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THE KOINONIA CONCEPT

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

From the time Koinonia started as a small group in Pretoria the news has spread rapidly throughout the country. For the first time there was a way and means to do reconciliation rather than just talking it. Many groups of people became interested in the Koinonia concept and so it happened that a number of groups were established countrywide.

After "SACLA 1979" (a religious conference on the present situation in SA), Christians in the Pretoria area felt the need for non-racial monthly gatherings where people could meet others from different racial and cultural groups and together worship God.

This meeting was highly successful, but after a while it was realized that this was not a sufficient method to work effective contact, exposure and reconciliation among each other. A cul de sac was reached. How could we break through the walls of alienation that was so effectively erected through the years?

At this time Dr Nico and Ellen Smith have just left their position at Stellenbosch to move to Pretoria to minister to the Hamelodi N G Kerk in Afrika. He was invited as speaker to this ex-SACLA group and challenged the group to take a step forward. "Why not move away from your static position and enter each others worlds?"

The concept of eating in each others house. Meaning Whites will physically enter townships and Black and Brown people will enter the White world as "equal beings" and not as the system categorizes them, as functional objects.

God granted all persons and parties involved the courage, and soon liberation of many prejudice came.

February 1986 came and Koinonia Southern Africa was officially called into existence as a National movement. It was constituted and an executive board of members was chosen.

The need for a national co-ordinator emerged because of many unsolved problems, promotion work that had to be done and the necessity for administrative direction.

A Swiss based Christian movement working for peace and justice worldwide called "Christian Solidarity International" declared themselves willing to support such a position financially and it became possible to make such an appointment.

The Rev Ivor Jenkins was approached and he accepted the position as from 1 September 1986 as fulltime National Co-ordinator. Since then a National office was opened in Pretoria and activities proceeded with direction.

The postal address is P O Box 1410, Silverton, 0127 RSA.

The daily committee of executives meet monthly to discuss promotion and operational activities. Every weekend Dr Nico and Ivor address Christian Church groups countrywide and in many cities and townships in the Republic, Koinonia groups have been established of which some already have a strong and affective ministry. Other centres are still battling and the need for groups in the rural areas are becoming a major concern. We are taking up this challenge and are convinced that the Lord will open doors as we go along. To help the process we will soon appoint 4 more regional organizers country wide as financial assistance develops. We are also planning a major National Conference early next year. The theme will be Justice and the local churches' involvement and expression of it.

We need to do some "brain storming" concerning our work among schools and university students. The future of South Africa is in their hands and they have to be exposed to one another.

We believe Koinonia has a message of hope and a method of putting reconciliation into practice. Pray for all involved and for the raising of strong leaders throughout South Africa.

A THEOLOGICAL BASIS

Philippians 2:6: " His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are".

The Greek word "koinonia" means community. True community (or communion) is practised when people mutually accept each other, whatever the differences between them may be. This mutual acceptance of each other also includes a portion of "becoming flesh". You become flesh in the presence of another by making place for him/her in your own presence. In the same way Christ, who was equal to God, became flesh in the midst of people by assuming their flesh. He thus came down into the condition of being human. This becoming flesh (coming down into) in the condition (circumstances, situation) of another forms a very important part of being a Christian because to be a Christian means "to be like Christ" to imitate Him in what He did. This "becoming flesh" in imitation of Christ is definitely one of the most difficult aspects of being a Christian. As people (creatures) we are inclined to withdraw ourselves from suffering, discomfort, struggling, and so on. By nature we do not readily wish to be involved in it. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the churches so sadly neglected this dogma of Christ's becoming flesh and its imitation by Christians, his followers. The churches sooner taught that to follow Christ guaranteed peace, harmony, peace of mind, and so on. That is why so many Christians in the world are prosperity people and prosperous, people who take it easy and are concerned about their own comfort and advantage. Hence also the great division between the rich in the Western world, of whom the majority are Christians,

and the poor in the Non-Western world, of whom a great percentage are also already Christians.

In South Africa the Koinonia movement tries to allow White privileged Christians the opportunity to come down into the world of Black less privileged Christians even if it is only to be with them in their environment and homes for a meal. We see this as a concrete possibility for helping to bridge the chasms between Whites and Blacks in South Africa. We thank God that many others in various parts of the country have captured this vision in their hearts and have started putting into practice this exhausting task of "becoming flesh" in each others' homes and world. It is our prayer and desire that Koinonia will appeal to many more. Because it is a difficult path Koinonia will probably not attract huge numbers. But then we are not set on success but on setting up signs of hope in our country.

A SIMPLISTIC ANSWER ?

The question has often been raised, why a meal ? There are a few specific reasons. Firstly because it is an activity that can be practised at "Grass roots level". Every single christian person or church parishner can participate and be involved.

A second motive is that a meal is an activity that does take place in each person's life at least once a day if you are fortunate. It doesn't matter how simple it is or what the contence of it is.

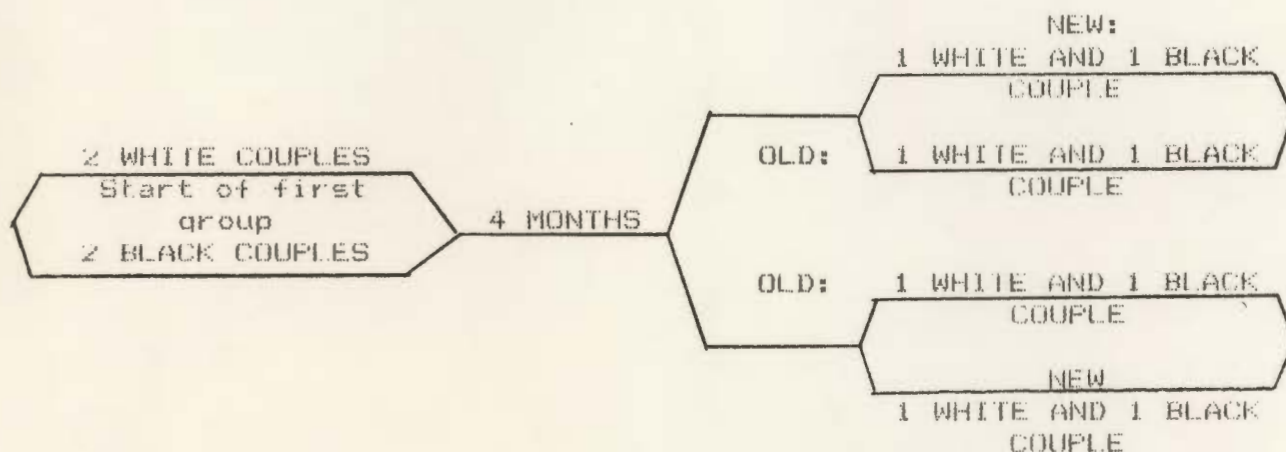
Thirdly and perhaps most important is the historical aspect. Most Black South Africans were never valued high enough, civilized enough or even clean enough to sit around a meal table, or use the plates and utensils of Whites. What a liberation of sin, traditions and prejudice it is for Whites to share not only food, tables and conversations with Black people but also their lifes and fears. What a reconciling experience it is to Blacks to relate on an equal basis with Whites and that in their own territory, yes in our own homes.

A last motivation for choosing a meal as a platform is the spiritual aspect which can be found through the Old and New Testament and which reaches its climax with Christ and His twelve disciples. We believe thier is somthing religious in this act of eating together.

A MODES OPERANDI

Because more than eight people together cannot communicate effectively, small groups are set up consisting of two couples, each from two different population groups (e.g. two Black couples and two White couples). These couples then meet together once a month on a rotational basis to have a meal at the home of one of the couples. This continues until each of the four couples has had a turn to act as host to the others. The host of the month provides the meal (for the other three couples) - the simpler, the better. After four months this group divides into two to

each of which two new couples are added. This may be illustrated as follows:



Consequently in every new grouping there are always two "established" couples, one from each population group. Couples are not necessarily married couples. Singles can also join, and children of families are of course included.

Each local group in a city or township then elect a Chief Organiser, secretary and contact person who meet regularly. A regular Combined Get-together of all participants in meal groups is also essential. The feedback at these regular get-togethers of the experiences of participants is both constructive and stimulating.

We must begin preparing ourselves and as many others as possible for a new South Africa. We can do this by making our meal gatherings more than just a social occasion to make us feel good. No, we have come together and talked to each other and eaten with one another already. We will also have to use our meeting together for constructive discussion about the way(s) in which we as Christians will be able to contribute towards building up a new society, a new South Africa.

No matter what the circumstances of the new situation or what new form of government it may bring, we will have to obtain clarity on how we as Christians (White, Black, Coloured, Indian) can take the initiative and take the lead in building a new society with all the demands it might make on us. For instance, what should we do if a Black majority government were to take over? How will we lead the way? Or a Marxist, Socialist, or Democratic-Socialist form of government? These are all choices staring us unavoidably in the face. We in Koinonia would like to offer some guidance about what various forms of government would entail, how they would affect our personal lives, and what our Christian responsibility will be to continue to give authentic witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ no matter what the form of government to make a Christian contribution to the formation of a new society. May God grant us the wisdom to give credible and trustworthy guidance in this.

FURTHER POSSIBILITIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

It was mainly the Pretoria and Cape Town groups that lead the way in creating new and more activities of change and progress. Annual PICNIC ventures of multi-racial groups to local "whites only" parks had some educational value to all onlookers and passers by and just so effective was the Koinonia multiracial CHOIR's appearances at White universities.

The monthly general meetings have also had its interesting moments specially shortly before the May White election when a Black professor came and share how he as a Christian has to "try and cope" with the fact that he is not allowed to vote for the government of his country.

Involvement in the communities as groups of White and Black people is becoming a prominent feature of some regional groups and the sealing of leaking roofs in a township, erection of a curio- and second hand clothing shop, starting multi-racial preschool facilities, and the providing of a house for Christian students of all races to start a commune, are expressions of this.

Some other activities are the creation of opportunities for individuals and families to "sleep over" in each others homes for weekends, to visit restaurants and theaters together and to actually become permanent friends and truly family in Christ.

One might ask: what is the use of all these minor activities? Perhaps just twofold: to educate blind societies that we can in Christ be one, even in South Africa and secondly to be a sign of hope to those in total despair. Wasnt this EXACTLY what Christ did?

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

We do experience many problems. This, how easy it may sound to do does not happen within our sleep - no, we have a long way to go. Pray that God will give us the strength, motivation and leadership to continue the struggle against the evil of the apartheid system. Pray for Christian wisdom and Christ's commitment from all fifteen groups country wide to the cause of bringing justice, peace and reconciliation to our country South Africa.

Should you wish to make a financial contribution to the organisation, kindly forward it to the above mentioned address, cheques to be made out to KOINONIA SOUTHERN AFRICA or pay it into our bank account directly: Nedbank Silverton Account number 1644 255111, P O Box 912-558, Silverton 0127.

Further additional information with regard to our work may be obtained on request.

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30 - GEOFF PEGRAM

FEBRUARY

MARCH

02 - TERTIA SMIT
10 - FRAN LEDERLE
10 - PEGGY TWALA
23 - BARRY POPPLETON

APRIL

11 - DR NICO SMITH

MAY

02 - RAGS POPPLETON
11 - TEMBA MDLALO

JUNE

JULY

01 - ATTIE LAWRENCE
09 - FRANCOIS DU TOIT
17 - BEN KOTZE

AUGUST

10 - ROBIN BRIGGS
11 - GUGU NGQULUNGA
12 - VISHNU APPALASAMY

SEPTEMBER

09 - DOROTHY APPALASAMY
11 - DAVID STEENKAMP
18 - LOUIS FOURIE
19 - JOSEPH LEHOBYE
21 - DANIEL RAMOKGADI
22 - ROSS VAN VUUREN
23 - BECKY GINSBERG

OCTOBER

11 - ALICE COETZEE

NOVEMBER

13 - JEANNE SMUTS
14 - ANDREW JANTJIES
15 - IVOR JENKINS
15 - VICTOR HONEY

DECEMBER