

Report on UPF Matlala Outreach – 11/12 May 2024

Introduction

This is to report on a UPF local outreach that took place to a Christian community deep in Sekhukhuniland north of Marble Hall. God had introduced us to the location, gave a purpose and brought a wonderful team together with a new focus area for UPF prayers to help build God's kingdom in our nation South Africa.

Location, purpose and team

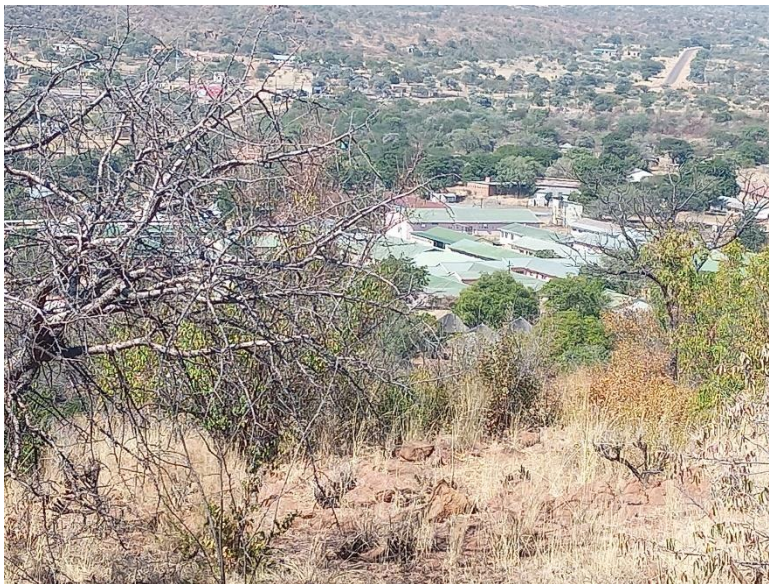
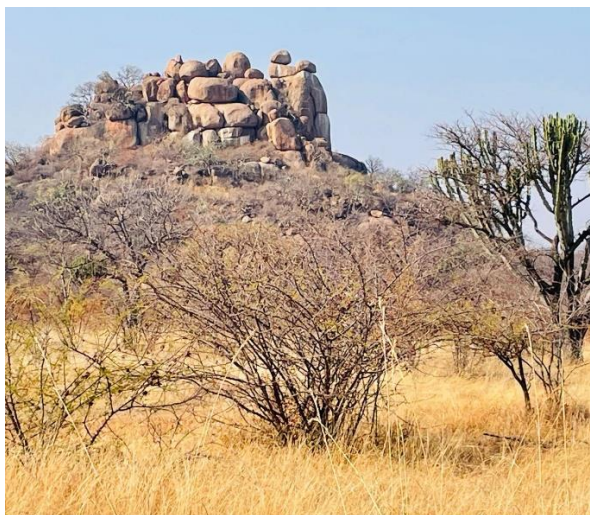
It started with Chris Burger discovering his missionary ancestors, Rev. and Mrs. AP Burger, who had helped to establish the Burger mission station among the Pedi people in Sekhukhuniland. Digging deeper into this blessed past, he found a PhD thesis 'History of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Sekhukhuneland and Church Development 1875 – 1994' and finally found the author and tent-maker missionary at Matlala mission station and hospital, now 89 year old, Oom Gawie Jordaan. Through circumstances of history and development, the rural Church is decaying and in need of a fresh injection of the love and direction from God. Oom Gawie's heart burns for the people of Matlala and his desire to find a local shepherd for the widely-spread Lepelle congregation, of which Matlala is one of its 20 wards, became the prayer focus for this outreach. Miraculously, two Pedi-speakers were added to the team – Florence Matlejoane, who it turned out, was born in one of the neighbouring wards of Matlala and baptized by Oom Gawie, and Eddie Manaka from Tembisa, who had just finished his pastoral training.



Team at the entrance to Matlala hospital
(Chris Burger, Alet Bredenkamp-our team leader, Eberhard Braune, Gawie Jordaan,
Florence Matlejoane, Eddie Manaka and Sagree Naicker)

Preparation and visit

On arrival, Oom Gawie took us to the top of one the typical rocky koppies for a wonderful view, far in all directions, including the Olifants River (Lepelle) in the distance. Altogether, we managed to visit and pray with the local people at three of the 20 wards of Lepelle. It gave us a first understanding and new heart for these forgotten people in our rainbow nation-to be. This was once the Pedi kingdom, the first and dominant monarchy established in the region, stretching from present-day Rustenburg in the west to the Lowveld in the east, and ranging as far south as the Vaal River in the 18th century. Pedi power was undermined during the Mfecane by Nguni invaders from the south-east, particularly the Northern Ndebele under Mzilikazi and the Swazi and later the Boers and the British. In 1885, the Transvaal government only allocated a small territory to the Pedi, known as Geluk Location, with the majority of the people living outside of it. This was to become the homeland of Lebowa in Apartheid times.



The Matlala hospital complex as viewed from the nearby koppie

Prayer is a wonderful preparation for doing challenging things for God. Any UPF outreach has prayer at its heart and in its preparation. Three times we met, prepared and prayed in each other's homes and also brought together 27 intercessors who covered final preparations and the outreach in prayer. Some of the resources that accompanied us on the journey were a booklet of Words and declarations that had come up during the preparation, research on the kingdom history of the area, hymns in the local language, a sheet of useful Sepedi phrases and material for exciting kids afresh for Jesus.



Children at Rakgoadi and Mogaladi will remember some new songs brought by far-away family in Christ

A shepherd for the Lepelle congregation

In the two days back in his community, Oom Gawie brought the word to two congregations, spread encouragement among hospital staff, visited the home of a recovering patient, took holy communion to a blind Gogo and never stopped sharing God's heart for these people with us. We learned of Philippus Mantsena, a young Pedi who had found Christ while being a migrant worker in far-away Tulbagh and back home, in 1875, formed a nucleus for worship and further mission development. In 1889, he contacted Rev. and Mrs AP Burger of Middelburg for Christian support (Chris Burger's ancestors). With the aid of the Zusters-Sending Vereniging (TVSV) of Middelburg, the Mantsenas became totally involved in mission work. Missionaries of the Ned Geref Kerk continued to assist at the outstation at Mothopong. Finally, in 1925, Rev. Abraham Rousseau became the first missionary of the TVSV in Sekhukhuneland. In 1956, Matlala Hospital was established as a mission hospital and Oom Gawie (Rev. GJ Jordaan) became missionary to the area in 1977. Sadly, by this time the medical mission of the Dutch Reformed Church was phased out and its missionaries no longer replaced and the training of evangelists discontinued.



The tent-maker shepherd visiting his flock as part of our outreach

The sermons Oom Gawie had prepared were from Ezekiel 34, with a message of hope to the flock that God himself would soon search for his sheep and look after them. But in the meantime a local shepherd had to be found who lived for his sheep and whom they would trust whole-heartedly. It was wonderful to see how the old missionary used young Moruti Eddie more and more in the services and how the congregation responded to their own. In the prayer together, the desire to have a full-time shepherd again, came out everywhere.



God is Love: He is your Shepherd – getting ready for Communion with Him



The elder generation worshipping God together, while the next generation listens attentively

Where to from here

On the way home on Sunday afternoon we were able to reflect on our experience. One thing was certain – God's wonderful investment into this part of our nation could not be left to decay further. It would become an altar to the enemy and a sign of weakness and hopelessness in the body of Christ, if there is no action now.



God's investment into Sekhukhuniland and specifically in the Lepelle congregation – since 1875

Next year is the centenary of what was started by the Burgers for Sekhukhuniland, and even 150 years after God planted the first missionary seeds in Philippus Mantsena and family.

We will continue to pray for the acknowledgement of God's purpose for this area and a new gratefulness for the people he sent to fulfill his purpose;

We will continue to pray for healing of many wounds done to each other in our history and for reconciliation in the Body;

We will continue to pray that a shepherd of their own will be found for the Lepelle congregation and with it for a fresh blessing on the whole region;

We want to help linking up other parts of the Body, for example in Pretoria, Tembisa, Middelburg and Johannesburg, with these brothers and sisters in Christ;

We want to help returning the Matlala mission station to a place of outreach and peace for those who want to visit with God's love for the people of this area;

We want to make linkages with other parts of the Body in the area, for example ELCSA that has grown out of the work of the Berlin Mission Society in Sekhukhuniland.



Inside the visitors house at Matlala mission station

“Indeed, the kingdom of God will grow on earth as the church creates an alternative society – a society that welcomes people of all races and social classes, that is characterized by love and not polarization, that cares most for its weakest members, that stands for justice and righteousness in a world enamored with selfishness and decadence, a society in which members compete for the privilege of serving one another – this is what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God” (Philip Yancey).

Eddie Manaka

Sagree Naicker

Florence Matlejoane

Chris Burger

Eberhard Braune

Gawie Jordaan

Alet Bredenkamp
24.5.24