



# EXTENDING BEYOND

## Investing locally

A message from Stanley W. Green



**A**round the world, Mennonite Mission Network is committed to identify, invest in, and encourage leaders so that they become agents to discern and implement their church's vision for ministry in

their context. The approach we use has integrity and respects and empowers our partners. Our workers do not manage or lead ministry programs long-term. Instead, from the very outset, we seek to discover Spirit-led leaders and support them to develop their gifts and capacities.

When Anna and Joe Sawatzky responded to God's call to go to South Africa as mission workers, they wanted to make a lasting difference. They worked alongside African church leaders in the Eastern Cape Province at Bethany Bible School. Anna and Joe gave leadership to this Bible school, a Xhosa-speaking ministry for African-Initiated Churches. Bethany opened its doors in 1982, when Mennonites accepted

an invitation from the Transkei Council of Churches.

Reuben Mgodeli, a student at the time, said the Sawatzky family's "lifestyle affected so many people." He mentioned their humility and their love for God's people. "They even ate with us, and danced with us ...(so) we gave them Xhosa names, *Luxolo* [Father of Peace] and *Noxolo* [Mother of Peace]. Those names show that they were people of peace."

Anna and Joe did much more than eat, dance, and identify deeply with the people they came to serve. Thompson Adonis, the late archbishop of the Reformed Church of Christ, commended Anna and Joe for continuing in the footsteps of their predecessors. "Mennonites emphasize all the time that they are here in South Africa not to plant churches, but to equip believers to do their church ministries better, to be good stewards. That's what the Sawatzkys did," Thompson Adonis said. "They encouraged us to serve God in an African way."

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In May 2009, M.N. Madikane and Anna Sawatzky celebrated with other students on the opening night of a session at Bethany Bible School in Mthatha, South Africa. Photo by Ryan Miller.

"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

—Romans 15:5-6



Photo provided by Dan Smith Derksen

The first 31 high-school students received certification in the Peer Mediators program. Oscar Siwali, director of SADRA Conflict Transformation, and Mission Network worker Dan Smith Derksen are in the center of the photo.

## Recognizing the Spirit in others

Jesus calls us to follow the rules of the upside-down kingdom. That means we don't follow the colonial model of mission. We try not to impede God's work through local leaders. Instead, we work alongside them.

Why? Local leaders know the culture. They know the language. They know what their communities need. And most importantly, they also have the gifts of the Spirit.

Mission Network still trains peacemakers, disciples, and church planters around the world. We have 200 partners in 60 countries.

We partner with people like Oscar Siwali. Oscar has a vision for southern Africa. As a Christian, Oscar wants to follow Jesus' example. He wants to train "active peacemakers in an increasingly violent world." He quit his good-paying job and started SADRA Conflict Transformation.

Conflict mediation was nothing new to Oscar. He led peace trainings across Africa before SADRA. But a new organization takes people and funds to get it going.

One day, Oscar shared

his vision with Steve Wiebe-Johnson. Steve is Mission Network's director for Africa. Steve loved the idea. So did some of Oscar's long-time friends. But it was Steve who trusted Oscar enough to act.

"My job is to listen to African partners and their visions," said Steve. "In those stories and visions I sense the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. I seek to find ways that Mennonite Mission Network can walk alongside of these partners to accomplish the vision that God has given them."

So Steve listened and trusted. He offered start-up funds and searched for mission workers.

In 2016, Daniel and Kathryn Smith Derksen answered the call. They moved to South Africa with their sons, Jacob and John-Clair. Kathryn's conflict resolution experience made them a perfect fit. Now, the couple trains students in peer mediation. "Shy girls found their voices," said Kathryn. Bossy students listen to other opinions. Former gang members mediate conflict among their peers. This lays the basis for a more peaceful South Africa.



Oscar Siwali gives input at an ANISA conference.



Photo by Dan Smith Derksen

Gakeema Allie speaks out during peer mediation training, while (clockwise) Chadwin Andrews, Ferlan February, Fareid Jacobs, Kelly Winnaar, and Ryan Caswell practice listening skills.



Photo provided

Taking a break from a peace-making seminar are Lidia Matabaro (Burundi), Witness Zodwa Nxumalo (South Africa), Kathryn Smith Derksen (United States/South Africa), Keke Phooko (Lesotho), Mbambo Noame (Uganda), Amina Ahmed (Sudan) and (in front) Comfort Okom Tom (Nigeria).

It's not coincidence. It's God at work. Through Steve Wiebe-Johnson, who trusted the God-given vision of Oscar. Through Oscar's leadership gifts. Through Daniel and Kathryn's conflict mediation gifts. Through the daily interactions of young South Africans that attended the trainings.

Here's to the visionaries. Here's to the connectors. Here's to training the next generation of peacemakers. May we follow the way of Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela ... and our Lord Jesus Christ. ■

## Meet our workers



**Dan and Kathryn Smith Derksen** and their two children, Jacob and John-Clair, serve in Cape Town, South Africa. They provide logistical support, develop peacebuilding programs, and engage partners in program development with the Southern African Development and Reconstruction Agency (SADRA).

## Meet our partners

**Anabaptist Network in South Africa (ANISA)** is a network of people, churches and organizations that want to embody a radical lifestyle centered around God's reconciling vision for the world; draw on the collective wisdom within the Anabaptist movement; and walk with, support, and grow communities of peace, justice, and reconciliation within South Africa.

**SADRA Conflict Transformation** is a Christian response to social injustice and human need in southern Africa. They provide conflict transformation knowledge and skills through training and research to South African communities.

**Bethany Bible School** offers affordable, nonresidential, indigenous language, biblical education and leadership training, and conducts quarterly Bible conferences in two locations within the former Transkei.

**Grace Community Church** is a ministry that shares the good news and works for economic justice in Philipstown, an area of economic depression.





Joe Sawatzky, Wiseman S. Gumenke (chair of the school committee), Anna Sawatzky and Reuben Mgodeli at Bethany Bible School in Mthatha, South Africa, in May 2009. Mgodeli is now coordinator of Bethany Bible School.

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One of the persons whom Joe and Anna equipped and encouraged in leadership was Reuben Mgodeli. Reuben committed his life to Jesus at the age of 11. Sensing God’s call, he obtained a theology diploma. In 1988, he was ordained as a pastor. In 1997, he established Healing Fountain Church where he was ordained as a bishop.

In 2008, Reuben met Anna and Joe and became a serious student at Bethany Bible School. From them Reuben learned a lot about “how to be a follower of Christ and to be a good steward. My life was completely changed by their teaching.”

Five years later, Joe told Bethany Bible School that they would be leaving South Africa in 2014. Everyone at the school started praying that God would choose another leader for the school. That leader was Reuben.

Joe started to train him and prepare him for leadership. Each week they spent four hours together. Sometimes Anna and Joe traveled an hour to visit Reuben and his spouse, Phumeza, to pray for them and encourage them. Many times the Sawatzkys visited Reuben’s church. When face-to-face meetings weren’t possible, Joe taught Reuben over the telephone.

On Feb. 15, 2014, Reuben was commissioned before the student body to take on the task of Bethany leadership. Reuben motivated the Bethany student body to have

confidence in themselves. “Together, we are capable of taking the school to a higher level,” Reuben said “I encourage them by saying that Bethany belongs to every one of us. I tell them that Bethany’s rise or fall is in their hands. And I encourage everyone ‘to work (and study) with all their heart’ (Nehemiah 4:6). I believe that good leadership gives people confidence in a leader, but a great leader also gives people confidence in themselves. That’s what I want to do.”

At the heart of this story is the realization of the commitment we make to develop and encourage others in their leadership. This enables them to motivate and resource their communities to fulfil their hopes and to follow God’s call.

Thanks for helping people like Anna and Joe, and through them, leaders like Reuben. While the Sawatzkys have returned to the United States, Bethany Bible School has thrived the last four years under Reuben’s leadership. So many people are being impacted by the Bible school that they recently opened a branch in Lusikisiki, South Africa.

Together, we can build the church of Jesus Christ around the world. Through your generous sharing you are helping to equip and encourage leaders for God’s mission. ■

*Stanley W. Green*

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