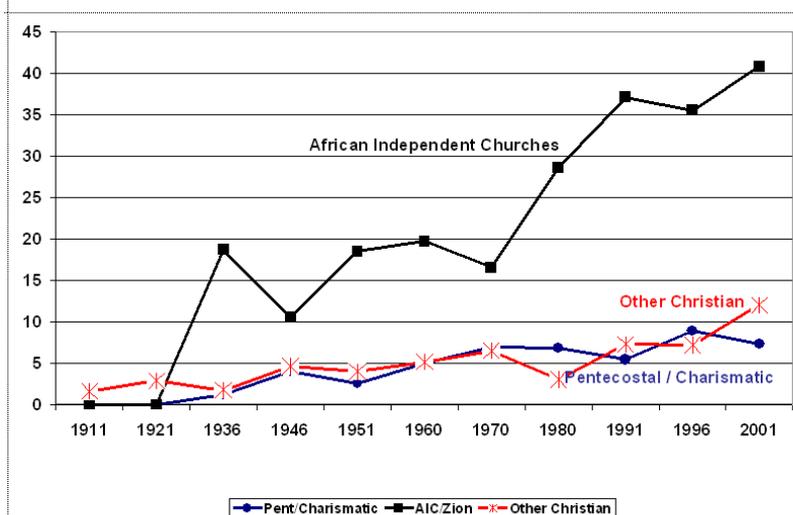
Table 4a: Christian Market share Mainline Denomination 1911-
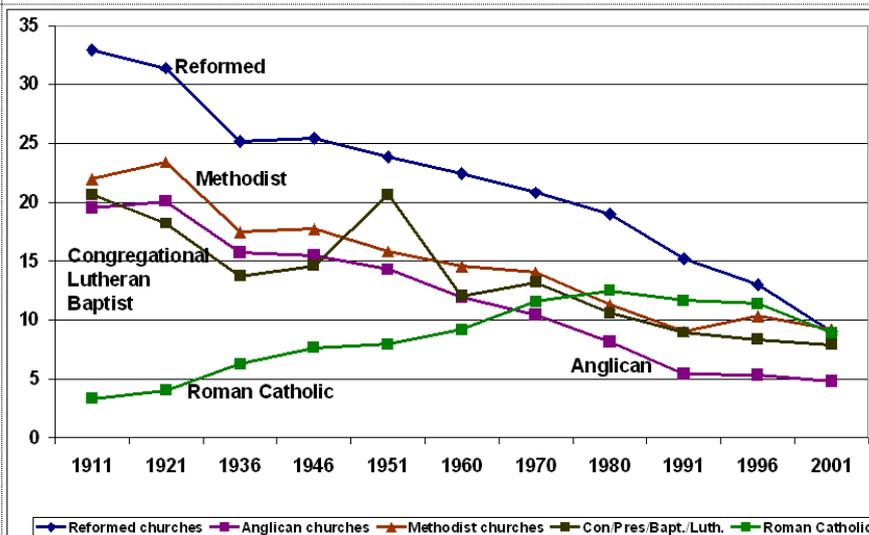
2005-2006 SA Christian Handbook p 78

Table 4b: Christian Market Share: AIC's, Pentecostal and Other Christian: 1911-2001

2005-2006 SA Christian Handbook p 79

These tables illustrate the growth of the church in Africa and the discussion points to some of the reasons for this growth. However, questions do arise. For instance: if the church has grown so spectacularly, and if the church is a "stock of social capital for promoting social development" (Swart 2006:346), which we believe to be true, why is Africa in such a deplorable state when one examines issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, corruption, etcetera? Two case studies may help in this regard.

3   ETHNICITY WITHIN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA (PCN)

In his doctoral dissertation, Uma Onwunta (2006), a two-term Principal Clerk of the PCN (1996-2002), addressed *Ethnicity and missional strategies within the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria*. This dissertation is a case study on the influence of ethnicity and tribalism on the church in Africa. It carefully describes the inception and history of the PCN (:13-49). Nigeria

is the most populous country in Africa, having anything between 120 to 160 million inhabitants, about 400 languages and up to 240 ethnic groups living in 36 politically demarcated states. Onwunta summarises (:78):

> In the final analysis, there are only three ethnic groups which have attained majority status in their respective regions: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Ibo in the south-east and the Yoruba in the south-west. These three groups comprise only fifty-seven percent of the population of Nigeria. The remainder of the people are of the ethnic minority groups ….

Muslims dominate the North, while Christians dominate the South, economically the stronger region. In Nigeria, one of the many disputes concerns which group is numerically the strongest, and interreligious differences have also remained a major divisive factor. Nigeria became independent in 1960. The first military coup took place in 1966 and soon led to a bloody ethnic conflict, the Biafran War, that had a strong political and religious (Muslim-Christian) dimension. Onwunta (2006:190) notes that the emergence of the Christian Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria coincided with the period when Muslim-Christian confrontation became fierce. Pentecostal fundamentalism conflicted with the Muslims' fundamentalism. Ethnic violence and war, causing millions and millions of casualties, have been endemic to Africa.

However, the main thrust of Onwunta's (2006:99) dissertation painstakingly points out how ethnocentrism has seriously eroded the mission of the PCN. He juxtaposes this by outlining to what extent the Gospel and dialogue can curtail this misfortune. The missionaries introduced the germ of ethnicity to the PCN. But, indigenous leaders have pampered and kept it alive until today. The two dominant vying ethnic groups monopolize over 98% of the human resources of the Church (2006:125). Presbyterianism is substantially present in only six of the 36 states. Kalu (in Onwunta 2006:122) declares that the overall growth of the PCN has not been encouraging at all, and puts the figure at approximately 150,000 after 150 years of enterprise in Nigeria.[3] This figure may be too low (:123), but Onwunta (:124,132) is of the following opinion:

> … I wish to strongly submit that the real problem of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria is not because the leadership is in the hands of indigenes; rather, the problem lies in the fact that leadership is being monopolized by the two rival ethnic groups in the Church. This is what I have called the ethno-localization of ecclesiastical leadership which allows no diversification of ideas from the different ethnic groups of Nigeria. Other groups have not been contributing to the leadership processes in the PCN because they are yet to be deliberately mainstreamed into the leadership structures of the Church.…
> Until we fight ethnocentrism to its end and until we get the cohort of leaders whose sole mission is to serve the kingdom of God and cater for the welfare of the people, PCN will continue to be a platform for ethnic politics and individuals driven by egos.

It is no overstatement to say that, with many variations on the theme, the Nigerian scenario can be proven in every African country. Compare the Mainline Denominations' pattern of decline in Table 4a and juxtapose it with the growth patterns of the AICs and the other new (mainly Pentecostal-Charismatic) churches' growth in Table 4b. The Dutch Reformed Family of Churches, especially the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, is experiencing a serious loss of members because of internal conflict. It must be emphasized that, both in Nigeria and in South Africa, churches with a mainline or European origin that have access to Western intellectual resources, are not succeeding to grow in numbers or to take their share of responsibility to address the endemic problems that Africa faces. Are those that are growing numerically doing better? In fact, the Anglican Church in Kenya is growing!

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[3] The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria was founded by Scottish missionaries in 1846 (Onwunta 2006:15).

4   LEADERSHIP IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN KENYA

In 2008, Rev DN Kagema completed his research on *Leadership training for mission in the Anglican Church of Kenya* at UNISA. His research question was (2008:2): "How best should the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) train leaders for its self-growing Church and leaders who can effectively meet the demands of the rapidly growing Kenyan society?" He used the well-known four-self mission strategy, advocated by the ACK's own 2004 strategic plan, to evaluate leadership training in Kenya. The strategy is that the Church and its leadership training should be self-sustaining, self-propagating, self-governing and self-theologising (2008:4,41-53).

The research provides a general overview of the ACK, the above-mentioned mission strategy, its history and the growth of this Church. In 2007, it comprised 3.7 million members constituting 10.6% of the total population of 35 million people, 3.4% more than its 1980 market share (Kagema 2008:54-67). Its 4996 congregations (1352 parishes) were served by 1555 ordained clergy. This translates roughly into 2400 members to one clergy person. The academic qualifications of the clergy include 83% with diplomas, certificates and less than 3 years' training. Only 17% have degrees. A thorough empirical analysis was made of the theological colleges and their curricula. Research of Anglican Christians' (Bishops, clergy, lecturers at the colleges, lay and youth leaders) views pertaining to the colleges' leadership training and curricula triangulated the data. A pretty uniform picture emerged (:144-235).

Some of Kagema's (2008:70): conclusions confirm the emerging picture of the church in Africa:

> The ACK lacks enough shepherds and the possibility is that most of its flock is spiritually unfed. It is practically impossible for one pastor to effectively satisfy the needs of such a big group. The challenges of the 21st century are immense and call for a pastor who is quite near to his/her sheep so that he/she can understand them and their challenges fully and as such he/she is in a position of meeting their spiritual needs.

In attempting to solve the problem of enough clergy, dioceses grouped together and started their own colleges. These always related to tribalism and power. Kagema (2008:198) writes:

> … some of the theological colleges were started out of the desire by some of the church leaders to have their own colleges where they would have direct influence and control. … this self-interest coupled with 'tribalism' has continued to affect the training of church leaders in the ACK up to date, greatly affecting the Provincialization process.…

When the four-self requirements were put to the test at these colleges, all failed. Even church leaders acknowledge this. The curricula are not contextualized and relevant. The seminaries are understaffed and depend on foreign donors to survive. The qualifications of the lecturers are substandard, while half of the principals are expatriates (Kagema 2008:199).

Regarding curriculum issues Kagema (2008:232) is very outspoken:

> The curriculum of any learning institution is very important as it determines the kind of products produced by that institution. If the curriculum is haphazardly done, the people produced by it are also haphazard and their work is haphazard.... The clergy produced by these colleges are 'half baked'…. And as such cannot stand the challenges of the 21st century…. This has rendered the ACK not to be a self-theologizing Church, a mission principle which is very instrumental for any growing church…. the curricula used in the ACK Provincial

Colleges are uncontextualised and irrelevant. These curricula look more Western than African and as such fail to address the main issues affecting the Kenyan society today.

As with the PCN in Nigeria, Kagema (2008:41-42) bewails the tribalism and points out that the chaos that befell the country after the December 2007 elections was due to pent-up ethnic anger that simply erupted as the different factions within the ACK supported their kin.

Throughout this dissertation, the vicious and self-destructing cycle is evident: through lack of strong leadership, church unity decisions to better theological training are not implemented and the perpetual financial problems continue. The candidates, drawn to study as clergy, are mostly low-level candidates unable to find work or study opportunities elsewhere. This is self-defeating; people no longer respect their fellow African clergy, catechists and evangelists. Good lecturers are scarce, underpaid, and more often than not tempted to leave the country, which exacerbates the brain drain of Africans leaving for lucrative work and salaries abroad (Kagema 2008:22-34,288). Theological training at all the colleges are still in English (2008:281) but Theology remains foreign if not taught in the mother tongue. Kagema's (:308-311) dissertation is an emphatic call for African Christian intellectual leadership.

4.1   **Conclusions**

The growth of the church in Africa cannot be denied. Some reasons for this growth have been explained. Mainline denominations do not always share in the growth, as can be seen from the Nigerian (PCN) and South African (Dutch Reformed Church [DRC]) examples, but occasionally, it does grow (Kenya's Anglican Church [ACK]). Although this phenomenon needs more research, it is clear that the Christian Church is growing, despite the absence of good theological leadership. Elsewhere, the author discusses this phenomenon in greater detail (Hendriks 2007:23-40).

This growth can be directly linked to the growth in world-wide Pentecostalism. Harvey Cox's work (1995; Hendriks 2007:31-33) explains this phenomenon. Table 4a, compared to 4b, illustrates its evidence in South Africa. In churches, such as the ACK, this growth takes place in the absence of well-trained clergy – may one say "because of the absence of well-trained clergy?"

The author's experience of travelling and teaching in Africa, of attending theological conferences, or simply visiting post-graduate students where they live and work, has been inundated with stories about "rogue pastors." It seems that one of the fastest growing entrepreneurial businesses in Africa is the building of one's own church in line with the popular American charismatic "health-and-wealth" examples that dominate religious television shows. People, such as the popular Palestinian-born American televangelist Bennie Hinn,[4] are known all over Africa for their evangelism campaigns that draw literally thousands and thousands of spectators, eager to be blessed, healed, saved and satisfied. The American prosperity cult-and-consumerism oriented variations of being church have thousands of replicas, large and small, throughout Africa. In most cases, this form of being church is a social reality but, theologically speaking, it is a disaster! However, they do provide a community spirit in a sea of poverty and there are laudable exceptions, but the true Gospel is known by its fruit, and the realities of Africa with its Rwandan-like genocides (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwandan_Genocide), with the "Lord's Resistance Army" (Uganda,   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord's_Resistance_Army), speak of sorrow and shame.

Africa needs theological leaders, people who, like the prophets of every age and continent, read the Bible and discern God's *missio Dei*. One can say that we need servant leaders like Nehemiah. We need disciples who follow Jesus Christ's example. Kagema (2008:283) reiterates the well-known conclusion that, in Africa, Christianity is a kilometre wide but a centimetre deep.

This scenario gave rise to the NetACT story.

5   NETACT: ITS INCEPTION, MEMBERS, MISSION AND GOALS

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[4] His official website: http://www.bennyhinn.org/default.cfm helps one to grasp the trend of his campaigns. Also check the very informative article in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benny_Hinn .

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Network for African Congregational Theology, NetACT,[5] is a network of eleven theological institutions in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition[6] with the following mission:

> NetACT is a network of theological institutions in Sub Saharan Africa, created and directed by these institutions, to assist them in preparing leaders for missional congregations.

Its major goals are to:

1. Upgrade curriculum standards at our member institutions.
2. Develop an effective system of communication, consultation and networking among all member institutions.
3. Provide scholarships to advance the theological training of our institutions' lecturers.
4. Create an affordable and welcoming living environment for lecturers who are receiving advanced training.
5. Organize lecturer exchanges among our institutions to provide needed expertise, and to create space and time for lecturers to further their studies.
6. Maintain an adequately staffed coordinating office.
7. Publish theological handbooks relevant to the African context.
8. Ensure that an HIV/AIDS course is developed and maintained as a routine part of the normal curriculum at each NetACT institution.

NetACT's cradle was a consultation held by the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA, http://www.theoledafrica.org/ACTEA) and the Nairobi Evangelical School of Theology (NEGST, http://www.negst.edu), on 2 to 5 February 2000. This consultation dealt with the relationship of seminaries, as theological institutions of higher education, and the church, and had as its theme, "Serving the church: Partnership in Africa." The main speaker was Prof Tite Tienou, the previous president and dean of the Faculty of Theology in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, the current (2009) Dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and professor of Theology of Mission at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois (http://www.tiu.edu/divinity/people/tienou). Here, 350 delegates debated the challenges, shortcomings and tensions in theological education in Africa.

In this atmosphere, the representatives of SU, JMTUC, ZTC and RITT met and decided to form NetACT. Other institutions that indicated that they wanted to be part of such a network were MTC, JMTI and Hefsiba.

The eight-day (18-25 April 2001) meeting in Lusaka, with 22 delegates attending, was most formative. The mission, goals and constitution were formulated, and strategic planning set things in motion. The subsequent Annual General Meetings took place in different countries. The minutes of these meetings describe NetACT's development, struggles and achievements and, together with crucial reports, appear on the website mentioned in a footnote.

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[5] On NetACT, see Hendriks 2006:489-505. NetACT's mission, goals, constitution, minutes of all meetings, etc are on the web: http://academic.sun.ac.za/theology/Centres/NetAct/netact.htm .

[6] At present, NetACT has 11 "members": Justo Mwale Theological University College (JMTC), Lusaka, Zambia; Murray Theological College (MTC), Morgenster, Zimbabwe; Zomba Theological College (ZTC), Malawi; Josophat Mwale Theological Institute (JMTI) Nkhoma, Malawi; African Bible College (ABC), Lilongwe, Malawi; Reformed Theological Institute (RITT), Eldoret, Kenya; Hefsiba Christian Institute for Higher Education, Vila Ulongue, Mozambique; Namibian Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS), Windhoek, Namibia; The Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University (SU), South Africa; ISEU Instituto Superior Emanuel Unido (ISEU), Huambo, Angola; Instituto Superior de Teologia Evangelica no Lubango (ISTEL), Lubango, Angola.

6   TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE SEMINARIES AND RELIABLE LEADERSHIP

6.1   Congregational emphasis

The plight of this continent motivated the formation of NetACT. An explanation of the emphasis on congregations in the mission statement is necessary. The first mission statement explains what is meant by "congregational theology":

> **Congregational Theology** is theology as practised in the Christian Congregation as the body of Christ, discerning the will of God in the process of interpreting the Scriptures and its own specific context, empowering the Congregation to address its multiple problems, challenges power, corruption and economic injustice (among others).

The emphasis on congregations professes the belief that the church should produce the social capital that keeps society intact, peaceful and just. Only a people's movement (Swart 2006b:129-154,189-242) can attain this. The best way of reaching and communicating values to Africa's people is via their churches. The infrastructure for this already exists, is sustainable and proven. The problem, however, is the quality of its clergy, its theological leadership. The basic assumption of this statement rests on the belief that Christian Gospel values have the potential to lead to a just, prosperous and peaceful society. The key for reaching this goal is the development of seminaries on the continent and ensuring that reliable servant leaders are trained or discipled at these institutions.

6.2   The first stage: 2000-2006: What made it happen?

The NetACT story is entering its second stage. The first stage was from 2000 to 2006 when the Annual General Meeting was held in Windhoek and where the mission and goals were slightly altered and the energy of the networked refocused.

In retrospect, the following key factors enabled the formation of the network:
1   *Leadership*. The founding members from the various institutions and countries had the prophetic ability to understand the problem and to visualize an alternative future. They had the faith to form a network against humanly insurmountable odds, which included finances, lack of infrastructure, various forms of prejudice and the constraints of an overload of work and responsibilities.
2   *Financial support*. How NetACT contacted Dr. Ron Hartgerink, CEO of a chemical pharmaceutical company and then Chair of the Board of Western Theological Seminary, was a divine intervention. He directed the Elmar Hartgerink Trust, which funded most of the Network's activities during the first stage. He came on board at the Lusaka meeting in 2001 and his strategic planning skills proved to be invaluable.
3   *Infrastructure*: The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Family in the Western Cape and Stellenbosch University (SU) played a major role in supplying the infrastructure needed for the work. The existing DRC-Reformed-Presbyterian denominational network provided expertise, accommodation for students and scholarships. SU provided office space for NetACT and administered its finances.
4   *Trust*. The scars of our colonial past and apartheid were realities in our midst. From the very beginning, all parties trusted bridge-builders, such as Prof Martin Pauw, a Zambian-born ChiChewa-speaking professor in Missiology. His intimate knowledge of Africa and its people and his personal relationship with most of us, helped us through many difficult times and situations. The development of personal relationships cemented the trust-building process in which the 2002 workshop on HIV/AIDS (that CABSA's Christo Greyling and his wife presented) played a major role in helping us to communicate and discuss the "elephants in the room."

6.3   Achievements of the first stage
The main activities and achievements of the 2000-2006 stage were the following:

1   *A communication network.* Our first goal was to supply all institutions with computers and institute e-mail communications. It was a tough and prolonged "struggle" and learning process, which still needs continuous attention and development. We had to, and must still, keep our seminaries connected to the information highway.

2   *An HIV/AIDS curriculum at all the seminaries.* In 2000, no institution lectured on AIDS. The staff, students and local church leadership of all seminaries were introduced to the first basic AIDS curriculum at three-day conferences. Seminary staff received additional training as trainers – and most were then "bought" by NGOs or government agencies. This aspect of our work needs continuous attention.

3   *Our first joint publication. Studying congregations in Africa* (Hendriks 2004) took three full years of preparation. We received invaluable international academic support and produced a contextualized, basic and affordable handbook for all our seminaries.

4   *Training staff:* The academic qualifications of the staff at NetACT seminaries have improved considerably (Hendriks 2006:501-502). Scholarships from the Reformed-Presbyterian denominations in Africa, Europe and North America as well as institutions, such as the Mustard Seed Foundation, made this possible.[7]

5   *The NetACT office and infrastructure* played a key role in networking resources, e.g. scholarships, money for seminaries' capital-intensive projects, and linking seminaries internationally to people and institutions to build capacity. The office also plays a key role in lecturer exchange, which takes place between NetACT institutions, and by inviting international highly qualified academics to teach at NetACT seminaries – free of charge. As such, local lecturers are able to pursue their studies, the overburdened staff receives respite, invaluable academic input is achieved, and personal and academic networks extended.

6   *The NetACT house at SU.* The DRC and the Elmar Hartgerink Trust supplied the capital to buy and furnish affordable accommodation for students from African countries to lodge for shorter or longer periods of study about two kilometres from the seminary in a house next to the railway station. The NetACT office provides the hands-on administration of the house while SU attends to the maintenance and finances. The house, containing 14 beds / ten rooms, plays an invaluable role as it provides, not only physical accommodation, but also spiritual and social-academic support for people who are often under pressure, far from home, and total strangers when commencing their studies. At this mini United Nations gathering, the interaction is remarkable. At 19:30, it is quite an experience to attend their daily devotions, which open windows and doors to many realities of our life and calling in Africa.

6.4 The second stage and its challenges
Key to the success of the first stage was the financial contribution of the Elmar Hartgerink Trust. This, however, was an inherently dangerous. Sustainable seminaries and a sustainable network should not depend on a single donor. In 2006, funding from the Trust stopped basically. At the 2006 sixth consecutive Annual General Meeting in Namibia, the NetACT

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[7] Between 2000 and 2008, an annual average of 36 postgraduate students from other African countries studied at SU, most of whom are from NetACT countries. Between 1994 and 2008 over 100 students from these countries received their postgraduate degrees from SU.

Board were compelled to do some serious thinking and planning. goal, The Venn-Anderson-Heibert (Shenk 1983; Heibert 1985; Kagema 2008:41-47) mission strategy's goal was self-sustaining, self-propagating, self-governing and self-theologising churches. How were we to deal with this?

Three concerns were clear: we had to strengthen the stewardship responsibilities of our seminaries / supporting local churches and we had to work towards an internationally accepted standard of accreditation that was to be driven by the individual seminaries and their constituent churches. We were also increasingly anxious about the AIDS pandemic and the impact it had on our students and the local churches that were supporting our seminaries. AIDS was impoverishing every aspect of society and, as such, also our seminaries.

The result was that the 2007 Lusaka AGM's structure differed from prior AGMs. 66 people attended: 26 from NetACT associated institutions, 21 from Pittsburg Theological Seminary and Pittsburg University, 12 ministers and church leaders from the PCUSA and 7 other international scholars.

The two-day conference on: *"The effects of the Aids pandemic and poverty on church life in Sub-Saharan Africa: stewardship implications"* was held prior to AGM, and a conference on *"The prophetic witness of the Church in networking with government, business and other NGO's to address contextual issues"* took place after the AGM, which our guests financed. Basic realities regarding the four-self strategy gained in clarity. As regards seminaries in Africa, local stewardship and external funding must find a compromise[8] that will not affect the principle of self-theologising.

The minutes of the 2007 AGM clearly indicate to what extent curriculum and accreditation issues took centre stage. The institutions all pledged to work towards local accreditation with their national Education Departments, but also towards ACTEA accreditation (http://www.theoledafrica.org/ACTEA/). The minutes state (NB 184):

> ACTEA is accepted by NetACT as the ideal general accrediting body for theological education in Africa, and is recommended as such to the *(South African)* CHE (Council for Higher Education). ACTEA is a regional body of ICETE (International Council for Excellence in Theological Education). It also associates with ICAA (International Council of Accrediting Agencies).

At present (2009), only JMTUC has both national and ACTEA accreditation for its BTh degree. Having accreditation from one's national Education Department is excellent but, quite often, local politics make it very difficult to attain and, furthermore, does not guarantee international academic acceptance.

ACTEA accreditation has a number of advantages. It is a process that an institution and the supporting churches drive. It deals with all aspects needed for quality theological leadership development. The institutions that set their goals on attaining a contextualized curriculum, adequate facilities, financial control, communication between students, lecturers and churches, discipline and spiritual formation, etcetera, pursue these standards. NetACT assists individual seminaries in this endeavour. Rev Kruger du Preez, Academic Dean of Hefsiba in Mozambique, received a scholarship to do his doctoral research on the state of the curricula of the NetACT institutions.

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[8] The financial reality that seminaries must face can be understood only against the global picture and overall financial position of African countries (Castells 2000:68-168).

What resources NetACT has, have subsequently been used to attain the accreditation goal. It was decided that, in future, curriculum development workshops for the theology sub-disciplines will take centre stage. The minutes of the 2007 discussion on HIV/AIDS explain why the AIDS curricula were first on the workshop's agenda (NB181):

- How does NetACT ensure that its positive resolutions on this matter really touch and influence local situations?
- NetACT is not to check that members do an AIDS course. Its role is to coordinate, empower and network so that members can have access to good information for their syllabi.
- Member institutions need to deliver to the churches pastors who are well-trained and able to function relevantly in their communities.
- The Board notes that local developments at the respective institutions have surpassed the (original) AIDS course and knowledge.
- It may be useful to share our respective experiences and insights and come up with a collective, current understanding.
- It is agreed that, due to the urgency of the matter, December 2007 until March 2008 will be the time for such a workshop.

In July 2008, all institutions attended the HIV/AIDS curriculum workshop. They worked day and night in dealing with the various aspects of curriculation. Their first book on the issue titled: *Our church has AIDS: Preaching in a context of HIV&AIDS in Africa,* should be published by July 2009, when they have a follow-up meeting. NetACT managed to obtain external funding from various institutions towards this.

In 2009, a workshop on the curricula of the Biblical subjects will be held. Here, each attending NetACT institution will work on its curriculum. They will receive a general introduction to the theory and art of curriculum development and then present their own curricula. The workshop will address all aspects of teaching the Old and New Testaments. Similar to the 2008 workshop on the HIV/AIDS curricula, we believe that institutions will adjust their current curricula in the light of what they have learned and developed at the workshop. In subsequent years, should adequate funding be available, the other disciplines will have their day.

Much energy and commitment are directed towards the accreditation goal. One of the many fringe benefits of this development is that all staff members will subsequently be involved, will become acquainted with one another, develop networks and, hopefully, decide to work on the production of literature and doing research.

7   IN CONCLUSION: MAJOR CHALLENGES

This presentation guarantees neither a resultant reliable leadership at all levels, nor the necessary social capital to change our continent's future. Metaphorically speaking, Africa is in socio-economic and political exile. Nonetheless, in faith we are working toward rebuilding our societies' broken walls.

We are in Nehemiah's position - we must approach those with power and resources to support us in this endeavour. We must develop the networks and encourage each other to be strong, work hard, and build for the sake of our descendants and the honour of the Lord whom we are serving.

Ultimately, the challenges we face are very real: all our seminaries need facilities for computer training, similar to what JMTUC received via the mediation of the NetACT network. All need scholarships for their young, future leaders. All need income-generating

projects that can help them to have sustainable seminaries. The NetACT house, where most of our young students reside when studying at Stellenbosch, needs extensive renovation and double its accommodation capacity. Furthermore, every curriculum workshop in the different fields of theology needs funding.

Local stewardship must be developed while the resources present in the body of Christ must be networked.

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