

Apostolic Faith Mission. Testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, East London, 19 November 1999. [disclaimer](#)

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PASTOR BURGER: Thank you Chairperson. On my left-hand side, is Pastor Frank Chikane who is the Deputy President of the church, Pastor George Mahlobo on my right-hand side who is the General Secretary, Pastor Peter de Wilt who is the General Treasurer and then also felt it wise to bring with us two leaders of our church before our unification, that played an important leadership role in ...**[End of tape 3A - no follow-on sound]**

CHAIRPERSON: ...[no sound] all six of you might in fact speak?

PASTOR BURGER: Yes.

APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION OF SOUTH AFRICA: (sworn states)

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you, we are now entirely in your hands but you will remember the sort of structure, it's a total of 30 minutes with maybe 20 or so minutes given to your corporate submission and 10 minutes or so for questioning, thank you.

PASTOR BURGER: Thank you Archbishop. I have requested a video TV monitor and I hope that it will be brought before I've completed my submission. I will do the submission and then I would like the delegates with me to respond to any questions that may come.

Commissioners, it is in all humility that we are appearing before of you today as the reunited - and I want to say reunited Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. The AFM was founded at the turn of the century by American Missionary, John G Lake, the AFM then was one. Today we consist of 1.200 congregations, 1.800 pastors and 650.000 members apart from adherence.

We are thankful for this forum, we know it is not perfect but then the AFM also is not perfect. The TRC is the only forum with some credibility and acceptability available to us in which we can publicly apologise to all those who had been hurt by the travesties of the past. It is the most effective way available to us which we can use to offer help and healing to those who had committed unacceptable, often even gruesome deeds against fellow South Africans.

And that offer goes for people on all sides of the line. There are few better ways than this rostrum, from which the AFM can reach all those falling in all these categories, that is why we are thankful for the TRC. As we have said earlier, we were one when the AFM was founded but as time moved on and this fair country became increasingly besotted by political and racial ideology, placing impediments on multi-

racial worship, we were ...[indistinct] asunder and ended up being four churches, Indian, Black, White and Coloured.

Our isolation never dampened the yearning to become one again and by the latter part of the freedom struggle, we were close to unity. By the grace of God, at Easter 1996, the AFM was able to celebrate it's new unity during a nationally televised service at Centurion Park. This made us the first church denomination to unify since the advent of our democracy.

There at Centurion Park spontaneously and obedience to God, I on behalf of the former White AFM and Pastor Frank Chikane on behalf of the former composite division - that was the Black, Indian, Coloured section, in public embraced each other and sought forgiveness and transgression for transgressions committed by the AFM churches and members against each other during the years of separation. God in his great mercy, helped us to grant each other pardon.

I've brought along a short edited video recording of this act and I trust that it will be possible to just show it to you before the end of our submission.

CHAIRPERSON: Have you made ...[intervention]

PASTOR BURGER: I've made arrangements, it's in the process.

CHAIRPERSON: It's going to happen, all right.

PASTOR BURGER: Thank you.

What is evident and what was evident on that day - because of the spontaneous character of the reconciliation that took place, was that we didn't only reach structural unity but much more than that. I can honestly say that something at the very heart of our church changed. We would not claim that we had reached absolute spiritual cohesion at that point, such a claim would be arrogant. What we can state unequivocally is that our unity and bonding are growing steadfastly. We can state equally unequivocally that we are committed and determined to the attainment of total unity in all senses of the word.

Commissioners, we can today in all humility state that our original submission to you is a sign of how the bonds in the AFM family are cementing. It is our humble suggestion that our submission is a rather unique document. It is to the best of our knowledge the only church submission to you in which members of all colours of this rainbow nation accept collective responsibility for the past.

Not so long ago we would have regarded someone suggesting that such a thing could happen in our church, a mad hatter. We thank God for letting truth, wisdom and consensus prevail. Let me be unambiguously honest and say that all our members did not agree with unity, some do not agree with our appearance here today. We have had

resignations, we have had poisoned mail, we have been labelled: "sell-outs", thus it must be clear to you that we have paid a price for our convictions.

We proclaim fearlessly that we are doing what we are doing today - we believe, is in line with the word of God and have no doubt that the future will prove us correct. We took a look at ourselves and found that in all our ranks we had members who had committed transgressions. For instance, the State being the major employer during the apartheid years, many of our members worked for it. Whichever way we may look at it, we helped to keep the system going and thereby prolonged the hurt of apartheid.

In the more gruesome arena people were slain and injured on both sides of the line, often people died without the approval of the previous government or the struggle movements. There came days when people on all sides became severely frustrated and vented their anger unilaterally. There were traitors on all sides, some did it for money - life was hard, at times hunger pains and cold put out minds the virtues of morality and ethics.

Others did it because they thought they were doing the nation and God a service, fighting what they had been indoctrinated to believe was ungodly. One of the people here with me today was tortured on a Sunday morning by a fellow AFM member who then went off to church, it is sickening but true. But one needs to look at the days we were living in, be it far from me to push blame recklessly onto another establishment. The fact is, that the ordinary man in the street was dependent on the media for information.

The State machinery controlled the print and the electronic media by way of legislation or direct holding, as was the case of the SABC. When Pastor Chikane and I were born, much of this already was the case. So on the one side, Whites were steadily being indoctrinated through liberal doses of contorted and distorted information, while people of colour were increasingly being incensed.

Should we not have been more critical of what we were told, should we not have challenged and resisted more? The questions are many and the answer to all of them is: "Yes, we all failed terribly". However, the fact is that by the time most of us were born, the National Party already was in power. I was born and reared in an environment in which one did no challenge - I'm stating this as a fact, I'm not using it in mitigation.

But Commissioners, this brings me to what we consider the cardinal reason for the AFM delegation being here today. We have admitted the errors of our ways, we have apologised collectively and individually to each other. We have apologised to those beyond the reach of the AFM which we might have caused harm to. We now are faced by the enormous task of getting to grips with questions such as reconciliation, healing, bridge building, poverty, joblessness, creating a mentality of challenging government and keeping an eye on those ruling over us, in a bid to prevent the mistakes and sins of yesteryear being repeated.

Questions, such as investment, education and the most prickly of pears, recompense. Healing alone is multi-ferrous in nature. There is the question of healing needed by those who suffered, the demands of healing needed by those who dispense suffering. The posser of healing of those bereaved by the...[indistinct] system.

The problem of healing those hardened and turned inhumane by frustration and indoctrination. The liberating healing of those embittered because their land and belongings have been seized. There is the effort needed in healing those who cannot come to grips with the past, of those baffled by what is now happening and of those without any framework of reference of yesterday and less of tomorrow. And there is healing attainable only through reparation, be it spiritual, physical or financial.

The finest remedy to bring about all these cures remains the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a united church, we believe we are well placed and consider it our duty at the very least, to do all within the reach of our cable tow to bring about healing. We are today committed to a continuous programme of communications and interfaction, interfacing with the larger of South African society.

Communications have been severely - and to our detriment, overlooked by our church and we are today taking expert opinion on this matter. In line with this, we are actively promoting efforts aimed at helping our members of different colour groups to get to know each other. As this drive of getting to know brothers and sisters across colour lines gains momentum, we are seeing increasing signs of acceptance.

Acceptance in turn is helping us to get to know the history of the AFM better. It is a necessity that the true history of the AFM be written and taught to our members. We believe today that the better a people knows it's history, the more unlikely it is that it will again in future fall into the same pitfalls of the past.

We are finding that as we give ...[indistinct] to this side of our effort, our people are developing increasing empathy and sympathy with those who suffered and with those who caused the suffering. Some suffered because of what they believed to be the right things to do, others are today suffering because of guilt of what they had done to those. In this atmosphere of growing understanding, we are prompting people to venture into areas that had been alien to them before - call it bridge building if you wish.

And it is at this point where we find the real truth emerging. This well nigh jealous pursuit of truth we regard as the single most important ingredient of the elixir of healing, this is hard work but we want to assure you that we are determined to reach our goal. It is in line with this that we are in the process of re-evaluating our training programmes and taking a fresh look at our educational institutions.

We believe we need to give our pastors a clear picture of what we are doing and why, they are the leaders and can give it through to the congregations and societies they operate in. Wee are trying our hardest to make the church more accessible to all. We

are propounding our belief that the idea of our buildings for instance being used only on Sundays for worshipping, should be ended.

A church serves its community, be it a soup kitchen, a crèche or school and in this way the people will feel more at home and it will help to spread the gospel to them. In this way also, our pastors will get a better insight into the grass roots needs of their society and can call on the rest of the church to help in the areas where help is most needed.

Put together, all these efforts are helping to inculcate a spirit of sharing. As an example, it has becoming increasingly unacceptable in the AFM to have a congregation with a hefty bank balance, while only a kilometre away from there is a church in which the pastor does not know where the next meal will come from. The AFM's social welfare department is working fullsteam - in addition to its other activities, on the question of empowerment and even job creation.

We have self-help schemes but are spending more on schemes that will help people help themselves. Some of our congregations have started Kibbutz-like operations where jobless people and down and outs are taught skills they could apply to earn a living on return to society. We have drug rehabilitation centres, orphanages, old age homes and other schemes.

Onto another avenue, we believe that much of what had gone askew in the past was the result of churches not having observed the fine dividing line between church and State. Many believers were adamant for instance, that the terrain of politics was not for christians and yet the church - the one institution which no government can destroy, meekly followed.

To combat this, we are today encouraging our people to take part in their society, in politics, in what is going on around them. With the aid of expert communications opinion we now employ, we have come to the belief or be it belatedly, that the church had in the past been on tow often because it was ill informed. Today we have heeded communications advice that the more our people are involved in their own environments, the better they will be informed.

Through spreading that information to their fellow christians, congregations and congregants, we be able to take better decisions - decisions taking only after multi-inputs. We have no fear of our people going astray, provided they remain true to their christian beliefs and in this way they will be able to develop higher moral and ethical values. A spin-off of this we believe, will help to combat evils such as the current crime waves spearheaded by violence and dishonesty.

If our prayers are fulfilled, we believe the more peaceable country that will result from this will attract investment which in turn will lead to job creation and a more stable society. We have to admit that we in the past neglected our duty of ministering to

those in high office, this led to them ministering their ideology to us and we all know the consequences.

We are confident that as more and more of our people take their rightful place in society - even government, doors will be increasingly open for us to do our spiritual duty in promoting good and Godly government into inspiring those who watch over us, to display qualities that will turn this world into a better place for all.

Whereas before the AFM was blinded to so many aspects we today know we should have been critical of. As we interface with society, as we teach our people and above all, as we make social justice and upliftment pillars in our strategy, the AFM today is becoming a force for healing and nation building.

I thank you Commissioners, for hearing us today and I pray that God will bless you and your work, may he guide your noble endeavours and in drawing up your report which we are confident will benefit our entire beloved nation. If it's possible now Mr Chairperson, I would love to have that video ...[intervention]

CHAIRPERSON: Yes, I thank you very much. I don't know, maybe you should ...[indistinct] we will go and sit over there and then more people will be able to see.

#### SHOWING OF VIDEO:

PASTOR BURGER: "...[inaudible] we can really be reconciled with each other. What happens here today and that happened during this week in the Apostolic Faith Mission, is a clear testimony that the vertical dimension of reconciliation also spilt over in our hearts and therefore we are able. And I want to say this today publicly, that the AFM has reached more than a structural unity, I believe God has melted our hearts together and that we become one reconciled.

In fact, being reconciled with God compels us to be reconciled with one another. I have something on my heart that I want to do and that is not on the programme and I say honestly I feel this is from God. I want to ask Father Frank Chikane just to come and stand with me.

Pastor Frank, - and I want to address especially my brothers and sisters from the previous composite division of the Apostolic Faith Mission, I have never before - as in the last week or two, really realised how much you've suffered and how much pain and frustration and despair you experienced in decades of separation.

I've listened to you my brother Frank, the last week a number of times in discussions not only about what you yourself have suffered, not only physically but spiritually and emotionally because of the vision in our church. And I stand this morning humbled before my brothers and sisters and I acknowledge today that the division and separation in the Apostolic Faith Mission for decades - although it probably was not an evil invention of some preacher, I acknowledge that we were children and prisoners of our time.

I acknowledge that we for years, did not question brothers and sisters being separated because their skins were not white. I acknowledge it this morning and this morning brother Frank - you were the previous leader of the composite division, I was the leader of the White section and as the representative of the composite division, I do confess this morning before you the unbearable hardships that we caused our brothers and sisters.

I confess that without us knowing that we actually sinned for many years, we sinned against the body of Jesus Christ by separating you and often at times, handled you with - conducted our work as if you were inferior mission objects.

And I ask this morning Frank - on behalf of those gone before and even those today and I know it has been done in isolated cases in the past, I do it publicly today, I ask you to forgive us for all the pain that we caused you"

FATHER CHIKANE: "Well, I would like to take this opportunity of thanking our brother, Pastor Burger - I would like to take this opportunity of saying thank you to my brother, Pastor Burger for what he has done today. There are many people who have been looking forward to this happening in our midst and this shows that the unity we have come to is true unity. And I would like to assure you this day, that we have forgiven one another, may God bless you and be with you.

I must also say that the hurt that we have carried for many years - as I said in the former Black church, has given us an occasion as well to sin in our anger and I want to thank our brothers and sisters who have now come together with us so that we do not ever sin against one another

again. From now on we're going to walk together and learn to do it together and be ambassadors of the Lord in this world, may God bless you".

PASTOR BURGER: Thank you brother Chairperson.

CHAIRPERSON: I am not sure that we want to ask questions, we may be wanting to ask questions but I sometimes think that - as has often happened or not often but on a number of occasions has happened in our hearings, we realise that we are in the presence of something that is special, where we really ought to be taking off our shoes because we are walking or standing on holy ground.

God is good, God is good beyond our deserving and we give thanks for what we have seen as having happened. We read about it but now we have participated a little bit in it in a way that would not have come across in the reports that we maybe read in newspapers or maybe saw a snippet on television.

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