

**Literacy practices of the African Gospel Church members in the KwaMashu  
Circuit, Durban: A case study**

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of**

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents (Elphas and Busisiwe), who are both deceased, for their solid teachings and gift of education they gave to me, to my dearest wife, Ntomb' mpela, for motivation and support and to our children, Sibusiso, Sithandiwe and Yenziwe, for being my inspiration, lastly and importantly, to God Almighty for giving me strength and sustenance.

## **ABSTRACT**

This is an exploratory qualitative study which is an in-depth investigation into the literacy practices of the congregants of the KwaMashu African Gospel Church circuit (Durban).

The study focuses on the practices, uses and values that the congregants attach to literacy.

The contribution of this study can be summarised by the following three points:

- 1). The church is a potential domain or institution that can contribute to the eradication of illiteracy and promotion of literacy skills.
- 2). Literacy seems to be integral in all spheres of life.
- 3). Literacy is situational or contextual; therefore, formal literacy cannot always be generalized.

There are four critical questions posed by the study:

- 1). What are the literacy practices that the church members engage in?
- 2). What are the literacy events occurring or identified in the church?
- 3). How do church members value literacy?
- 4). How do non-literate church members cope with the literacy demands of church literacy practices?

The study aimed at exploring how literacy is used and valued by the members of this church.

The data was collected and analysed qualitatively from three categories of participants (leadership, non-literate and literate congregants) who are its members.

The study revealed that literacy is used and valued by the congregants. It further revealed that in the literacy events that were studied congregants had a tendency to use orality and literacy mediators. Although these appeared to be coping means for non-literate members, the study revealed that even the literate members sometimes made use of literacy mediators and orality.

The study concludes that despite the culture of Pentecostalism (reliance on guidance by Holy Spirit and tendency towards oral practice of religious activities), literacy appears to be integral to and irreplaceable in this church.

## DECLARATION OF OWN WORK

I, Leonard Dumisani Dlamini, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work, and has not been submitted previously for any degree at any university.

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Date

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Elda Lyster  
Supervisor

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# ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



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Dear Mr. Dlamini

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0030/09M**

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been approved for the following project:

*"Literacy practices of African Gospel Church Members"*

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Yours faithfully

  
.....  
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cc. Supervisor (Dr. E Lyster)  
cc. M. D Buchler



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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AGC: African Gospel Church

NLS: New Literacy studies

FET: Further Education and Training

ETC: Evangelical Training Course

M ED: Masters of Education

TBN: Trinity Broadcasting Network

UBI: Union Bible Institute

UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1. Background**

The African Gospel Church (AGC) is a Pentecostal church which, among other things, stresses repentance, confession of sins, baptism (immersion in deep flowing waters) and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As one of the denominations that fall under the Christian religion, the African Gospel Church believes in the Trinity of God (God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). The role played by the Holy Spirit in this church is very crucial as He (Holy Spirit) is regarded as the teacher.

The congregants of the African Gospel Church are known for their dogmatic beliefs and fervent faith which are often assumed to be the central part of their commitment to Christianity. However, the history of the relationship between Christianity and literacy reveals that literacy is an important component of church activities because of a reliance on printed texts like the Bible and hymnbooks as well as recording of valuable information. Understanding the role played by literacy in this church will be crucial for this study.

The KwaMashu African Gospel Church circuit is the setting that was chosen for this research study where the uses of literacy by the congregants of this church are investigated. The study is qualitative in nature in the sense that it is based on the interpretations of behaviours and responses of the participants. As I am a full-time member of this church, some of the background information is based on my personal experience and knowledge.

## **2. Rationale for the study**

The rationale for the study is informed by my experiences and observations that I have made as a member of the African Gospel Church regarding education and literacy. The manner in which issues of literacy and education are handled in the AGC has always created a conflict in my mind because it is a Christian religion and Christianity has a history of a strong relationship with literacy and education (in particular, literacy). However, this church does not have any literacy programs in place and does not appear to be doing anything to promote literacy among its members. This has concerned me for many years and has ultimately made

me develop an interest in this study. The selection of KwaMashu Circuit was due to the fact that it is one of the oldest circuits of the African Gospel Church and is in a cosmopolitan area with people of different backgrounds.

For religions like Christianity in particular, literacy is one of the most important vehicles that can be used by the church to reach out to its members and the world in terms of conveying its message (Openjuru and Lyster, 2007). On the basis of the foregoing argument, it appears to me that it would be very difficult for Christian churches to do without literacy because they (Christian churches) mostly interact with printed texts like Bibles when conveying the Christian message. The interaction with text (either printed or handwritten) indicates that some forms of literacy are needed. Finding out about those forms of literacy and the people who use them was important to me especially in a denomination like the African Gospel Church where issues of literacy are not discussed very often.

I have been a member of this church for more than 20 years and had the privilege of being appointed to leadership positions, like Youth Leader (at both circuit and district levels), Circuit Secretary, Preacher and Evangelist. I have seen that literacy in particular, is integral in almost all church activities but does not appear to be receiving the attention it deserves. This has certainly instilled an interest in me to look closely at literacy in particular with the intention of finding out if it has any value to the members of this church and also to investigate how they use it. My positionality is fully discussed in the methodology Chapter.

The absence of literacy education programs in the church suggests that either all members of the church are literate or that literacy in this church is not particularly valued. For me, there was only one way to investigate this assumption and that was to investigate the literacy Gpractices of the congregants of this church.

In my experience as a member of this church I have found that the congregants, especially the older generation, have adopted a culture of silence regarding issues of literacy. (Although they acknowledge its importance through actions they do not talk or engage in any discussion or planning about it). This silence which, according to some members of this church, has been evident for many years was another reason that made me develop an interest in doing this study.

Literacy and education were, and are still regarded by some “conservative congregants” (as I choose to call them) as not having any relationship with faith. These conservative congregants are mostly the non-literate elders of the church who tend to regard education as a worldly thing that detracts believers from their faith in God. They tend to have a conviction that the Holy Spirit teaches and reminds God’s people what they ought to know. This dogmatic belief, as I choose to call it, exalts the possession of Christian faith and baptism by the Holy Spirit as the answer or solution to all the needs of the congregants and tends to render education and literacy irrelevant. This view is challenged by the more contemporary generation and this gap has caused tensions in the church. It was therefore important for me to find out what the literacy practices of the congregants of the church are.

According to my own experiences as a member of this church, the tensions that exist between these two groups (the conservatives and the contemporaries), are among other things, caused by the fact that the conservatives believe that being literate and educated does not make one a better Christian, but instead makes one believe in oneself and one’s abilities and natural intelligence. They claim that this displaces God’s power and wisdom. On the other hand, the contemporary group (which consists of the youth and educated members) believes that literacy and education do not clash with the presence of the Holy Spirit but instead work harmoniously together to produce a fully-fledged Christian. This tension has aroused interest in me to find out more about the place that literacy has and the role it plays in this church.

Gee (1996), talks about different domains of literacy such as church literacy, home literacy and school literacy. The domain of church literacy is relevant for this study. The fact that this author regards these domains as different implies that they result in different kinds of literacies as they occur in different environments. Pentecostal churches are known for being different from traditional Christian churches in terms of their attitudes regarding literacy and education and the way in which services are conducted. Unlike traditional churches, Pentecostal churches often have the tendency to be obsessed with matters of the Holy Spirit. This is a cause for them to rely more on orality (for example when speaking in tongues) which sometimes makes members pass unfounded judgments that literacy has no place or value in the Pentecostal churches. This difference between orality and literacy in the church was also another reason that motivated me to do this study.

### **3. Focus of study**

In this study I tried not to focus on general issues related to literacy since this is a wide subject that has been debated by many theorists. According to Lyster (1992, p. 8), literacy is a contested concept. I also tried not to allow myself to be overwhelmed by theological issues and analysis, since the study is specifically dealing with literacy practices, not about general religious practices and theological issues. The study specifically focused on literacy practices that members of this church engage in as well as their uses and values. The focus of the study is better explained by the following key research questions:

- What are the literacy practices that church members engage in?
- How do non-literate church members cope with the literacy demands of church literacy practices?
- What are the literacy events occurring or identified in the church?
- How do church members value literacy?

In other words, the focus here is on what the congregants of the African Gospel Church at KwaMashu do during their church activities that could be interpreted as literacy practices. The second area of interest is: “What value do these literacy practices have?”

### **4. Contribution of study**

It appears that not much research has been done on literacy practices in religious institutions like churches. Openjuru and Lyster (2007, p. 97) state:

Unlike literacy practices in other significant areas such as education and commerce, religious literacy practices are often overlooked because they do not relate directly to national development concerns and can also be negatively associated with colonialism and evangelism.

A definition of religious literacy practices is given in Chapter 2 under the heading “Literacy and religion”. This research study did not just focus on religious literacy in general but was

specifically intended to study literacy as used in the Pentecostal churches, which the African Gospel Church forms part of.

A study of this nature (literacy practices) of this particular church has never to my knowledge been done before and to me it is putting this church into the world of research. Further research studies may develop from this one. Lastly, the findings of this study have the potential to influence attitudes and perceptions regarding the issue of literacy and education of both contemporary and conservative members of the church.

## **5. Theoretical framework**

This research is framed by the interpretive paradigm since it is studying the behaviour, interaction, practices, attitudes and perceptions of human beings in a particular setting or context, which in this case is the church. According to Maree (2007, p. 289), the interpretive paradigm is qualitative in nature and strives to comprehend how individuals in everyday settings construct meaning and explain events of their worlds. The use of this approach allowed me an opportunity to interact closely with the participants and this helped me to gain insight and understanding of what the congregants of the African Gospel Church conceive of literacy and more specifically, their uses of literacy.

It is crucial to mention at this point that the study is mainly informed by Street's theory of "New Literacy Studies". This theory represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on the acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches but on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice (Street, 2003). This new approach to literacy (as Street would contend), de-emphasizes the old tradition which regards literacy as being neutral and universal in nature and instead offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another.

This theory makes a thorough distinction between autonomous and ideological models of literacy and Street is the main writer who has strongly argued about these two models of literacy. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 (Literature review). Street (2003), defines the autonomous model (which he criticizes), as a universal approach which regards literacy as a neutral technical skill, the acquisition of which, will lead to development. According to Street, the autonomous model stresses the importance of learning to read and

write as a key to other developmental programs as well as social and cognitive practices (universal skill). With the autonomous model, the assumption is that the skills of writing and reading are indispensable and with them one can manipulate any given situation. It is this ideology which recognizes formal education above all others.

Street's contribution helps in understanding the reason why some people find it difficult to separate literacy from schooling. Even though they might be literate (able to read and write), unless they were to school, they regard themselves as illiterate. It also focuses attention on the faulty assumption that literacy will automatically result in knowledge, creativity and critical mindedness and the implication that being illiterate means that one is stupid.

Street defines the ideological model on the other hand, as a more culturally sensitive view of literacy which regards literacy as a social practice. In other words, literacy practices carry social values of people since they are socially constructed. The main distinction between these two models is that the ideological model sees literacy practices as bearing particular social values; hence they are not transferable or generalized as would be the case with the autonomous model which regards literacy as a neutral and universal skill that is transferable to other social and cognitive contexts. The conceptual framework that underpins this study is the ideological approach to literacy since the focus is on the uses of literacy or the literacy practices of the congregants in the church context. The assumption is that in a specific church context, there is a particular kind of literacy that is practiced in a particular way.

Other than Street, there are scholars like Gee (1996), Barton (1994) and Cope and Kalantzis (2000), who have also expanded the field of New Literacy Studies by developing new fruitful concepts such as literacy ecologies, discourses and multi-literacies (Kim, 2003). This has brought about change in the narrow understanding of literacy thus allowing a broader and new understanding (ideological approach).

It is not possible for one to subscribe to both models (ideological and autonomous), as the two are not compatible. Making a choice will depend on one's values and beliefs which determine one's stance. For the sake of this study, the ideological model appeared to be the most relevant model since it allows for the study of individuals' literacy practices in context. The adoption of the ideological model implies that literacy is not regarded here as a single or

universal skill but as contextual – hence the focus of this study which looks into specific literacy practices of the African Gospel Church congregants. According to Street’s conception of the ideological model, literacy is contextual and is socially created by people living together and cherishing the same values which ultimately form their own culture or way of doing things. This implies that literacy need not be formulated or designed for people but needs to be socially created by the people living in a particular context or environment. For example, if the environment is characterized by the use of computers, people working or living there, have to be computer literate or develop other coping means in order to participate and not become excluded. The ideological model links literacy to people’s values, needs and culture and I think this is a critical area where literacy finds meaning.

The focus of this study is on what the congregants do with literacy, which is their literacy practice as members of this church. Inherent in these literacy practices are attitudes, and perceptions of the congregants. These were also studied in order to find out how they impact on the values and beliefs which are part of the church culture which is currently challenged by change that is brought by transformation affecting the whole world.

## **6. Definition of terms**

Some of the terms used in the study may be confusing; therefore a brief explanation of such terms may be necessary.

- **African Gospel Church:** This is a Pentecostal church which is a Christian denomination. Although it is open to all racial groups it is predominantly African. It is found in most of the South African provinces and has recently begun to extend to countries like Mozambique and Zimbabwe.
- **Pentecostal Churches:** This is a group of Christian denominations which believe in and stress the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues.
- **Congregants:** The members of a particular church who worship together although they may not always physically worship together.
- **Literate congregants:** Those members of the church who are able to read, write and count (in any language) without any difficulty or getting assistance from others.
- **Non-literate congregants:** Those members of the church, who are not able to read, write and count on their own and mostly need assistance of other literate people.

## **7. Structure of the study**

The study is divided into five chapters which are as follows:

### **Chapter 1:**

This is an introductory chapter which presents an orientation to the study as seen in the foregoing sub-topics. The chapter briefly discusses the background and character of the African Gospel Church, rationale and focus of the study, contribution of the study, theoretical framework and definition of terms.

The rationale for the study is presented including the motive for undertaking the study. This is followed by the focus of the study which helped me understand the core of the study and not get confused by peripheral issues that may be brought in for clarification purposes. This was also to help me to stay focused on the main subject that the research questions intended to probe.

The contribution of the study is discussed to help clarify the need and value of the study. The theoretical framework is also introduced in the introduction as it is the lens through which the researcher looks when undertaking the research study. The chapter concludes by giving definitions of key terms such as those used in the church context which might bear different meanings when used in other contexts as well as other terms which are selected so that they do not convey derogatory or unintended interpretations (for example, non-literate instead of illiterate).

### **Chapter 2:**

This is the presentation of the literature review and begins with the definition of the term “literacy”. The theory of New Literacy Studies, which is the basis of this study because it describes literacy as contextual rather than general, is discussed.

I look into the relationship that exists or has existed between literacy and religion since the literacy studied here will be rooted in the church context. This study presents literacy and religion as key terms which need to be discussed and understood. Preceding this is the issue of literacy practices, which simply means what people do with literacy. I found it important to research and discuss church literacy practices because it helped me understand the literacy

practices of the African Gospel Church (KwaMashu circuit) which is my unit of analysis in this study. The church literacy practices that are presented and discussed here involve a variety of literacy practices and they come in different formats. Finally, the relationship between literacy and language is also discussed.

### **Chapter 3:**

This chapter discusses the research design which includes my reasons for choosing a case study. The general information about case studies and my choice and views on the case study I have chosen are discussed here. The sampling strategy which includes sample size and sampling method used are also discussed and this is followed by methodology which includes sources of data, and methods of data collection, research instruments and analysis of data. This chapter concludes by discussing ethical procedures observed and the limitations of the study.

### **Chapter 4:**

This chapter presents the findings and analysis. It is the theme of the research study where data collected is organized into broad categories based on common themes selected from information provided by different methods used. The presentation of findings and analysis of data is done simultaneously in this chapter.

### **Chapter 5:**

This is the conclusion of the study where I try to recap each chapter as well as attempt to answer the research questions posed in the introduction. This chapter concludes by highlighting the key findings of the study and suggesting recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Introduction

The concept of literacy is ambiguous and shrouded with many interpretations. This causes it to be understood at the one end of the pendulum as having a very functional mechanical definition whereas on the other hand it encompasses both a functional as well as a critically empowering definition. This implies that it is not yet fully understood or, more likely, that there is no agreement about its meaning (Perumal, 2004). For this reason it was important for me to begin this chapter by defining the concept of literacy before discussing the issue of literacy practices which is the core and focus of this study. The broad understanding of literacy made it possible for me to use the concept of literacy practices relevantly.

Papen (2005, p. 45) states:

The temptation to understand and define literacy simply in terms of the ability to read and write, as well as defining varying levels of these literacy skills, emanates from the fact that in our contemporary societies, schools, further education colleges and institutions of higher education have the authority to define what literacy is.

The common practice is that governments through these institutions set standards for what counts as appropriate literacy skills (reading, writing, spelling, dictation, to mention a few). According to Street and Street (1991), the afore-mentioned literacy skills are examples of what are called dominant literacy practices.

A term related to literacy that I found worth looking at here was “practice”. Papen (2005, p. 25), again, describes this term as follows:

The term practice can be used in various ways. In everyday use, we might speak about practice as something you do on a regular basis, to either develop or maintain skill, as in the practicing of the piano.

Another version that this writer gives is that of contrasting practice with theory which is very common in the academic as well as non-academic areas. Two examples are given here, one of which is practice undertaken by professional bodies like medicine, education and law

professions. An example of practice in non-academic areas is that of learning for a driver's license where one needs to pass a theory as well as a practical test. For the purposes of this research study, the term "literacy practice" is understood as a social practice that is embedded in a specific context. This would mean that the literacy practices of the African Gospel Church congregants which are the focus of this study are regarded as an example of social practices embedded in the church context.

Papen (2005, p. 30), argues that there are two important things to bear in mind about social practices. Firstly, it must be noted that there is something stable or repeated in any social practice and this implies that within social practices there are recurring patterns of behaviour that are culturally recognizable (an example of a practice of classroom teaching in Britain which follows a particular conventions and rules, is given here). However, Papen does acknowledge that these practices are never completely fixed, as those who engage with them have the potential to transform them.

The second important thing that Papen mentions about social practices is that they involve people making meaning and communicating it by using language and other semiotic means. The latter will be discussed under a separate sub-topic.

The issues that are found to be most crucial in providing understanding as well as locating important areas of the study are discussed below. Such issues referred to here can help to provide essential information to the critical questions posed in Chapter one and they are addressed under the following topics:

- Definition of literacy
- New Literacy Studies' view (NLS)
- Literacy practices
- Literacy mediators
- Literacy and religion
- Language and literacy.

## **2. Definition of literacy**

Many definitions are given for literacy but it is not the purpose of this study to explore the different definitions of this term. For the purposes of introducing the term, since it is the key to the whole study, I will briefly discuss a few definitions by different writers. Papen (2005, p.45), states:

Literacy, which is the integral term used in this research study, is better understood when talking about it as a social practice. It is in this instance that it is seen as carrying different degrees of authority.

This means that the perception of literacy as only involving reading and writing is automatically excluded here.

Different theorists agree that literacy is a controversial term that can have different meanings to different people. The general consensus is that literacy involves the ability to read and write. However, there is still a great debate about it (Lyster, 1992, p. 8). According to Harris and Hodges (1995), a common definition is not feasible. Street (2000) acknowledges the fact that literacy involves reading and writing but needs to be understood in much more complex ways. More will be discussed about Street under literacy and context.

Literacy is not a single ability as people read and write for many different reasons, in different contexts. Perumal (2004) differentiates between functional and critical empowering definitions of literacy and this has further broadened my understanding of the word and the way it is used in different situations.

In terms of UNESCO's definition, a functionally literate person is able to engage in all activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculations for his own and the community's development (Steinberg and Sutter (1991) cited in Perumal (2004)).

It is noted here that the concept of effective functioning requires a certain level of literacy which may also differ from one context to another. Steinberg and Sutter (1991) cited in Perumal (2004), further argue that in a rural community it might be enough for people to write their names and letters to families while in urban communities, people need to write, read signs, advertisements and newspapers before they can function effectively.

This explains further that literacy differs from one context to another and from one culture to another, depending on what people regard as their need for development and liberation. Street and Street (1991) concur with this when he contends that there is no single concept of literacy as it is instead socially defined. There are presumably as many literacies as there are social groups to define them (ideological model).

Baynham (1995) also maintains the same idea that literacy is a loaded word with a cluster of associations and ideologies attached to it. Lyster (1992, p. 9), tries to summarize a range of views regarding literacy as follows:

Few would dispute that literacy is a vital component in development and transformation. But its place in the process is fiercely contested. Policy makers, planners, trainers, teachers, researchers and learners all have different ideas about what literacy means, what its benefits and consequences are, how it should be achieved, on what scale and why.

Lyster (1992, p. 10. *ibid*), continues to define literacy as follows:

What do we mean when we talk about adult literacy? There is general consensus that literacy involves the ability to read and write, but that is where the consensus ends and the debates and questions begin: read and write what, how well, in what contexts and for what purposes? Does literacy mean the ability to read a race ticket, a stop sign, a safety notice in a factory, a great classic, a hire purchase agreement, an agenda for a meeting, an article about economic models for the future, pornography, a political pamphlet or a letter from home?

According to Lyster (*ibid*), people read and write many different things for many reasons in a range of different contexts and the relevance of literacy varies dramatically according to context.

### **3. New Literacy Studies' view (NLS)**

As referred to in Chapter 1, the concept of New Literacy Studies (NLS) represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on the acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but on literacy as a social practice (Street, 2003). This new

approach to literacy (as Street would contend), de-emphasizes the old tradition which regards literacy as being neutral and universal in nature. Instead it offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another.

The definition of New Literacy Studies as perceived by Street has already been presented in Chapter 1. At this point I will only try to describe and analyse this definition by drawing a distinction between the autonomous and ideological models of literacy in a more practical sense.

The scenario used by Street to explain the autonomous model is that of a person who could be very knowledgeable, creative and critically minded but as long as he or she has not gone through formal education and been certificated, that person is not regarded as literate. The notion presented is that some people find it difficult to separate literacy from schooling and also differentiating between being informed and literate. According to Street (2003), this confusion may sometimes be caused by a western conception of literacy which may be misleading.

According to Street (*ibid*), literacy practices carry social values of people since they are socially constructed. The main distinction between the ideological model and the autonomous model is that the ideological model sees literacy practices as bearing particular social values, hence they are not transferable or generalized as would be the case with the autonomous model which regards literacy as a neutral and universal skill that is transferable to other social and cognitive contexts. Kim (2003, p. 1), contends:

Other than Street, there are scholars like Gee (1996), Barton (1994) and Cope and Kalantzis (2000), who have also expanded the field of New Literacy Studies by developing new fruitful concepts such as literacy ecologies, discourses and multiliteracies. This has also contributed in bringing about change in the narrow understanding of literacy.

Many writers like Street (1984), Grabill (2001), McLaren (1993; 1994), Lankshear & McLaren (1993), maintain that literacy cannot be well understood when it is studied outside the environment where it is occurring. The ideological model discussed by Street regards literacy as a social practice and this means defining it in terms of its meaning as articulated

by people living together. The implication of the idea presented here is that people living and acting together in a particular environment will often ascribe and articulate particular meaning to phenomena in ways that are understood by them or make sense to them.

According to Street (1984; 1993), the particular practices of reading and writing and their associated meaning in the society, their uses, functions and meanings can only be determined adequately if they are studied in context. Street further contends that the nature of reading and writing are dependent on the contexts in which they are embedded. Banda (2003, p. 108), states:

Following Street (2001), then we shall view literacy practices as socio-culturally determined ways of thinking and doing reading and writing in different cultural contexts. Such a definition implies the development of pedagogical and didactic programs that take into account the socio-cultural context of literacy practices.

Street thus emphasizes the importance of context in determining the social practices of people and emphasizes that literacy cannot be generalized.

De la Piedra, (2010, p. 100) states:

The construct of multiple literacies (Street, 1997) implies that literacies vary according to the context and society in which they are embedded. The concept of local literacies, (which can be interpreted as contextual literacy) links literacy practices to local identities.

One of her assumptions is that diverse institutions shape local literacies, for example, some of those who use institutional literacy, develop their own ways of using literacy skills learned in the context of official institutions like schools and churches. In her article she tries to show that local Protestant religious practices in the native language are closely related to the local identity of being a *hermanola* (Christian). It seems to me that literacy differs from one context to another which means that a literate person in one context can find himself/herself illiterate in another context.

In his definition of literacy according to New Literacy Studies (NLS), Openjuru (2004, p. 10), states:

Literacy is a continuum with no single, simple individual competency which can be called literacy. In this model literacy is a social practice in which people engage in their own different cultural ways.

Baynham (1995, p. 3), also concurs with this when he argues:

Literacy acquisition takes place in context and unless we take into account the influences of context on literacy practices, we are ignoring an important dimension for the understanding of literacy.

Grabill (2001, p. 28), acknowledges the relationship between literacy and context when he writes:

McLaren (1993; 1994) and Lankshear & McLaren (1993), argue that literacy is entirely a matter of how reading and writing are conceived and practiced within a particular social context.

All these writers agree on one thing: that literacy can only be well understood when it is studied in the context of those who practice it. This becomes clearer when one studies closely what Prinsloo and Breier (1996, p. 11), say regarding the issue of literacy and context. They point out as follows: “The studies that make up this book are of literacy-in- use, and set out to make sense of people’s reading and writing practices in local social contexts”.

They further point out that these studies challenge common assumptions in educational and policy work that adults without schooling are a homogeneous mass of socially disabled people. They provide different ways in which such people are able to mobilize local forms of knowledge and resources. This means that for these adults, not being able to read and write does not render them helpless. Instead they devise some means of accessing knowledge and necessary resources.

Prinsloo and Breier (1996), embarked on the above research study that focuses on recipients of adult literacy work rather than on the providers of literacy. In their study they reveal the marginalization of the recipients of adult literacy efforts in South Africa. Their main concern was that the research on adult literacy in South Africa seems to be biased in the sense that it addresses the successes and challenges faced by literacy providers. There is nothing much

said about those for whom literacy is intended (recipients), whether they benefit from it or not. Their needs or daily life experiences and more importantly, the forms of literacy that they practice are not an important issue. According to these authors, what matters most is the usefulness of literacy to the recipients, not the satisfaction of the desires of the providers.

#### **4. Literacy practices**

The key concept of literacy practices needs to be defined and understood generally before it is used in the church context. According to Baynham (1995) and Prinsloo & Baynham (2008), literacy practices, literacy events and literacy values cannot be separated. Literacy events are instances and occasions where literacy practices occur or play a role. Literacy events also mean occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies.

The term "literacy practice" incorporates literacy events as empirical occasions in which literacy is integral. The term also refers to those understandings about and orientations towards literacy that people bring to a literacy event (Prinsloo and Baynham, 2008).

Baynham, (1995, p.1) states:

Literacy practice is a concrete human activity, not just what people do with literacy, but also what they make of what they do, the values they place on it and ideologies that surround it.

Barton et al (2000, p. 7), contend:

The notion of literacy practices offers a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between the activities of reading and writing and social structures in which they are embedded and which they help share. Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives.

In simple terms, literacy practices are what people do with literacy. Barton et al (ibid, 2000, p.7) explain as follows:

Practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. This will also include people's awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of it.

Since this research study sought to identify the literacy practices of the African Gospel Church congregants in a specific environment, I found it to be important to describe what literacy practices are in general before researching more about what the members of this church do with literacy.

## **5. Literacy mediators**

Baynham (1995, p. 59), defines a mediator of literacy as follows:

A mediator of literacy can be defined as a person who makes his or her literacy skills available to others, on a formal or informal basis for them to accomplish specific literacy purposes.

Baynham (1995) and Wagner et al (1986) wrote about the role of literacy mediators in Morocco and argued that illiteracy was not a stigma in the past, though it can be in contemporary Morocco. These writers note that literacy is now perceived as a need and a right whereas it was once something that could be accomplished indirectly through mediators. Openjuru (2004) relates a story of a non-literate young man in Uganda who relied on the help of his half-sisters or other people for his literacy needs. However, he seemed not to be satisfied with the help he was getting because he was not independent, neither could he get a decent job. The last two were his main reasons for wanting to be literate.

In relating the issue of literacy mediators to the church context I shall refer to Malan (1996a). In her research study, conducted in Bellville South (Cape Town), Malan shows that literacy mediators play a significant role in the church. The congregants who are non-literate use literacy mediators to accomplish specific literacy purposes. Fellow congregants act as literacy mediators when it comes to writing announcements to be read aloud, signing attendance registers during meetings, reading the Bible or other texts, and interpretation of English into other local languages.

Most authors I consulted agree that in the church community great care is taken to ensure that all those who are not literate in one way or another, are not totally excluded from religious practices. For example, Openjuru and Lyster (2007, p. 104), contend:

Although literacy is important in practicing the Christian faith, non-literate members of the church are not excluded from participation. The Priest and other literate members of the church always enable the whole community and congregation to participate in the joint Christian religious literacy practices.

According to Lyster and Openjuru (ibid), both literate and non-literate members of the church eventually internalize and memorize certain literacy practices through the process of orality, but the mediators of literacy are the initiators. Through the process of such assistance, committed non-literate Christians eventually develop coping mechanisms in order to participate in the literate social practices of religions.

Finally, the argument by Baynham (1995) brings two concepts to the fore, which are power imbalances and interaction. There is some kind of interaction between the illiterate and literate person in a particular social context where one uses another's expertise to accomplish a specific literacy purpose. On the other hand, the literate person may also benefit in this interaction in the form of getting experiential practice. For example a person reading or writing for others can end up improving his/her writing/reading skills, which could be of help to him/her for future job opportunities and personal development. The issue of power imbalances is also seen because of the fact that the illiterate person uses the expertise of the literate person to fulfil his/her literacy needs. This can ultimately result in the literate person having more power in this interaction in terms of manipulating the situation to fulfil his/her motives which may sometimes have negative effects on the illiterate person. Sometimes the power issue can take the form of dependency where the illiterate person can be misled by the literate person, even unintentionally due to human error or ignorance.

## **6. Literacy and religion**

The relationship between literacy and religion, especially Christianity, has a long history. The first schools in South Africa were mission schools where literacy was taught with the intention of spreading Christianity. Across all denominations, it has been established by different researchers or writers that literacy is practiced in one way or another, which means that it is valued. It has also been found that sometimes there is a mixture of orality and literacy not only by the illiterate congregants but by literate congregants as well (Openjuru, 2004; Openjuru and Lyster, 2007; Barton, 2000; Cabrita, 2010; de la Piedra, 2010).

Orality will be discussed later under a separate topic. At this point the issue of literacy and religion will be discussed and the history of Christianity in Uganda will be used as an example in order to show the relationship between religion and literacy. According to Openjuru and Lyster (2007, p. 99), literacy was initially introduced in Uganda as an integral part of Christianity. The embracing of the Christian faith by the local people automatically embraced a literate culture involving the use of the Bible, prayer books, hymn books and other religious texts. Openjuru and Lyster (2007) further point out that reading and writing were first introduced in Uganda by Arabs for the sake of teaching Islamic faith. Round about the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Anglican Church Missionary Society from England and the White Fathers' Society from France also came with a mission to "civilize". They used religion and education and in that case literacy became an integral part of religious practices in Uganda. The church has therefore, for a long time, been a very important institution when it comes to the promotion of literacy.

The history of literacy and religion has been characterized by different literacy practices by different denominations (Christian denominations).

Openjuru and Lyster (2007, p. 100), for example, state as follows:

New converts in the Anglican Church in particular, were inducted into the Christian faith through reading and writing biblical texts...becoming a Christian often became closely associated with becoming literate. The Anglicans emphasized reading of the Bible by individuals themselves. Therefore, before the establishment of schools, reading was taught as a precondition for becoming an Anglican Christian. The Catholics on the other hand emphasized rote learning of prayers and religious doctrines printed in other Catholic literature and did not require learning how to read and write as a precondition, although they also conducted some literacy classes.

It appears that literacy in these two denominations was not perceived or practiced in the same way. In the Anglican Church, literacy was more directly part of the church culture.

Consequently it was meaningful for the congregants of this church to learn the skills of reading and writing, whereas in the Catholic Church it was not as meaningful. What mattered most were the recitation and oral skills which could be achieved through the help of literacy mediators (literate congregants who could assist with literate skills like reading and writing).

These writers sum up their argument by pointing out that Catholic Sunday services were more ritualized, routine and predictable than in the Anglican Church and this reduced the need for congregants to interact directly with the text as their services were more orally based. This shows some difference in the literacy practices of these two churches particularly in the use of printed texts. Openjuru and Lyster (2007, p. 104) state: “This confirms Parry’s observation that religious literacy is deeply embedded in community life”. This means that although both denominations used printed text to guide their proceedings individuals did not necessarily read directly from the text as they seem to learn aspects of the text by heart.

Gee (1996, p. 32) states: “The goal of literacy (reading and writing) in Sweden was the promotion of Christian faith”. This again implies that reading and writing in this country was specifically linked to religion and valuable as it enabled Christians to be orientated into the Christian faith.

Literacy is the main medium through which the Christian faith (religion) can be accessed. Malan (1996a) maintains that without literacy, it is difficult for the church members to participate in church activities like reading the Bible, singing and praying (To mention a few). All religions have their respective doctrines and sacred texts or books. For example, Christians use the Bible as the holy book on which they base their religious teachings, Muslims have the Qu’ran. It appears that many charismatic churches nowadays are increasingly relying on the use of literacy in spreading their doctrines. I have even seen the use of technology becoming common (Power Point presentations, overhead projection, etc.).

Preaching the word of God, handing out of tracts and doing Bible classes or empowerment courses for spiritual and personal development, are practices which occur in many Christian denominations. These are all strategies of evangelism which cannot be practiced without literacy because they involve reading and writing in one way or another. I have seen Jehovah’s Witnesses in many occasions in my local town (Pietermaritzburg) standing in different spots where they hand out tracts and religious booklets. This confirms a general statement which I have often heard that this denomination is strong in spreading its gospel through teaching.

Therefore, for most religions to be able to spread and practice their doctrines and teachings and win more converts, they have to rely on the use of literacy. In his book entitled “The legacies of literacy”, Graff (1987), traces the history and uses of literacy in some of the European countries like France, England, Germany and North America. He found out that there was a strong relationship between literacy and the church and that the church played a major role in education and literacy. Graff (1987, p. 58), cites the role that the church played particularly during the period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and points out:

Throughout this period, despite the impressive increases in lay-controlled and initiated schools, most institutions for the transmission of literacy were part of the church, teachers in the lay schools were usually church-educated clerics and without the church, provisions for schooling and literacy in the west would have been incredibly reduced, and the number of available teachers would have been tiny.

Blackledge (2000, p.118), contends:

We cannot afford to abandon or ignore literacy because it is important in all spheres of life including religion. For religious practices to be conducted effectively and meaningfully with full participation of all members, literacy becomes a great necessity.

This writer cites an example where some parents sent their children to school so that they could learn to read Arabic and Urdu, and some sent them to private tutors to learn to read the Qu’ran because they believe it is important for the Islamic faith. A common experience in many of the communities in South Africa is for people to attend adult learning centres to learn literacy skills so that they can participate in the activities of the church, like reading the Bible, singing from the hymn book and participating in leadership positions.

In an interview that I conducted on 15 August 2007, as part of an assignment required for one of my M.Ed modules, I discovered that adult learners had different expectations when attending adult classes. Those who could hardly read and write had specific objectives for learning to read and write. They intended to learn to read and write in their mother tongue so that they could participate in church activities like reading the Bible and using hymn books. They also wanted to be useful in the church, by participating in particular positions such as secretaries, chairpersons and treasurers. Those who were already literate in their mother

tongue had different expectations, like learning to speak and write in English as well as attaining practical skills that could make them employable or start their own businesses.

It was an interesting experience for me just to find out that literacy can have different meanings to different people. What is most relevant to this study is the issue of the women I spoke to, who just wanted to be literate so that they would be able participate in all church activities without being excluded. Stromquist (1997) cites the reading of the Bible, singing from the hymn book, reading religious books and participating in church activities on Saturdays and Sundays as part of the motivation of congregants to become literate.

Kulick and Stroud (1993, p. 33), in a study of conceptions and uses of literacy in a Papua New Guinean Village, argue:

Nobody in the village considers that one can become better informed or more competent in any way by reading. Consequently, there is no notion in the village that everyone should read. The act of reading in itself has no value apart from accomplishing some immediate goal like confirming the words to a hymn, preparing to recite prayer, reading a note one has been given, deciding to discover a here-to-fore concealed truth in a religious text or checking the hand of cards one has just been dealt in a game with friends.

Their study (Kulick and Stroud) further reveals that the introduction of literacy in Gapun between the mid-1950s and late 1960s was done in a context directly associated with the Catholic Church. This link between literacy and the church was reinforced even more by the fact that there was a total absence of any literature except booklets and pamphlets addressing Catholic beliefs. Therefore, when there was any learning of reading to be done, it was directed towards reading Christian literature.

There seems to be a variety of literacy activities occurring in the different church denominations. Writers cited above and below have similar views on this (Barton, 2000; Malan, 1996a; de la Piedra 2005; Eakle 2007; Cabrita, 2010; and Ek, 2008). Church literacy practices find their use in the form of literacy activities which include writing Bible verses; reading the Bible; printing pamphlets/documents for reading; production of literacy artefacts like pictures; and development of records (minutes). Orality in the form of listening,

recitation and memorization will also be alluded to as an alternative to literacy. All of these will be discussed individually but most of them do overlap or complement one another as in the case of recitation and memorization; reading and listening; writing; printing; production of documents and production of literacy artefacts.

### **6.1. Literacy (Writing and reading)**

The findings of most of the research studies on church literacy practices are that writing is not as commonly practiced as reading. For example, de la Piedra, (2010) contends that the *hermanos* (Protestant Christians) of Uripata use reading more than writing although some participants do write references for passages read during the service. These *hermanos* of Uripata who are Quechua speakers use reading when they sing songs from songbooks and when the Preacher is reading a text from the Bible. They also practice what is called collective reading whereby reading is not an individual act. In this instance, an individual reads for everybody and others listen attentively to the reader or follows from their own Bibles silently according to their own pace and understanding. In this church, reading also characterizes participation during and after preaching when some congregants cite other passages from their own Bibles to support what has been said by the Preacher.

According to De la Piedra writing is done by church leaders when attending courses outside the church and also by church officers when writing minutes and circulars to communicate with outsiders (mostly in Spanish). De la Piedra (2010) also points out that *hermanos* use religious literacy practices at home. This extension of literacy into home contexts seems in turn to have an impact on promoting writing during church services because some participants copy Bible verses for home study. The writer also notes that children like to sing using *himinarios* (hymn books) and copy their favourite songs into their notebooks.

Barton et al (2000), in their discussion about entry into the Catholic Church (i.e. time and preparation for the first Holy Communion) in England say that it is marked by literacy. They cite writing as a common practice in this process. They contend that a significant amount of time is spent on literacy events which produce literacy artefacts like pictures to be used for public display. This does not displace literacy in the Catholic Church but means that during this time (preparation for the first Holy Communion), production of artefacts like symbolic pictures plays a big role.

Barton et al (2000) talk about the importance of the Parish newsletter which is issued weekly, and contend that it can be regarded as evidence that the Parish Community which they investigated does read. Barton et al (2000, p. 49), also maintain as follows:

“The distribution and reading of the parish newsletter is only one of the many literacy practices which contribute to the construction of community identity”.

Another form of evidence that most members of this church are literate is that newsletters are distributed to everyone coming into a mass on Saturday or Sunday. There is also writing displayed on the board placed at the back of the cathedral and this implies that there are congregants who read these. Reading is much more dominant than writing in all forms of religion because even those who cannot write or read on their own rely on others who read while they listen attentively to what is being read to them.

## **6.2. Literacy documents**

Literacy documents (which include printed and written text, artefacts) cannot be excluded when discussing literacy because the act of printing and writing those documents involves literacy. In the article entitled “Literacy Practices of a Faith-based School”, Eakle (2007, p. 477), talks about the issue of Christian literacies and printed text. He states:

In this article, I treat literacy broadly to include printed text and other communication media. Lines drawn between such media are tenuous, at best. Connections among images and written texts have existed since the advent of print and they often have religious bases.

He continues to say that, just as with public schooling, Christian instruction is centred in the printed text, specifically the Bible. This can be accepted as a fact because most churches or denominations use the printed texts in the form of the Bible, songbooks and prayer books which are not produced by members of the church. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that sometimes denominations do produce their own printed works as in the case of the literacy practices of the Catholic Church discussed by Barton et al (2000).

Barton et al (2000), discuss sacraments of initiation occurring in the Catholic Church with the intention of preparing the youth for membership of the church. These classes involve a lot of

time spent by both parents and children engaged in the literacy events in preparation for the sacraments mentioned above. Among other things that the children do is the production of artefacts and documents like congratulation cards for those completing the initiation process and songs/ choruses sung during the occasion which ultimately form part of records or resources used in the church.

Production of these artefacts involves both writing and reading because individual children write their names and those of their friends on the paper “Hands of friendship” which they produce. Sometimes they write short prayers which are collaboratively written in small groups.

These artefacts are displayed not just for reading purposes but also as a record of evidence of work produced by candidates and their parents. It also makes the parish community aware of children’s progress through the first communion. Some of these artefacts are used during Sunday masses and imply the value the parish community attaches to these artefacts. Examples of such artefacts are posters of trees with the words “sorry”, “forgiveness” and “love”. These posters were carried by children to the altar during a celebration of mass. On other occasions, children read out prayers they have written themselves.

Production of documents in the Catholic Church also includes cards of congratulations (given by relatives and friends during communion ceremony), certificates recording the date and place of the ceremony and hymn sheets with names of candidates attending the communion mass. All of these are seen as evidence or examples of literacy practices and value of literacy to this parish community (Barton et al 2000).

### **6.3. Inspired interpretation of the Word**

In her study entitled “Literacies of school and everyday life in Bellville South”, Malan (1996a), discusses different literacy practices within the context of literacy and religious discourse. The religious literacy practices in this study are different from those discussed by Barton (2000) in the sense that these do not necessarily involve individual skills of reading and writing even though the text (the Bible) is central.

According to Malan's findings (ibid), the inspired interpretation of verses from the Bible is more important to the members of the church than the reading itself. By inspired interpretation Malan means the intervention of the Holy Spirit whereby a believer transcends to a spiritual realm where he/she receives the power (wisdom) to understand unknown things. Nevertheless, the importance of having a Bible cannot be underestimated because even those Christians who cannot read the Bible have them because they regard the Bible as their symbol of faith. "Although scripture plays a central role in religious practice in Bellville South, it is the inspired interpretation of the Word rather than the correct "reading" thereof that counts as the measure of religious authority" (Malan, 1996a, p. 38).

Related to inspired interpretation of the Word, is the religious practice which is nothing else but total commitment to one's belief as well as hope that can be defined in one word called "Faith". Malan (1996a, p. 39, ibid) also states: "In this community, religious authority is not gained through book learning but is the result of the special wisdom that people receive through religious practice". This point was emphasized to her by Mr. and Mrs. Smal whose social identities are constructed around their faith. Malan (1996a) states:

Mrs. Smal made it clear that faith was to be gained through conversion and not through education or church membership. She told me that when her husband got converted, he was suddenly able to read the Bible and he (Mr. Smal) confirmed that the Spirit leads you to read the Bible.

According to Malan (ibid), receiving the ability to read the scriptures from God has an altogether different meaning from literacy learning. In this case the reading of scripture becomes a gift of the spirit. Preaching the Word without the ability to read the Bible can be referred to in this context as another form of literacy practice.

The valuing of the fact that Mr. Smal was given an understanding of scriptures by the spirit rather than having learnt to read the Bible, relates to what Probst (in Street, 1993) calls the battle between the "letter" and "spirit (Malan, 1996a, p. 39). Malan contends that although it is rare for someone to believe that he/she received literacy through divine inspiration, it is common for people to acquire literacy through religious practice rather than schooling. She goes on to say that farm workers' children who did not go to school were often taught at home or church to read and recite passages from the scripture.

Embeddedness in religious practices and values carried by the church is what matters most in Bellville South. As is the case in the Pentecostal churches/charismatic churches, the emphasis is on direct and active communication with God. Receiving a divinely inspired message is much more valuable than being able to read from the Bible. Of course, Bible reading is central to religious practice in Bellville South but being non-literate does not exclude people from participating in religious activities as there are fellow literate congregants who are always willing to help. From all these examples, it is clear that literacy in the context of religious literacy practice can imply an understanding of the signifying or symbolic power of Scripture rather than the ability to read the book.

#### **6.4. Orality and its practices**

Orality heavily depends on the skills of listening, recitation, speaking/oratory, narration and memorization (Cabrita, 2010; Malan, 1996b; Whitaker & Sienaert, 1995). According to Ek, (2008), orality is more traditional in the sense that it existed and was more relied upon before written/ printed texts were available. Whatever information was memorized could then be repeated or recited orally.

In some of the African traditional churches like the Zulu Church of Nazareth, orality is dominant. Whitaker and Sienaert (1985, p. 181), cite from the founder, Isaiah Shembe's biography, that he had divinely inspired wisdom despite the fact that he was not educated and not a man of letters. In this biography Shembe's words are cited as follows: "I am not afraid to preach anywhere, even though I am not educated." The clear implication is that preaching the word of God does not always need literacy.

Malan (1996b) relates respective religious practices which reveal important aspects of the social uses of literacy in Newtown, particularly in the Congregational Church services and these are embedded in local discourses which are not necessarily formal. Such practices would, among others, include oratory, narratives and rhetoric of scriptures.

One of the research works that elaborates on orality, is by Cabrita, (2010) entitled; "*Text, Authority and Community in Southern Africa*". The writer, among other things, presents the history of literacy and practices in the Church of Nazareth ("uShembe", as it is commonly

called today) and specifically tries to draw the reader's attention to what he calls "written text" and "oral literacy". Cabrita, (2010), contends that according to Petros Dlomo (whom he describes as the main archivist of the Nazareth Church between the years 1940 to 1990), there seems to be a dependency between written and oral literacy in the Church of Nazareth, in the sense that the congregants recite prayers, songs and Bible verses which are read from the texts either independently or through the help of literacy mediators. Both oral (as Cabrita calls the collection of *Izihlabelelo* (Body of Hymns) recited by congregants of Nazareth) and written texts complement each other and it is this relationship that makes it impossible to talk about one text without referring to the other.

In the Church of Nazareth, "*Izihlabelelo*" is a common text which is in both written and oral form. Cabrita (2010, p. 61), explains this as follows:

The written text is in the form of *Izihlabelelo* and the oral text is in the hearts of the people." The relationship between *Izihlabelelo* and oral text is confirmed by Isaiah Shembe (the founder) when he emphasized that written words are powerful in that they can conjure up communities of people as "enduring records.

The author is raising two points here. One is the issue of written and oral texts and the other is the importance of written documents. Isaiah Shembe's statement implies that it is by recording the hymns in the hymn books that such hymns could be kept and learned by people and that those who read and learn from the hymn books will become "records" in that they will teach the songs they have learnt to the next generation. Cabrita maintains that their virtuous Nazareth life is itself a written record for posterity because it is based on performance skills besides the fact that they also make use of written documents like *Izihlabelelo*. Orality practiced in the Nazareth Church is characterized by the activities/skills presented below.

#### **6.4.1. Speaking, listening and memorization**

Speaking, listening and memorization cannot be divorced from one another. According to what Cabrita found in the Church of Nazareth, speaking and reading aloud have the same effect on the listener. Isaiah, while he was still a young boy would be visited by a "Voice" when praying and this Voice would speak in his ears and he would listen (Cabrita 2010, p. 67). Isaiah did nothing other than respond to what the voice was telling him to do.

Even *Izihlabelelo* that he wrote were given or dictated by this Voice. The Voice would speak to him just as if a person were reading aloud into his ears and he would listen obediently to what the Voice said to him. He would not forget even a single word of it and this was a sign of wonderful memory. In all his teachings Isaiah would always encourage his followers to listen to the words of God that he spoke to them obediently and it was this religious practice that enabled them not to forget but keep everything in their memories. Therefore, although Shembe was non-literate, his power of listening and memorization skills helped him to become active in the church activities, particularly in the development of *Izihlabelelo*.

Literacy and orality are actually interdependent. Cabrita (2010, p. 61) states:

The presentation in Dlomo's text presents writing not only as rational technology of pen and paper but ultimately as a spiritual inscription in the hearts of people who love God. This means that writing in the form of pen and paper, (as Dlomo chose to call it), was important for recordings so that those who could read would do so not only for themselves but teach those who could not read, who would memorize the songs and pass them orally to the next generation.

This suggests that those who are literate teach those who are non-literate by interpreting or reading aloud what is written. The non-literate congregants memorize the song which they will ultimately sing. The literate congregants interpret the written text to the non-literate congregants. This relationship or interdependency was also seen between Isaiah Shembe and his network of scribes (*Ababhali*). During the documentation of hymns, Shembe would say what he heard from the Voice and the scribes would write that down on paper (Cabrita, 2010).

The *ababhali* were drawn from a small minority of the educated group at *amakholwa* (believers) mission schools like Ohlange Institute, Inanda Girls Seminary, Edendale and Adams Schools (Cabrita, 2010, 66). One of Shembe's followers, MaDlomo recalled how these literacy events occurred: "The speaker and the scribe would sit next to each other, bouncing a text back and forth to each other in oral, written and finally reread form" (Cabrita, 2010, p. 67).

According to Cabrita (2010, p. 67) MaDlomo offers the sense of the permeable boundaries between speech, writing and song at the scribing dialogues (between the Scribes and Shembe) describing how the young boy Nyaweni scribed hymn 200 for Isaiah. She states:

Babamkhulu (grandfather), said to Nyaweni, “write”...he told him what to write...the next time came when Babamkhulu said, “bring it to me my child”...and then he sang from the paper which had been written (Cabrita, 2010, p. 67).

It is important to note that these literacy events (where Shembe and scribes were engaged in a collaborative textual culture), were watched as public performances. In other words it was a form of theatre.

#### **6.4.2. Recitation and memorization**

Listening or “hearing” (as Isaiah chose to call it) was considered a spiritual discipline and it was on the basis of this belief that he instructed recipients (congregants, especially ministers whom he had ordained to do Pastoral work) of the letters and epistles to “hear” them. The understanding of the word, “hearing” here, would be to listen attentively with understanding and heeding what was being said (obedience). In a letter to Minister Petros Mnqayi, Isaiah, commanded him as follows: “listen” to the letter: “*Listen to what I say to you today*” (Shembe cited in Cabrita 2010, p. 72).

He also repeated the value of listening when addressing the believers at Groutville in 1927 when he stated as follows: “Believers who drink from the spring of life are those who listen with great care to the words of God” (Cabrita 2010, p.72).

For Isaiah, obedient listening was an embodied, wholly consuming spiritual practice (Cabrita, 2010). Those who could not read on their own relied on this skill and it was important that a reader or whoever was speaking should read or speak aloud. It is noted from this discussion that for the act of listening/hearing to occur, there needs to be an act of speaking or reading aloud. These two acts (reading/speaking and listening) would always precede the act of memorizing.

Recitation is a continuous exercise which is done repeatedly until the message or content is internalized and recited orally without having to refer to the written text.

According to Me Suk (2005), this is an exercise which takes time and it needs commitment and dedication. This writer further maintains that the Catholics emphasize rote learning and recitations and as a result their practices are basically routine and oral. It appears that the Catholics are known for practicing orality because Barton (2000) also contends that they emphasize rote learning of prayers and religious doctrines, since the catechism they use emphasizes recitation. De la Piedra (2010) also points out that for the *hermanos* who were not literate, memorization was an alternative to being literate and those who could not read would listen attentively and memorize. She further maintains that the ability to memorize the content of the Bible was more central for salvation. She refers to one event that she observed during the church service at Uripipata, where the Preacher prayed that God's written words be kept in their memories and in their hearts. The Preacher then asked for blessings for the men and women who only "listened".

In her research study Malan (1996a and 1996b) found that learning from the scriptures was a form of initiation into the church for the youth or for new members, simply because most of their literacy practices had been internalized to such an extent that they were then orally practiced without having to rely on the use of textual material. This means that once these congregants were well orientated and inducted into the church doctrine and practices, they became engaged in the processes of orality. She further contends that in most Sunday schools the students learned the doctrine of the church from the book, but those who were not able to read usually acquired knowledge they needed through listening and memorizing.

## **7. Language and literacy**

The issue of language, whether local or official, seems to be central when talking about literacy. It is common that when we talk about literacy we define it on the basis of a vernacular or dominant language, depending on the context. Since the time of missionaries, the promotion of indigenous languages was emphasized and people were taught in their vernacular so that they could interact with Christian literature books (Kulick and Stroud, 1993).

Openjuru and Lyster, (2007, P. 100) state:

The missionaries emphasized the use of local languages in their literacy work which gave local languages status and acceptability within church practices.

The objective of using the local language was obviously an attempt to motivate people because they were likely to develop interest in learning in a language that carried their own culture and was also meaningful to their daily lives. Literacy was initially introduced in Uganda as an integral part of Christian religious practices, making Christianity the first social and institutional framework within which literacy found meaningful use in everyday life (Openjuru and Lyster, 2007). Consequently, missionaries had the task of learning the local languages, developing orthographies for that particular language and translating and printing Bibles, prayer books and hymn books in that language.

Local language use ensures that the learning is locally relevant, while use of the official language distances the learning content from the realities of adult learners (Trudell, 2009, p. 76). This suggests that for non-literate congregants, it is preferable to learn to read and write in their mother tongue first before they proceed to an official language. A person who can read and write in the local language is usually considered to be literate. This does not mean that vernacular literacy is always valued. A new trend has developed where literacy in the mother tongue appears no longer to be regarded as enough. According to this new trend, the knowledge of a second (official) language has become an added advantage if not a necessity.

Steinberg and Sutter (1991), cited in Perumal (2004), when discussing the issue of language and literacy, use the term literacy to mean basic literacy skills in one's own language and English. They state that in the South African context, once a person can speak, read and write the basics of English, he/she is functionally literate for the purposes of life. Perumal (2004, p. 10), concurs with this view when she contends:

In South Africa, definitions of literacy are complicated by the fact that knowledge of a second language, usually English, is as vital as the ability to read and write in an African language.

The general consensus (as argued above in the section on the definition of literacy), is that literacy involves reading and writing and once there is reading and writing involved, language cannot be excluded. Since this research is about religious literacy practices, it is equally relevant to point out that literacy is integral in religious practices because it is the main medium through which the Christian faith (religion) is accessed (Malan, 1996a).

## **8. Conclusion**

Understanding the concept of literacy and the importance of context in the use of literacy is very crucial. It has also been emphasized that the issue of language and orality cannot be totally left out when discussing literacy practices, especially in the religious context.

Although orality is not literacy per se, it has been found to be connected with literacy, not only for the non-literate but for the literate individuals as well (Cabrita, 2010; Malan, 1996a; Whitaker and Sienaert, 1985).

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter focuses on a description of the study design, the reasons for choosing it as well as general information before discussing the specific study design I have chosen. I have organized the presentation of this chapter into topics which are discussed in the following order:

- Study design
- Sampling strategy
- Methodology
- Sources of data and methods of data collection
- Data analysis
- Ethics
- Limitations.

The research as a whole was based on a qualitative research approach which, according to observations by Schumacher (2001) as cited by Mbatha (2004, p. 42), is based on the following:

- Reality is the social construction by different individuals or groups who derive or ascribe meaning to specific entities, such as events, persons, processes and objects.
- Use of multi-method strategies to collect data which entails interviews, observations, and document analysis.
- The involvement of the researcher in the situation which allows him to assume the interactive role in which he records the observations and interactions with the participants.

This chapter also concludes by giving a summary of all major methodological issues that were pertinent to the study.

## 2. Study design

This study is located within an interpretivist paradigm and its objective was to understand the social uses of literacy including the value that is placed on literacy by members of the African Gospel Church. The research study was conducted using a qualitative case study design.

Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2008, p. 460), define case studies as follows:

Case studies are intensive investigations of particular individuals and they may also be studies of single families, units, families or social policies.

Case studies are therefore in-depth studies that seek to gain as much information as possible about a particular unit of analysis.

According to Maree (2007, p. 75), the term “Case Study” has multiple meanings. It can be used to describe a unit of analysis, for example, a case study of a particular organization or to describe a research method. He further points out that case study research can be positivist, interpretive or critical, depending on the underlying philosophical assumption of the researcher. The case study is defined by the fact that it is a bounded system, which means that it is undertaken within particular parameters which are clearly set. Boundedness is not the only characteristic used to define the case. The methodology is also important. For example, if the study is a qualitative case, then a qualitative method will be used.

Despite the multiple definitions and understandings of case study, Maree stresses that it is a systematic inquiry into an event or set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest. It is open in the sense that it offers multi-perspective analysis, where views of not just one or two participants, but also the views of other relevant groups are considered, thus opening a possibility of giving a voice to the powerless and voiceless, who in this case are the non-literate congregants. Maree (2007 p.75), states:

From an interpretivist perspective, the typical characteristics of case studies are that they strive towards a comprehensive understanding of how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon under study. There must be a valid reason for a researcher to choose a case study design otherwise a methodological and design error can be made.

According to Henning et al (2005, p. 42), a researcher needs to ask the following design questions:

What is this study a case of? Does the topic warrant being referred to as a case? Does this study require multiple methods in order to capture the full case? Usually, if the answer to this question is “yes”, and if there is a bounded system with a clear unit of analysis, the study will warrant a “case” design type.

Henning et al (2005, p. 41) maintain:

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest here is the process rather than outcomes, in the context rather than specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Case studies are distinguished from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analysis of a single unit or bounded system such as an individual, a program, event, group, intervention or community.

Henning et al maintain that a case study is characterized by the focus on a phenomenon. It is for this reason that it warrants multiple methods because it must be as exhaustive as possible.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), present different kinds of case studies as identified by different authors like Yin (2003); Merriam (1988); Sturman (1999); Stake (1994) and Robson (2002). Among these is the exploratory case study (Yin 2003) that acts as a pilot and can be used to generate hypotheses that are tested in larger scale surveys, experiments or other forms of research. My study is an exploratory case study and has used observations, interviews and documentary analysis as methods of data collection which are discussed later in this chapter.

Yin (2003, p. 13) describes a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Writers like Merriam and Simpson (1995) identify strengths and limitations of the case study approach. Such limitations include dangers of distortions, since it is not easy to cross check information in all the cases. While a case study might be strongly influenced by particular sources consulted, on the other hand it might turn out differently with the use of other sources and methods. Other factors or limitations mentioned by these authors are subjectivity, bias and the positionality of the

researcher which are likely to influence how the case is constructed and what it reveals. Case studies have restricted applicability, which means that they are not necessarily generalizable.

Despite all these challenges and limitations of a case study, I decided to use it due to the following reasons:

- I had chosen to do my study in the African Gospel Church but had decided to limit myself to one circuit (KwaMashu).
- Studying the whole church was not possible for me and it was therefore convenient to do an intensive study of a specific group of congregants.

Hence the case study became a suitable method for me to use.

I was very careful and aware of the limitations of a case study method like subjectivity and bias because as a researcher I had a single case on which in-depth study needed to be conducted. In such situations there is always a tendency for researchers to become selective and more specific and I think it is for this reason that researchers like Cohen et al (2007, p. 254) point out as follows:

It is important in case studies for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves rather than to be largely interpreted and evaluated or judged by the researcher.

The above statement reveals a characteristic of a case study that is regarded as a way of limiting chances of subjectivity and bias which is why my methods of data collection included observations, interviews and documentary analysis. While observation would afford me an opportunity to observe the phenomena in the context, interviews would, on the other hand, assist me to get answers to the questions that arose during observations and areas that could not be covered by this method. My point of departure was to identify a case that needed to be studied together with its identifiable unit of analysis. My unit of analysis in this case is KwaMashu (African Gospel Church) circuit. This was followed by a plan which was developed with details of data collection procedures that were used, as well as the general rules about research ethics followed (Robson, 2002).

### **3. Sampling strategy**

This includes the sample size and the sampling method used and these two are briefly described below so that reasons for using the strategy and selecting the participants are also explained.

#### **3.1. Sample size and sampling method**

About the issue of deciding on the size of the sample, Maree (2007, 178), maintains as follows:

The size of the sample necessary for it to be representative of the population depends on the degree of homogeneity of the population. Generally in homogeneous populations, where the members are similar with respects to variables that are important to the study, smaller samples may adequately represent the population

My sample of 7 participants was purposively selected because they exhibited all the characteristics of interest for the study. According to Merriam and Simpson (1995), purposive sampling becomes most convenient when the researcher is looking for specific participants who are in a position to provide the needed information. The three categories (presented in the table below) selected, make it easier for me to get the needed and most relevant data for this study. Since my research was a case study it was very specific and selective and I therefore needed to ensure that I had a good and relevant choice of respondents. In short, I used a purposive sampling strategy because I already knew the type of people I was looking for and this was a more convenient and cheaper strategy for me in as far as time frames and financial resources were concerned.

The sample that I decided to employ in this study was determined by different factors like categories of the church population that I proposed to use (as listed in the table below), the number of branches/units of the circuit, as well as the availability of suitable participants. In short, the size of the sample is valid as long as it satisfies the researcher's needs which in that case would not pretend to represent the wider population (Cohen et al, 2007). In other words representation was not the issue here but what was important was to select people who would provide the needed information.

The sample of this study consisted of three categories which are shown in the table below.

**Table 1: Participants listed according to categories.**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Type of Employment</b>	<b>Method of selection</b>
<b>Leadership</b> <i>Pastor</i>	70	Male	Married	Tertiary	Pastor	Purposive
<i>Secretary</i>	51	Male	Married	Tertiary	Professional (Manager)	Purposive
<b>Literate Members</b>	58	Male	Married	Matric	Self-employed (Business man)	Purposive
„	32	Male	Single	Tertiary	Professional (Artisan)	Purposive
„	50	Female	Widow	Grade 10	General employment (General assistant in Hospital)	Purposive
<b>Non-literate Members</b>	42	Female	Married	Grade 2	Unemployed (House wife)	Purposive
	48	Female	Married	None	Unemployed (House wife)	Purposive
<b>Total = 7</b>						

My decision to divide the sample into three categories was because I wanted to get an overall understanding of what the research study intended to uncover. The congregation is composed of ordinary members and those who occupy certain leadership positions, but all of them are referred to as congregants. It was important to start with the leadership, in particular the executive members, because they are the “gatekeepers” and custodians of administrative information which could be of great help. After that I went to ordinary congregants.

The above table shows clearly the number of people chosen per category and further describes each person in terms of age, gender, marital status, level of education and type of employment. Seven participants were selected and the criterion for selection was based on the following:

The leadership (Pastor and Secretary) were chosen because of their positions. They are gate keepers and incorporating them facilitated access to literacy events that I intended to observe and also important documents like minutes. Secondly, for me they were key figures who could provide valuable information regarding this study since they are administrators of the church. The Pastor's educational background and job description could provide valuable information. The secretary was chosen on the basis of his role in the church.

The ordinary congregants were divided into two categories which were named non-literate and literate congregants. It was important to include the literates in this study because they could provide me with crucial information regarding what they do with literacy in the church. The inclusion of non-literate congregants was important for me since they are also congregants who are expected to participate fully in all the activities of the church.

Literate congregants were chosen on the basis of their level of education. I needed people whose literacy varied in terms of levels of education like below matric, with matric and post matric (tertiary level) and these congregants were chosen on the basis of those criteria. Any other church responsibilities they were involved in, was an added advantage.

Non-literate congregants were very important to me as part of my sample since they would represent a group that could provide information regarding the coping mechanisms for those who were not literate. They would be chosen on the basis of age, gender and possible responsibilities in the church. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of the study as discussed later in this chapter, some of my intended plans were compromised.

Ngaka (2004, p.74), supports the use of purposive sampling and he argues as follows:

This strategy keeps fieldwork costs low and helps speed up the process of locating people to interview in the field.

Ngaka (2004), also defends the use of a purposive sampling strategy in that it increases the likelihood that the variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the data in contrast to random sampling which tries to achieve variation through the use of random selection and large sample size.

#### **4. Methodology**

The purpose of this section is to describe the plan of data collection procedures used and general rules followed. This understanding of methodology is shared by Robson (2002).

This is an exploratory case study which sought to find out about the uses of literacy in the church as well as the value that is placed on literacy by the members of the church. The study was located within an interpretivist paradigm because it intended to understand the practical or social uses of literacy in the church context (social phenomena). The study was a qualitative research study because it was carried out in a real life context where methods like observations and interviews were used to gather information which was analysed and interpreted (Maree, 2007; Cohen et al, 2007).

There are at least four possible and relevant methods that can be used in case study research and those are interviews, focus groups, observation and documentary analysis. For the sake of this study, I decided to use three which are observation, documentary analysis and interviews. For me these three methods were enough for this case study especially when I considered the estimated time frame of my study.

#### **5. Sources of data and methods of data collection**

Most of the information used in this study was obtained from observations, interviews with the participants and from documents that were analysed. Three observations were done of a church meeting, a Bible class and a church service. Interviews were conducted with participants using an interview schedule with semi-structured questions. I also analysed documents like agendas, minutes, a Bible and a notebook. Relevant instruments were adapted

and designed to capture information accordingly (see Appendix 4.). Lastly, my experiences (as a member of this church) also helped me a lot in providing me with valuable background information from discussions and observations.

The three methods are discussed in more detail below.

### **5.1. Observation method**

My reason for choosing this method is because it gives the researcher an opportunity to allow the phenomena to speak for themselves which is not the case with other methods of gathering data (Cohen et al, 2007). Maree (2007, p. 84), states: “As a qualitative data gathering technique, observation is used to enable the researcher to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the phenomenon being observed.”

For these reasons, it appeared to be suitable for the methodology I have chosen. I was aware of the limitations of this technique, for example Maree (2007) cautions that observation as a method has a risk of being selective and subjective. In order to overcome that, I always tried to verify my observations with some of my participants by posing questions during our informal talks about what I was observing (triangulation).

I observed church activities like Sunday services, church meetings and Bible classes. The observation checklist was adapted to the three afore-mentioned literacy events (see Appendix 3). These checklists tried to accommodate important literacy aspects that characterized the events.

Sunday services were important because they follow a formal or ritual program, are generally well planned and include a variety of literacy practices like reading the Bible, singing from hymnbooks, writing/scribing notes during sermon presentation as well as making announcements. These activities were important because they exhibited different literacy practices which I intended to study.

Observing a church meeting was also crucial because as far as most people understand the term “meeting” as used in the formal context, it involves the standard procedures of organizing and preparing for a meeting, running and recording the proceedings. In organizing

and preparing for a formal meeting, key persons (secretary and chairperson) with some form of literacy expertise were involved. I therefore thought it necessary to observe a meeting in the church context with the intention of finding out what literacy practices were involved.

Bible classes also provided a good environment for observing literacy practices. For Bible classes, issues like kinds of programs offered, content and language received attention. For meetings, items on the agenda and their nature, language used and level were also noted.

Other than observation of specific literacy events, I also did general observations. This general observation included observation of public notices, advertisements and sign posts that might relate to literacy use. I found it useful to start with observation because it allowed me an opportunity to identify issues and behaviours of the participants which could be probed further during the interview process.

## **5.2. The interview method**

The method I chose was an in-depth interview used to collect information from all participants according to their respective categories. The strength of this method is that it can complement other methods used by probing some of the information gained. While doing that, the act of probing might raise further questions or a need for further explanation and this was the main reason for me to use it after observations. I used a semi structured interview schedule with open-ended questions because they allowed for exploration of ideas and views between the participant and the researcher. The interview schedule/guide was designed in such a way that it was just one schedule that incorporated all the categories of participants (leadership, non-literate and literates). It was one set of mixed questions that were intended to accommodate all participants (see Appendix 1.) The advantage of using the semi-structured interview is that it allows for the probing and clarification of answers (Maree, 2007).

I used this method specifically to collect information relating to the general socio biographical information, educational background, general questions about literacy practices, general questions about the value and importance of literacy, general questions about educational aspirations, views, perceptions and attitudes towards literacy among the church members.

The interviews took an average of one and a half hours per person. The interview with the Pastor took longer than other interviews because he was the main source of information. All interviews were conducted in isiZulu. I used a tape recorder to record the interviews. I disclosed to my participants my intention and reason for using this device so that I could get their permission. While recording the interview, I also recorded some brief field notes which helped me a lot during the process of transcribing by throwing some light on some unclear voice recordings. The process of transcribing and translation was analysed against the recorded data to avoid errors.

The interview method was convenient since my sample was small and it was easy for me to interact with people in a natural way (Terre Blanche and Kelly (2002). Wisker (2001); Kakooza (2002) and Bell (1995) cited in Ngaka (2004) also maintain that the interview method is good for conducting exploratory case studies. I personally found this method to be comprehensive since it allowed for probes that led to more information than was anticipated. It was flexible and convenient, not only for the participants, but for me as a researcher. This method helped me not to take up too much of their time as would have been the case with questionnaires. Since I was also going to involve the non-literate congregants, there would have been a problem in using questionnaires because they would involve reading and writing which would be a great challenge, if not impossible, for them. The use of questionnaires would in any event have been unsuitable as the nature of the study (in-depth) did not allow for the use of such methods. With the use of the interview method, all participants just had to respond orally to questions posed to them. I was very careful not to dominate the conversation. I allowed them time to express their views freely.

### **5.3. Documentary analysis**

Henning et al (2005 p. 98), state:

When documents are used as a method along with other methods, they are collected as entities of data and then follow the same route through analysis and interpretation. Documents can be valuable sources of information irrespective of their format, as long as they relate to the research topic.

Mbaaga (1990) cited in Ngaka (2004, p. 77) defines the documentary analysis method as the analysis of materials, which contain the information about the phenomenon the researcher

intends to study. In this research study, documentary analysis was used to complement data collected through the use of observation and interviewing methods.

The schedule for documentary analysis incorporated documents such as the Bible, work programs, agendas, minutes and notebooks (see Appendix 4.) The documents that I had access to and studied, included attendance registers, agendas for meetings, minutes, the Bible (different versions) and notebooks used for taking notes during church services and workshops/Bible classes. Each of these documents threw some light or provided crucial information regarding the phenomenon studied here.

Among the things that were analysed in the documents were the following:

- The nature of the document (printed text or written text)
- Language used and its level
- Frequency (how often is the document used)
- Purpose
- Target group.

The details for analysing the documents are shown on the research instrument (see Appendix 4).

### **Attendance registers**

My intention in checking attendance registers was to find out if they were used and how they were used especially because this is a document that is normally circulated for every individual to sign. It would be possible to identify those who cannot write because they would possibly ask for assistance. Sometimes it is also possible to judge a person's level of literacy by merely looking at the handwriting. Different types of handwriting also mean that people are writing their names individually whereas the same handwriting means that somebody is doing the register on someone else's behalf.

### **Agenda and minutes**

It is a common practice that meetings have an agenda which tabulates points to be discussed in the meeting. The meeting must have a record of the proceedings and resolutions taken (minutes). The meeting I observed had an agenda but there was no record of minutes read. According to the Secretary they did not have minutes because that was a special meeting; otherwise they keep minutes of all meetings. I wanted to find out if all members were given copies of these documents and also see what language was used and whether there was use of more than one language (English and IsiZulu). I also wanted to find out if the documents were handwritten or printed.

### **Bible**

The congregants of the African Gospel Church mainly use IsiZulu bibles and this was the reason why I chose the bible as one of the documents to be analysed. The bible is the main document (main source of reference) used in any church. Consequently, it is expected that all members should have it in their homes. Carrying the bible when attending a church service is also important for the congregants. However, carrying the bible does not mean that one can read it (Malan, 1996a). Indicators like inscriptions made on some pages, underlining/highlighting of verses and sometimes bookmarks in the form of pieces of paper were taken into account as far as judging the literacy practices of the church members was concerned.

### **Notebook**

Some members use notebooks as tools to record anything they find worth remembering. Others use diaries but I preferred to look at notebooks because I had an interest in finding out how the congregants used note books for different purposes. I was able to get access to a notebook of one participant and analysed what was written, the purpose of what was written and the language used.

## **5.4. Personal experience**

I have been a member of this church for more than 24 years and have had the privilege of occupying different positions such as circuit secretary, local preacher, district youth organiser and evangelist. Consequently, I have accumulated considerable experience regarding procedures and practices of the church, habits and attitudes of congregants and the tradition

of the church. My experience provided me with valuable information regarding some issues discussed in this study, especially under tensions between faith and literacy. While my personal experience was very useful I was aware of the dangers of using personal experience in a research study of this nature. This is dealt with in Section 8 of this chapter (Limitations of the study).

## **6. Data analysis**

Since this research falls under an interpretivist paradigm, its nature is mainly qualitative and likewise, all data was collected qualitatively. Cohen et al (2007, p. 461), contend:

The data analysis has a tendency to be influenced by the nature of the research design approach (paradigm that the researcher subscribes to).

For this reason it was inevitable that the process of data analysis was influenced by the research design and the methodology. The approach that I used was interpretive and descriptive in nature. I summarized the findings of the study according to themes and patterns and in this fashion the data analysis became a continuous exercise from the beginning of the data collection stage right through to the data analysis stage. Qualitative study requires qualitative data analysis and Maree (2007, p. 99), argues as follows about this method: “In qualitative data analysis, the process is ongoing and iterative, which means that data collection process and reporting are intertwined.”

Henning et al (2005), concur with Maree’s view when they contend that qualitative analysis takes place throughout the data collection process. She further maintains that the researcher will constantly reflect on impressions, relationships, and connections while analysing data. The search for similarities, differences, categories, themes, concepts and ideas forms part of the continuous process. This is the approach that I attempted to follow during the process of conducting observations, documentary analysis and interviews.

The thematic approach used here was accompanied by another method, which is, organizing data for analysis by research question as suggested by Cohen et al (2007). These authors regard this method as a very useful way of organizing data, as it draws together all the relevant data for the exact issue of concern to the researcher and preserves the coherence of

the material. I also chose to use this method because it kept me focused on the objectives of the research study.

The first research question of my study (What are the literacy practices that the church members engage in?) made me as the researcher focus specifically on the literacy practices of the congregants rather than on other things that they were doing. It was not intended to find out anything about what they ought to be doing or not doing, but what they did that constituted literacy practices. Consequently there was a set of questions intended to investigate this and likewise, the responses to such questions by the participants were grouped accordingly.

Another advantage of organizing by research question is that it always returns the reader to the driving concern of the research (Cohen et al, 2007). Lastly, organizing data by research question makes it possible for all the relevant data collected from various data streams like interviews, observation and documentary analysis to be collated to provide a collective answer to a research question.

All data collected was organized according to emergent themes which came from different sources and coding was done through using highlighters of different colours. All data was presented qualitatively hence its analysis also followed the same pattern. Even the tables used were not quantitative but only described the criteria used in the composition of the sample.

Henning et al (2005, p. 109), prefer to use the term “global analysis” (when describing the thematic approach which has been used here accompanied by the research question approach) to suggest an integrated view of the data and the way in which the main themes are identified. This is because of a holistic reading and accompanying notes and not just as a preparation for coding. Maree (2007) uses the term “categories” to explain themes. He points out that these themes or categories provide direction for what the researcher looks for in the data. The implication of this statement is that a researcher will have to identify themes even before categorizing data and that will be followed by searching the data for the text that matches the themes.

## **7. Ethics**

After having identified the sources of data for my research study, I had to make sure that the whole process for access arrangements was done. This included getting ethical clearance from a University Research Committee, negotiating access with the management and leadership of the Church (African Gospel Church), getting the informed consent from my participants and assuring them about observing the rule of confidentiality. I assured them that their names were not going to be disclosed and that wherever names were needed, only pseudonyms would be used. My “positionality” was declared to them because not all of them knew me and even those who did had to be made aware of my role as researcher which was different from being a member of the church. I ensured that the rights of my participants were respected. It was important to note that as the issue of literacy can be a socially sensitive one, as a researcher I was very careful when identifying church members who were illiterate (my approach and the way I introduced myself and the reason for interviewing them.). I was very careful not to offend them and to ensure that their literacy status was not addressed as a stigma. I assured all participants that they were going to be treated with respect and the dignity they deserve; that participation was voluntary; that they were free to withdraw should they feel uncomfortable or unhappy; and that there would be no penalty for such withdrawal. I also made sure that I did not make false promises or create high expectations in order to lure them. I tried my best to be fair and open and to keep to what had been agreed upon (for more information, refer to Appendices 5 and 6).

## **8. Limitations of the study**

All the logistics of the study were planned in advance and included the location of the study and the study sample. However, there were some practical problems which had methodological implications.

Observations and interviews were planned to be done within a month but practical problems like the cancellation of appointments due to unforeseen commitments by participants, stretched the time frame to about two months. Secondly, it was difficult to find non-literate congregants in the township. I had to contact people I knew to help me find non-literate congregants but even then I was unsuccessful. Church leadership, including the Pastor, seemed not to know people who were non-literate. It took me a long time before I eventually

got help from one member who advised me to visit the branches that were outside the township (in the squatter area) but falling under the jurisdiction of KwaMashu Circuit. It was in one of these branches that I managed to locate three congregants (two females and one male).

The male member appeared to be mentally challenged and this was confirmed by the fact that he was earning a social grant and I decided to drop him as he did not appear to be a suitable participant. I ended up interviewing only two non-literate congregants instead of three whom I had intended to interview initially. This was an unanticipated challenge and it automatically had an impact in as far as set time frames for the study were concerned. On top of that, this challenge also had some financial implications as I had to do more trips than planned.

The composition of my sample was changed by the above mentioned challenge (difficulty of finding non-literate participants). One of the non-literate congregants was not totally illiterate as she had dropped out of school at Grade two, but I ended up choosing her because her literacy level was very elementary and she could hardly read and write.

It was mentioned at the introduction of the study that the African Gospel Church is a large denomination organized into districts and circuits. The doctrine of the church is the same but what is practiced in one district or circuit is not necessarily the same as what is done in another district or circuit. Consequently, it is unfair and incorrect to generalize the findings of this study as if they pertained to the whole church. The situation at KwaMashu may be unique and different.

Lastly, where quantitative information was needed to justify certain statements made by participants, it was not found due to poor recording and unavailability of records. For instance, all participants agreed that there were some congregants who were not literate, but no one could tell the number of such people. The most surprising was that the circuit management, in particular the Pastor and the secretary, could not tell me the total number of the church membership. There were no records and they based their figures on guesswork. Neither could this information be organized demographically.

It is important to conclude this chapter by clarifying my position as one of the members of this church. I am an Evangelist and I perform all the leadership roles within my job description. I worship in Pietermaritzburg Circuit but do have the privilege of visiting other Circuits often, preaching the word of God. My areas of specialization are preaching and teaching.

My position in the church enabled me to know more about practices and habits of the congregants; hence certain views expressed here partly drew on my own experiences and knowledge. This was a limitation on its own. However, I tried my best not to look at things as a member of the church but through the lens of an “outsider” and this helped me to look objectively at how literacy was used and valued by the congregants of this circuit. Nevertheless, the fact that I am a member of the church and that I have had the advantage of serving as both an ordinary member and a leader, has sometimes not left me free from subjective judgements. Such judgements might have sometimes affected my findings to some extent but as I have mentioned above, I always kept in mind that I was a researcher and hence I needed to be as objective as possible.

My literacy and education status together with the position I am holding in the church, might have also had impact on the issue of power relations. There is no evidence regarding the latter but in my experience it is a common practice in our church that those who are in leadership positions are respected and “feared.” The non-literate members, in particular, are not free to express their objective opinions to them and it becomes more difficult if the leaders are educated. For this reason, I cannot totally deny that the issue of power relations between me and some of my participants might have had some impact on the findings of the study. This was the reason for me to declare my position to them by trying to explain that my education and church positions were not the issue. Instead I was a researcher with an interest in finding out information from them. I did my best to make them feel empowered, informative and the reliable source of information I needed.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **1. Introduction**

The main focus of this study was to find out more about the literacy practices of the church members of a particular church (African Gospel Church). The previous chapter presented the research methodology used in collecting all the data that are used here or helped in answering the three critical questions posed in the first chapter of the study. The four critical questions were:

- What are the literacy practices that the congregants engage in?
- How do non-literate church members cope with the literacy demands of church literacy practices?
- What are the literacy events occurring or identified in the church?
- How do congregants value literacy?

This chapter is the core of the whole dissertation and it focuses on my findings and analysis thereof gained through an in-depth qualitative case study which used three selected research methodologies in the form of observations, interviews and documentary analysis. All data collected have been organized into broad categories based on common themes. In organizing data into common themes and analysing my findings, I tried to be very careful not to lose sight of the key research questions because they kept me focused on the objectives of my study.

I have studied the interview responses, notes taken during observation of church committee meetings, Bible class, church service and documentary analysis. The presentation of findings and analysis is done simultaneously in this chapter and is presented in the following order:

1. The African Gospel Church
  - The structure of the African Gospel Church
  - Ethos, culture and the tradition of the Church. A brief description of KwaMashu Circuit.
2. Background of research participants (interviewees)
3. Common types of literacy events
  - Church services
  - Workshops/Bible classes

- Church committee meetings.
4. Participation/exclusion and coping strategies
  5. Value attached to literacy
  6. Tensions between faith and literacy
  7. Vernacular versus English literacy
  8. Conclusion.

## **2. The African Gospel Church**

Most of this background information comes from the KwaMashu circuit congregants as well as from my own personal experience as a member of this denomination. In my capacity as an Evangelist, I have had the privilege of working in most of the church structures where I meet with senior leaders and elders of the church which has helped me to learn more about the history as well as the organization of the church.

### **2.1. A brief description of the Church structure and line functions**

The African Gospel Church is one of the Pentecostal churches and is found in all nine provinces of South Africa which are referred to as districts. The districts are under the leadership of Superintendents (Senior Pastors) and they are further divided into circuits which are in turn divided into branches. The circuits are managed by Circuit Pastors whereas the branches are managed by the Local Preachers. The Local Preachers of each circuit report to the Circuit Pastor whereas the Circuit Pastors of each district report to the District Superintendent and all District Superintendents report directly to the office of the National Moderator who is the head of the church.

As explained in the above paragraph, the church has a bureaucratic protocol starting from the lower level (branch) to the upper level (national). The Local Preacher is in charge of a branch and reports to the Circuit Pastor who is in charge of a circuit (formed of branches). Between the Circuit Pastor and a Local Preacher there may be a Circuit Evangelist who becomes an assistant to the Circuit Pastor, especially if the circuit is very big. A Circuit Evangelist may be allocated some branches/branch to manage but under supervision of a Circuit Pastor. A Circuit Pastor reports to a District Superintendent. The latter is in charge of a district (formed

of circuits) and reports to the Moderator who is the head of the church (formed of different districts).

The Moderator, the Vice Moderator, the Secretary, the Vice Secretary, the National Treasurer and the Field Organizing Secretary form the National Executive of the Church. The National Executive together with all District Superintendents, their Deputies and two representatives per district, form the Central Executive Committee. All Pastors, Evangelists and their wives and delegates from each circuit form the General Conference, which is the body that endorses all decisions and resolutions of the church.

## **2.2. Ethos, culture and tradition of the church**

The African Gospel Church, a faith-based Pentecostal church, follows the Christian religion. The members of this church believe in the Trinity of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

Conversion rather than merely joining the church is heavily stressed in this church and this is followed by confession of sins before one is immersed in deep waters (baptism). To be a full member of this church, a person must undergo these three steps under the close counselling of a leader (Pastor, Evangelist or Local Preacher). The confession of sins and baptism are preceded by workshops/Bible classes or counselling sessions, where reading the Bible is integral. It is during such sessions that people are inducted into the doctrine, religious practices and code of conduct of the church.

The African Gospel Church recognizes, respects and values the presence of the Holy Spirit and it is therefore expected and recommended that each member be filled with the power of the Holy Ghost whom Jesus Christ called the Comforter, Guide, Teacher and Counsellor (St John, 16: 7-13).

## **2.3. A brief description of KwaMashu Circuit**

The KwaMashu Circuit is one of the many circuits of the African Gospel Church and is so-called because it is located in KwaMashu Township. This is a large, predominantly black township in Durban which boasts a rich history of being a descendent of a big multi-racial squatter township called Cator Manor (Umkhumbane) which existed during the apartheid era (Govender et al, 1999). The Circuit consists of twelve branches which are referred to as

“units.” Some are within the township and some are in the neighbouring areas outside the township. The branches are managed by Local Preachers who report directly to the Circuit Pastor. The membership of the church appears to reflect the character of the community (in terms of life styles and culture) that the church serves.

KwaMashu as a Circuit not only includes people from the Township but also from semi-urban/squatter areas surrounding KwaMashu Township, like Lindelani, Bester and Nhlungwane. It is difficult to comment on the demographics of the church because there were no figures available. However, according to my general observation when visiting this Circuit and during my official observation day for purposes of this study, it appeared that there are more females than males. When I tried to estimate the number of youth and the elders, they appeared to be almost the same. However, as I have said before, this cannot be generalized because it is not based on quantitative evidence.

#### **2.4. Background information about participants (interviewees)**

The sample of my research participants was purposively and carefully selected from a range of categories which comprised leadership, non-literate and literate congregants. The intention for selecting my sample in this fashion was to ensure that I had the right people to give me the information that I needed. The topic of the research study as well as critical questions posed in the introduction, also guided me to arrive at these categories because I needed to get the views, experiences as well as practices of the congregants who represent the whole church. The membership of the church consists of the leadership and the ordinary congregants who include non-literate and literate congregants. Information about the interviewees was presented in Chapter 3 (Methodology) in the form of a table. For purposes of data presentation, I present here a brief narrative account of each participant in the form of a mini case history.

##### **2.4.1. Leadership**

Under this category, I selected the Pastor and the Secretary for specific reasons. The Pastor is the leader and the manager of the Circuit, and by virtue of his position, he appeared to be a key person in the leadership who could provide valuable information. His background and educational history was another reason for me to select him. The Church Secretary is a key person when it comes to church administration. His position requires that he be literate

because of the kinds of tasks he has to perform. His key responsibilities involve reading and writing and consequently, valuable information regarding literacy in the church could be obtained from him.

## **Pastor**

### **General socio-biographical information**

The Pastor's name is Abednigo Zulu and he was born and bred in a remote, deep, rural area (Emakhabeleni in Kranskop). He is 70 years of age, married and blessed with two daughters. He converted to Christianity and became a member of the African Gospel Church in May 1961. He was called to the ministry after a few years and was ordained as a Local Preacher, Circuit Evangelist, and then a Pastor. After a long period of service as a Pastor, he was elected to the high leadership position of Vice- Moderator of the African Gospel Church.

### **Educational information/background**

He is well educated as he has tertiary qualifications. His literacy history is very interesting and may seem unbelievable to others because he learnt to read and write when he was over 18 years of age. He attended adult school when he worked as an ordinary labourer in Durban (Overport), where he registered with a Roman Catholic Church Adult School. After completing Standard six, he developed a passion for doing Bible courses. He then registered with Union Bible Institute in Pietermaritzburg, where he got a Certificate in Pastoral Ministry. He then registered with Damelin College, where he passed his Junior Certificate (Std 8).

After that, he studied towards Matric which he completed at Ndwedwe (north of Durban), on a part time basis with the assistance of a local Roman Catholic Church. It appears from his educational background that the Roman Catholic Church had a big role to play in his school education. It is noted that he converted to the African Gospel Church but the Roman Catholic Church played a big role in his educational background.

The qualifications that he has are the following; Diploma in Pastoral Ministry (U.B.I.), Diploma in Church Growth (London), Diploma in Theology (University of Natal).

His passion for studying theology emanated from the fact that he felt a deep calling for the work of God. Secondly, he has a passion to search for information and does not want to talk

about something that he has not researched. He regards himself as a perfectionist, an actor and a demonstrator and he believes in learning and practicing before performing.

## **Secretary**

### **General socio-biographical information**

The Secretary's name is Themba Ngubo. He was born in Umkhomazi but grew up in KwaMashu. He is 51 years of age, married and blessed with three children, two girls and one boy. He is employed as a manager by the Umgungundlovu District Municipality.

He has been a member of this church since his childhood and currently holds the position of Circuit Secretary.

### **Educational information and background**

He is well-educated and can read and write all Nguni languages spoken in South Africa as well English and Afrikaans. He holds tertiary qualifications (degree and honours degree) in Political Science. His reason for pursuing a course in Political Science was due to his interest and passion for politics which developed at an early age. He studied for this course before he even became a full-time member of this church.

#### **2.4.2. Literate congregants**

The three congregants interviewed under this category ranged between 32 and 58 years. The level of education of these three members is indicative of the fact that there are educated people in the church but with varying levels of education. Their socio-biographical and educational information is presented below.

#### **Mr. Moses Msomi**

##### **General socio-biographical information**

Mr Moses Msomi is 58 years old, married and blessed with four children. He was born in Zululand but was brought up in Durban where he has spent most of his life. He is self-employed (Funeral Undertaker). He has been a member of this church since 1990. He once occupied the position of Treasurer but is now an ordinary member.

### **Educational information and background**

He can read and write isiZulu, English and Afrikaans with understanding. His highest level of education is Matric which he attained during his years of formal schooling. He does not have tertiary education but he is upgrading himself in the work that he is doing. He became literate long before he converted to Christianity and he once tried to do further studies but work commitments prevented him and by that time he was working for an insurance company. That was long before he became self-employed.

### **Mr. Sfiso Chamane**

#### **General socio-biographical information**

Sfiso Chamane is a young man of 32 years of age and still single. He lives at Ntuzuma Township with his mother. He is employed and works for Smith Company in Pinetown as a tool controller. He has been a member of this church for 9 years and was elected as Secretary of the Youth Wing (This position does not qualify him to be part of the Circuit Leadership).

#### **Educational information/ background**

He can read and write both in isiZulu and English. He attained his education under formal schooling. He has a tertiary qualification (Further Education and training/F.E.T. level), a diploma in Marketing Management. The reason for him to pursue this tertiary qualification was that he had a passion to work in advertising as a career. Unfortunately this required him to register with a university but shortage of funds hindered him and as a second option, he opted to do this diploma with an F.E.T. College. His love for advertising started even before he converted to Christianity (becoming a member of this church). He is still doing his further studies on a part-time basis with University of South Africa (B.Com degree).

### **Mrs. Sibongile Dlomo**

#### **General socio-biographical information**

Sibongile Dlomo is 50 years of age and was born at Mtubatuba but grew up in KwaMashu Township. She was married but is now a widow and blessed with two children (boys) who are 13 and 24 years of age. She is employed as Housekeeper and Supervisor of cleaners at Addington Hospital (Durban). She has been a member of this Church for 15 years.

### **Educational information and background**

She can read and write and learnt these skills at school. She claims to be not that good at English but tries to read and write it although she has problems with spelling and pronouncing certain words. At school she went as far as Std 8 (Grade 10) and was forced to drop out due to financial problems. She had never thought about registering for adult classes to complete her matric as nobody ever advised her about it. She is reluctant to register now because of age and she thinks that she cannot cope now.

#### **2.4.3 Non- literate congregants**

The two members interviewed under this category are middle aged females.

#### **Mrs. Mantombi Mthethwa**

##### **General socio biographical information**

Mantombi Mthethwa was born and grew up at KwaMambulu (Kranskop). She is 42 years of age, married and has two children aged between 12 and 19 years. She is an ordinary housewife, not employed and survives on a disability grant. Her husband is also unemployed and relies on temporary jobs. She became a member of this church in 1996 and is currently entrusted with the position of Youth Treasurer of the branch. She is not literate but was elected to this position on the grounds of maturity in Christianity and the assumption that she would get help from the Secretary.

##### **Educational information/ background**

Her ability to read and write is very basic. She says she can only write basic things but sometimes she encounters problems. It is the same with reading. She says she stammers and only reads for herself, specifically the Zulu Bible. At school she went as far as Grade Two before she could learn reading and writing satisfactorily. She dropped out because of illness. However, the environment also had an impact because education was not valued especially for girls who were only prepared as future housewives. She once tried to attend adult school but unfortunately she was the only one and the teacher who volunteered to help found it difficult to teach her alone.

## **Mrs. Nokuphila Cele**

### **General Socio biological information**

Nokuphila Cele is 48 years old, married and has six children, ranging between 6 and 24 years of age. She was also born in Ntunjambili (Kranskop). She became a member of this church in 2000. She holds the position of Youth Organizer for which she regards herself as not suitable since she is not literate. She dropped out of school before finishing Grade 2 when she could hardly read or write.

### **Educational information/background**

She can only read and write her name and surname. When it comes to reading, she claims that she tries to read the Bible but not very well. She learned to write her name and surname in the adult school that she once attended for a short while. She did not mention any major reason for not attending school except that it was due to the background she grew up in. According to her, when she realized the need for schooling; she was very old which made her demotivated. She also blamed her family for the fact that nobody encouraged her to go to school.

## **3. Common types of literacy events**

There are three types of literacy events that dominate in the church and they are instances where literacy in this church finds meaning. The literacy events in this church differ in terms of their frequency and I have therefore chosen to present them in that particular order as follows:

- church services
- Bible classes
- Church committee meetings.

### **3.1. Church services**

These are formal gatherings where congregants come together for the purpose of worshipping God. Church services occur at different levels depending on the nature of or motive behind that service. There are normal church services which are held every Sunday where local branches/units gather at KwaMashu Mission and worship together. Congregants from other

branches that are far from the township gather at their respective venues and worship God. At least once a month, all branches convene together at KwaMashu to partake in Holy Communion.

Other than services held on Sundays, there are also services held during the weekdays for revival purposes and the dates and times for these home cells (as they are called) are announced during Sunday services. There are also services held at district and national levels like Good Friday and July Annual Conferences but these are ceremonial conferences which are not necessarily the same as the ordinary church services.

I had the opportunity of observing one church service which is referred to as “Big/Holy Communion Service” (*Isono lesidlo*). This kind of service where all branches/units congregate to worship together is held once a month. The main reason for me to choose this day was because I wanted to observe the whole church of KwaMashu worshipping together. It was also an advantage to me because that it is a day of Holy Communion, and becomes a fully-fledged service where all ritual activities like Holy Communion, consecration of children and offerings are performed.

The church started at 10h00, with the Chorus Leader (*Umhlabelisi*) leading the congregation in the singing of choruses. This was a part of the service which took about 30 minutes and allowed the congregation an opportunity for total dedication to God in the form of worship. The chorus leader started by using the hymn book entitled “*Icilongo Levangeli*” which could be interpreted in English as the “Gospel Trumpet”. Some members of the congregation, young and old had their own hymn books that they had brought with them. As they sang, I observed that not all of them were singing from the hymn books. Like the congregants who did not have hymn books they were singing from memory. The use of hymn books by the congregants indicates that reading is not used when reading the Bible only, but even when the congregants are singing. According to De la Piedra (2010), the *hermanos* (Christians) of Uripipata liked to sing using *himinarios* (hymn books).

As the congregants began to pack the church hall to its capacity, the singing again gained momentum and the Chorus Leader suddenly switched over to choruses. The chorus is different from the hymn in the sense that it is just a stanza from the hymn that is sung

repeatedly and its melody allows the congregants to dance. Sometimes the choruses are not taken from the hymn books but are artistically created by gifted individuals and these are very popular in Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. The spirit was very high and almost the whole congregation began to dance and sing, clapping their hands and jumping, seemingly out of excitement and joy from the Holy Spirit.

At this stage, the Chorus Leader handed over to the Pastor who then requested the whole congregation to stand up and to sing song number 43 from the hymn books. The congregation stood up after one member had started the song. The congregation joined in singing and after finishing, they all prayed individually. Prayer in this church is not formulaic but there is freedom for an individual to pray in his/her own way. Congregants were praying aloud, shouting and some were speaking in tongues. This was an opening prayer and when it was over, the Pastor called upon the church choir (predominantly youth) to sing. The choir rendered two musical items which were both in English and were sung from memory. After the choir the Pastor made some opening remarks, greeted and welcomed everybody present and then called upon the Secretary to do announcements.

The Secretary ascended the podium with his diary and some pieces of paper which were hand written and began with the announcements. While he was busy reading announcements, some people submitted written notices to the podium while others interrupted him by whispering in his ear. He then wrote down this information. The announcements included dates and venues for branch services, reminders regarding respective offerings, reports about sick congregants to be visited and so on. One of the announcements was a wedding invitation card which was printed in English which the Secretary read in English and then interpreted in isiZulu. It read thus:

You are cordially invited to grace the wedding of Ntando Jacob Zikhali, the first son of Mr. and Mrs. B.E. Zikhali.

TO

Nomathemba Gladys Msweli, the last daughter of Mr. and Mrs. T.E. Msweli

Date: 27 July 2009

Venue: Newlands East Community Hall.

Time: 10.00

Lunch 13.00 @ Newlands East Community Hall

Reception: 15.00 @ Newlands East Community Hall.

NB. Your presence will be highly appreciated.

Another announcement was a thank you card written in English which read thus;

Dear Pastor and the Congregation

The Ndwandwe family wishes to express sincere thanks to all brethren who shared and comforted them during sad moments of losing their beloved mother. It was very much appreciated, may God bless you all.

From Miss T. P. Ndwandwe and Family

The Secretary took about 10 minutes to make announcements in isiZulu. He then handed over to the Pastor who embarked on the next part of the service by requesting the congregation to give praises to God by singing a worshipping chorus entitled: “We give you all the glory”. This chorus was sung from memory by the congregation (it was not easy to identify if everybody knew it), after which he then embarked on the sermon. He called upon one member to read the word of God from the 1<sup>st</sup> book of Thessalonians, 5. 23 and he read from the isiZulu version as per the Pastor’s request. The Pastor also requested another member to read from the English version, before he began with the sermon based on this text. It was not easy to check if all members had their own Bibles, neither was it easy to identify those who had the English version but from what I observed, almost all the members had their own Bibles. I think the Pastor knew those who had the English version because he called one member by his name (David) to read it. When the first reader read in isiZulu, some congregants were reading silently in their own Bibles. I also observed that others had their Bibles open but were not reading them. It was difficult to tell if those who had their Bibles open but were not reading them were literate or not because during the interview sessions I found that listening to the reader and not following was preferred by some congregants even if they were literate (communal reading). They paid attention to the person who was reading.

The Pastor had a Bible and a clipboard in front of him to which he kept referring. As he continued with his sermon, I noticed that a few congregants were taking some notes in their

notebooks and diaries while most congregants did not write but were listening to the Pastor nodding their heads and shouting, “Amen!”

His message was that a man is three in one; meaning that he is flesh, spirit and soul/mind and he even did a practical demonstration to make his sermon more meaningful. He requested three young men to come to the front. One represented the flesh, the second one represented the spirit and the third one represented the soul/mind. He then explained how the Word of God works in the three parts of a man. After concluding the first section of the service he then moved to the second section which was a Holy Communion section. There was no break between the two sections but the Pastor simply switched over to the second section. He said in Zulu, “Brethren, we are now engaging in a sacred part of our Service, let those who are ready to partake, take positions.”

A special song relevant to this service was sung and everybody seemed to know it by heart. The Deacon and Senior Preachers then prepared the table in front of the congregation. Scripture from 1<sup>st</sup> book of Corinthians 11: 23-29 was read for this special service. The Pastor requested the Secretary to read from the isiZulu Bible and the congregation, as usual, opened their Bibles as well. There was then a brief explanation by the Pastor before the Sacramental Service was performed. The Pastor prayed for the wine and sacrament and then handed it to the Preachers who then served the congregants while seated. This marked the end of the Pastor’s service and after conducting a benediction, he handed over to the Treasurer to lead the offering section.

The offering section was the last part of the service to be performed. The Treasurer called each and every branch to the stage according to the written register. There was big excitement as they all sang and danced while submitting their offerings. The Treasurers and his assistants counted and recorded all moneys submitted by each branch after which the totals were announced to the congregation. After finishing with offerings, the Pastor performed the final benediction which marked the closure or conclusion of the church service.

Reading dominated in the church service in three main activities: when the congregants sang from the hymn books; when they read from their Bibles during the sermon presentation and during the reading of announcements. Writing was not commonly practiced except by the few

congregants who were writing in their notebooks and diaries during the sermon presentation and announcement time. It is a common practice for the members to carry their own Bibles and hymn books and the implication is that these two books are very important and valued by the church and the members. Although they do not always sing from the hymn books because they know many of the songs by heart, there are times where the Pastor will call upon the congregation to sing a particular song from the hymn books. This happens at special times like when he officially opens the service. A Chorus Leader sometimes switches over from choruses to use the hymn books and this compels the congregation to use the hymn books because they may not know all the songs by heart.

During the presentation of the sermon it appeared that it was procedural to have one person reading the Bible on behalf of the whole congregation. Congregants were following from their own Bibles quietly.

The increasing practice of writing by some of the congregants during sermon presentation indicates that some of them are now embracing the culture of documenting information rather than relying on memory. Documenting information has the advantage of reviewing and using it in future when it is most needed. Sometimes the Pastor says a lot of things during the sermon which are not easy for one to absorb and understand at once, and it is during such situations that writing some notes becomes important and useful to those who do it.

As a member of this church, I know that preparing a sermon on paper is not a common practice in the African Gospel Church. The Preachers generally have a belief that the power of the Holy Ghost helps one to remember everything. In fact even the verse that one reads from the Bible is believed to be revealed by the Holy Spirit and it is the same Holy Spirit again that helps one to explain the content of the verse and conveys the message in the form of a sermon. However, it was interesting to note that the Pastor on that day had prepared his sermon in writing and he kept referring to his clipboard file while preaching. In my discussion with the Pastor during the interview, he explained:

*Abanye abazalwane njengami nje bayabhala izinto ezithile njengama vesi ebhayibheli kanye nezingcaciso zezintshumayelo. Nabo abashumayelayo abanye sebeyabhala phansi amaphuzu abasuke bezoshumayela ngawo, njengami nje ngikwenza impela lokho.*

(Some people like me write some verses and key notes when the Preacher preaches. Even the Preachers, a few of them now write some brief preparations for the sermons to be delivered. I for one make sure that I have my written preparation when I am preaching.)

The people that the Pastor is referring to are in the minority and according to him they involve the youth. This was confirmed by my observation that very few people used writing material (like pens, notebooks/diaries) in the church service. From what I gathered from most of the interviewees, writing during church services is not common. This is confirmed by the following examples of responses from the interviewees:

Secretary (Themba Ngubo): When it comes to writing, we do take down some notes when the Pastor delivers the sermon but this is not done by everybody, very few engage in this exercise of writing.

Moses Msomi: Writing is not much practiced in the church, very few people write (educated/literate).

Sfiso Chamane: In my case, I cannot say which of the two I do the most, but I think I try to read the Bible on my own, just a few verses, but I cannot claim to be a reader at all as I find difficulty with other words.

When analysing these responses, I found that literacy in the form of writing is not as much practiced as reading. The majority of the congregants use reading and apparently it is mostly when they interact with the Bible. Nevertheless, writing seems to be now increasingly practiced by the few, who are beginning to realize the importance of documenting information. I think one reason that makes the congregants view reading as more important than writing is that writing is more individualistic/personal whereas reading can be communal because it can be done aloud thus including even those who cannot read on their own.

I also had the privilege of accessing some personal documents of the participants which was done with their permission following ethical procedures. They included the Bible (isiZulu

version) and a personal note book. Below is a copy of a Bible passage which is underlined and highlighted.

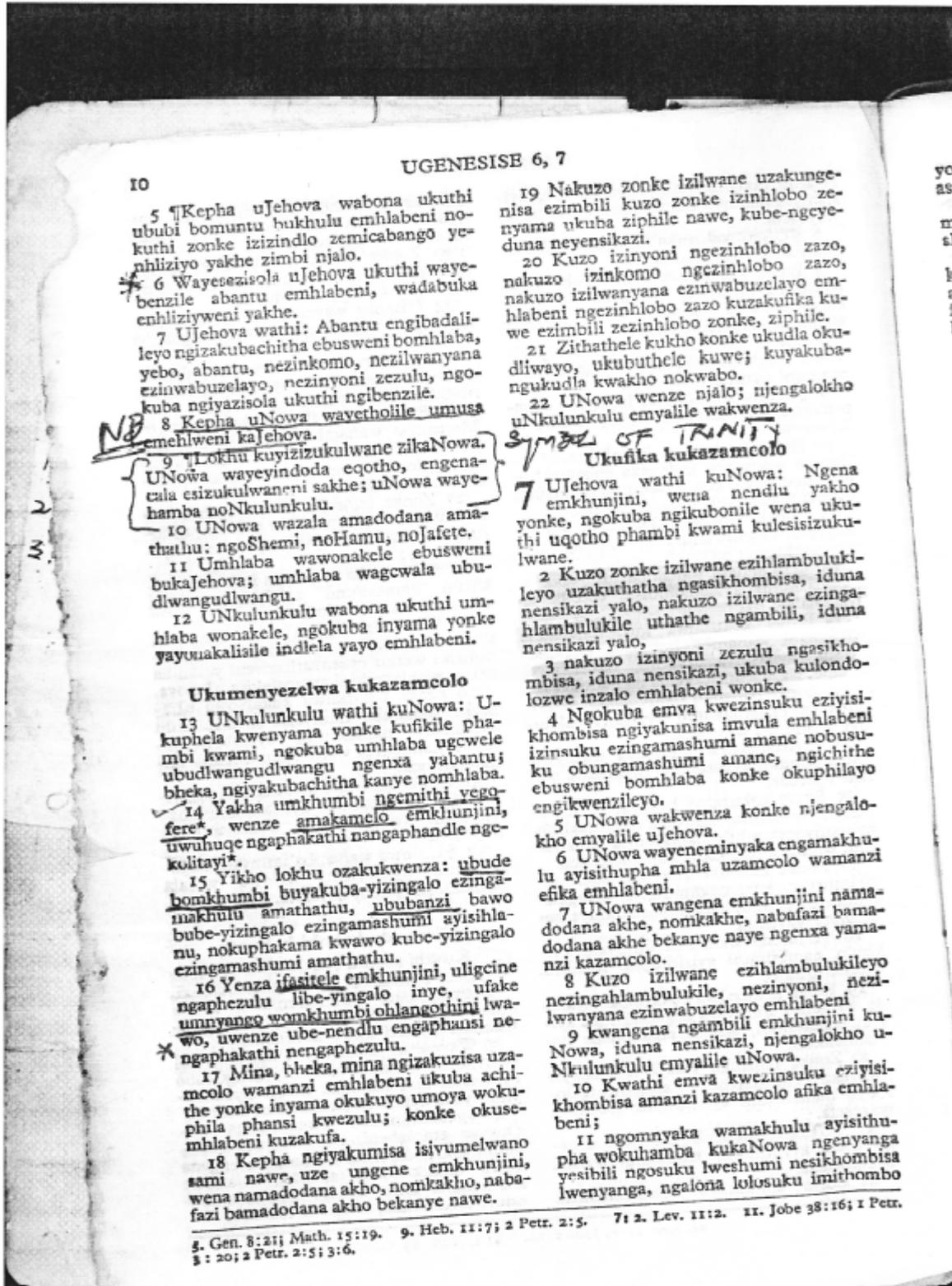


Figure 1: A copy of Bible passage.

This example comes from Siphon Zondi's Bible which does not seem to be old at all, although it looks as though it is. The pages are soft and folded with some passages highlighted in different colours and sometimes underlined. Siphon claims that this helps him to identify important verses easily when he studies the Bible. He is so attached to his Bible that he finds it difficult to use another one. The markings and folded pages are indications that this is a frequently used Bible. They show that that this gentleman does not use the Bible during church services only but reads and annotates it at home. According to him, he reads more (particularly, the Bible) than he writes.

Another document that I analysed was the notebook of Nosiphon Mdlalose. This is a pocket notebook that she usually carries when attending a church service or Bible class. It is full of references to books of the Bible and verses, accompanied by relevant topics and messages. She also writes announcements and dates of important events in this book which makes it work as diary as well. Below are examples of photocopies from the notebook.

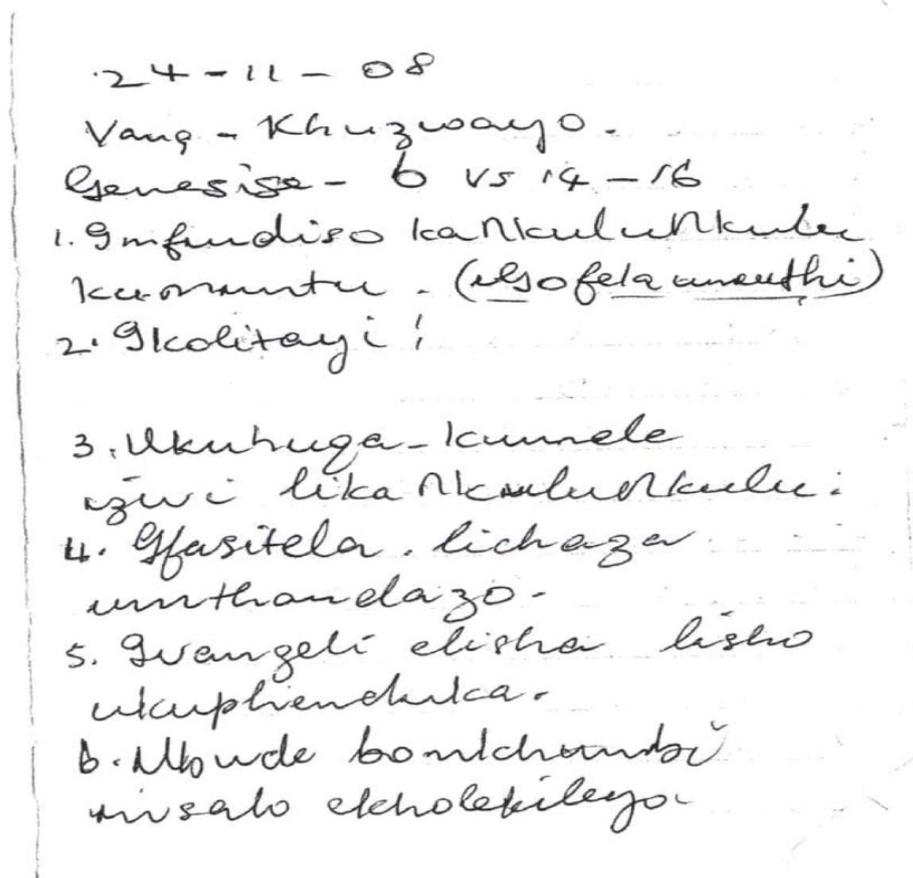
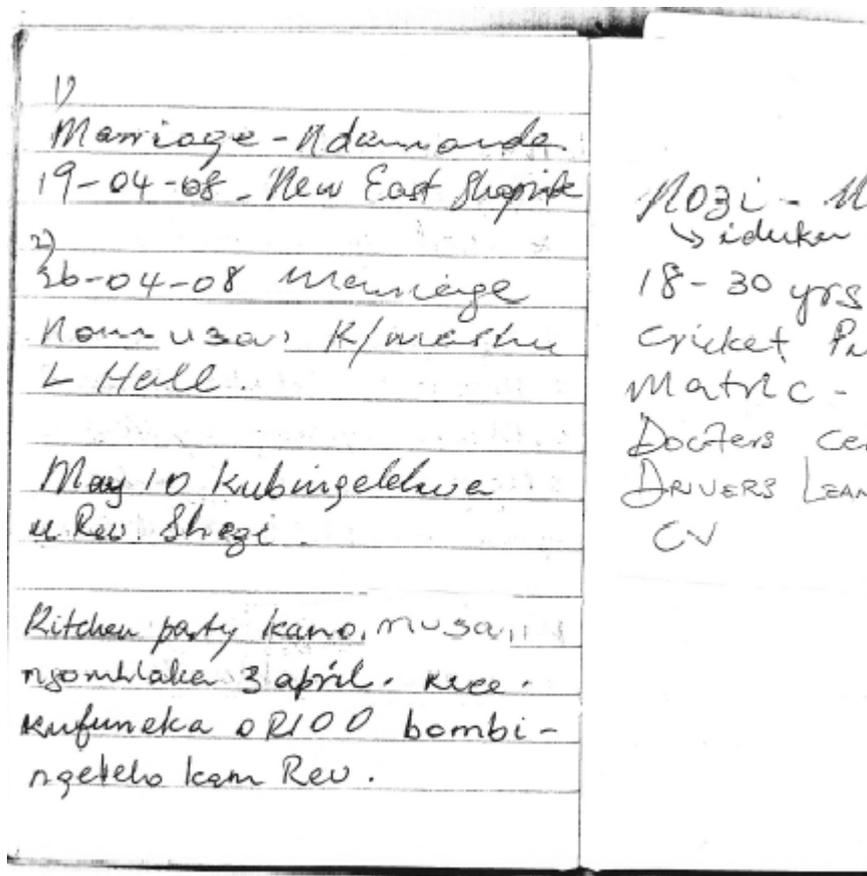


Figure 2: Bible message and verses extracted from a notebook

The sermon is dated and bears the name of a Preacher. The message of the sermon is based on the book of Genesis chapter 6, Verses 14-16. The message of the sermon is summarized under six points. This message is written in isiZulu and is well organized in terms of the date, the person who preached the Bible passage read, as well as the theme that was discussed. Literacy obviously works for this lady as she seems to be making much use of it. It is a big advantage for her to have this sermon summarized like this because she can refer to it when she is doing her own study. Writing is therefore an important literacy skill that some congregants utilize to their advantage.

Below is an extract from Nosipho's notebook which records church announcements.



**Figure 3: An extract of announcement from a participant's notebook**

It is noted in the above copy that there is a combination of both isiZulu and English which shows that Nosipho is able to write in English as well. The use of lower case in the word

April and the incorrect spelling of the word “doctors” is an indication of her level of education. Nevertheless this is good example of the use of literacy by this member.

### **3.2. Bible classes**

These are typical Sunday school classes conducted by the Pastor every Sunday from 9.00 to 10.30, before the main service and they basically deal with issues related to growth in Christian life, faith and spiritual matters. The Bible is the main source of reference. These workshops are commonly referred to as Bible classes since teaching, learning and discussions are based on the Bible. Other than the Bible, religious literature books such as “*Umdobi*” (Fisherman) are also used for enrichment purposes. During my observation of a Bible Study class, I found that literacy was practiced by the congregants but more reading was done than writing. The congregants who read were good readers who were reading aloud for everybody.

According to the Pastor, Bible classes are conducted on Sundays and they precede the formal church service. These Bible classes take about an hour. In an interview with the Pastor regarding the attendance at these Bible classes, he said the following:

Attendance at these classes is voluntary, hence not all members attend. Although I encourage the congregants to attend, the majority do not attend these Bible classes.

The congregants are still reluctant to attend as they consider themselves as very old to learn hence, they regard these sessions as meant for youth and educated people, but they nevertheless do appreciate and value this initiative.

In the interview with one of the non-literate congregants, Mantombi Mthethwa, she said the following:

It is difficult to comment much on the Bible classes because I do not attend them. I only attended once and I got discouraged because it was more of learning than a church service and there was a lot of reading that was done. The involvement of everybody made me feel that I was going to have a problem as I am not able to read.

The above two interview extracts reveal some of the causes for non-attendance of some congregants at these Bible classes. One cause that comes out clearly here is that illiteracy is a hindrance to some. The other one is that there are those who regard themselves as not being able to cope with learning because of age as they regard learning as something that belongs to

the young ones. This second reason is also somehow linked to the illiteracy factor because it is commonly related to age.

On 15 March, 2009, I had the privilege of observing one of these Bible classes which was conducted by the Pastor at KwaMashu Circuit. There were 56 attendees but when I attended the church service which followed, I found that the church was packed to such an extent that some congregants were standing at the back. I then realized that very few people attended Bible class. I noticed that in the class there were more women than men and when I asked the Pastor about the significance of this gender imbalance he told me that the active participants in these Bible classes were women, most of whom were Sunday school teachers (Children's Forum). The women were a mixture of ages whereas men were mainly young with only two of middle age. This Children's Forum is very active in organizing Bible classes and it was through it that Bible courses in the church were initiated. The Sunday school wing is predominantly female because most of the teachers trained to teach children are women.

The teaching-learning environment was well organized, but in a traditional way as congregants were all seated facing the Pastor who was in the front. There was a chalkboard but this was not used as the textbook method seemed to be dominating. All attendees were carrying their Bibles and hymn books. I observed that there were a few congregants who had their notebooks/diaries and pens and on the table in front of the Pastor was a pile of books.

The class started with singing by all members. One member started a chorus which was sung from memory by all. The title of the song was; "My Bible and I" and it exalts the Bible as a wonderful treasure. After that there was a scripture reading from the isiZulu Bible which the Pastor asked one member to read aloud while others followed quietly in their own Bibles. The Pastor made brief remarks based on the scripture followed by a general prayer. He then welcomed everybody present and this was followed by the introduction of the lesson.

The topic of the lesson read thus: "*Ukuba ivangeli sikwazi ukulixoxa,*" which in English means; "To be able to talk about /discuss the gospel of Christ". The objective of the lesson was to prepare and train congregants in the ministry of "Soul Winners." The theme of the lesson and its objective was therefore to equip Christians with the strategies of evangelism, one of which is talking to people about the gospel of Christ and making it more practical than

preaching the theory. After the introduction of the lesson, he then issued copies of the book called “*Umdobi*” (Fisherman). Congregants were asked to read from the book on a rotation basis. Some were reading voluntarily whereas others were requested by the Pastor to read.

Although all participants had books that were handed out by the Pastor I noticed that some were not referring to those books at all; instead they relied on the reader. I was not sure about why certain people did not refer to their books but it seemed to me that the class wanted to resemble the character of a church service where people have the tendency to rely on one person who reads the Bible and to concentrate on the Pastor who preaches the word. One reader at a time here seems to act as a literacy mediator for most of the members of this class. In the course of the reading, the Pastor provided some explanations and also posed some questions just to check if the class was following the lesson. The reading from the book was also supported by verses read from the Bible.

The few people who had brought writing material, wrote notes and I also noticed that certain individuals were involved in all the activities (reading, writing and answering of questions) without any difficulty. Among those were a few people I happened to know who are professional people and the youth who are either at high school or tertiary institutions. While a few of the congregants were writing, the majority were simply listening intently to the Pastor. I was not sure about their reasons for not reading or writing and solely relying on listening and memorization but I cannot deduce that they could not read and write.

Singing was done at short intervals and was in the form of short choruses. I think the intention was to keep congregants awake and to ensure that the church spirit was there as a guiding core of the event. The choruses were sung from memory and everybody seemed to cope with singing even if it was in the medium of English. When listening carefully, I could hear that some people were articulating certain words wrongly which could be an indication that they were singing without understanding.

The documents that were used during the Bible classes were Bibles, a textbook (*Umdobi*), and notebooks/diaries. According to the Pastor, he sometimes prepares handouts but none was available on that day. The Pastor carried a personal file which contained his prepared lessons. I observed that the Bible was used in the same way as it was used during the church

service. Those congregants who could write practiced this activity the same way as they did in a church service. I was interested to see the contents of the Pastor's file and at the end of the lesson I made a humble request to see his file which he did not have a problem with. I found two copies of work: one that he had prepared for the learners (congregants) of KwaMashu Circuit, and another one that was prepared for Bible College students (who are members of the African Gospel Church) that he teaches. Photocopies of these two documents are shown below.



# ETC TRUTH MINISTRIES COLLEGE

MONTH & DATE	LECTURER	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR
<b>MARCH</b>	01 IMS	CHURCH HISTORY I	CHURCH HISTORY II
	01 WZM	UKWENZA LOC I	UKWENZA LOC II
	08 IMS	CHURCH HISTORY I	CHURCH HISTORY II
	08 WZM	UKWENZA LOC I	UKWENZA LOC II
	15 MTK	REVELATION	REVELATION
	15 WZM	UKWENZA	UKWENZA
	22 IMS	CHURCH HISTORY	CHURCH HISTORY
	22 MTK	REVELATION	REVELATION
	29 IMS	CHURCH HISTORY	CHURCH HISTORY
	29 MTK	REVELATION	REVELATION
<b>APRIL</b>	12 VBM	SCIENCE OF APPROACHING AND APPLYING SCRIPTURES	
	12 SGM	PASTORAL STUDIES	
	19 VBM	SCIENCE OF APPROACHING AND APPLYING SCRIPTURES	
	19 SGM	PASTORAL STUDIES	
	26 VBM	SCIENCE OF APPROACHING AND APPLYING SCRIPTURES	
	26 SGM	PASTORAL STUDIES	
<b>MAY</b>	03 VN	UMDOBI	UMDOBI
	03 ZBN	GENESIS	GENESIS
	10 VN	UMDOBI	UMDOBI
	10 ZBN	GENESIS	GENESIS
	17 VN	UMDOBI	UMDOBI
	17 ZBN	GENESIS	GENESIS
	24 DM	MODERN CHURCH HISTORY	MODERN CHURCH HISTORY
	24 LN	BIBLE SURVEY I	BIBLE SURVEY II
	31 DM	MODERN CHURCH HISTORY I	MODERN CHURCH HISTORY II
	31 LN	BIBLE SURVEY I	BIBBLE SURVEY II
<b>JUNE</b>	07 LN	BIBLE SURVEY I	BIBLE SURVEY II
	07 DM	MODERN CHURCH HISTORY I	MODERN CHURCH HISTORY II
	14 IMS	LEADERSHIP I	LEADERSHIP II
	14 WZM	SYNOPTIC GOSPEL I	SYNOPTIC GOSPEL II
	21 IMS	LEADERSHIP I	LEADERSHIP II
	21 WZM	SYNOPTIC GOSPEL I	SYNOPTIC GOSPEL II
	28 IMS	LEADERSHIP I	LEADERSHIP II
	28 WZM	SYNOPTIC GOSPEL I	SYNOPTIC GOSPEL II

**Figure 4: Pastor's programme for E.T.C.**

The above program is used by the Pastor for the courses that he runs for Sunday school teachers and all members of the African Gospel Church (not only KwaMashu) who wish to study Bible courses. The program is typed by the Secretary of E.T.C. Truth Ministries College. E.T.C. stands for Evangelical Training Course. Some of the topics appearing on this program are also taught at KwaMashu Circuit during Bible classes (for example, the book “*Umdobi*” has some relevant topics that teach the congregants about the skills of winning souls to Christ).

Below is the program that was used for KwaMashu Circuit, but it is not arranged in terms of dates, lecturers and course level as shown on the previous program. When I asked the Pastor about this, he told me that this program was just a list of topics that he intended to teach about. It was not an official year program of examinable topics and modules which needed to be covered within a specific time frame. Some of the topics appearing on a circuit program were suggested by the congregants after doing a need analysis with them. Some were suggested by the Pastor himself. There were no specific time frames for covering these topics; it all depended on the Pastor’s program for that particular month or when the need arose.

The topics that are ticked on the program below are those that had already been covered during the previous Bible classes. The topic of the day read as follows: “*Sonke sinomsebenzi wokufakaza ngoJesu, lokhu singakwenza kanjani*” (All of us have a responsibility to testify about Jesus, how can we do this?)

**UHLELO LWEZIFUNDO/ PROGRAM OF WORKSHOPS**  
**Luqhutshwa eSeketheni yakwaMashu/Conducted at kwaMashu Circuit**

- ✓1. Ukusindiswa, kuyini, kwenzeka kanjani?
- ✓2. Ukuvuma izono, yini isono? Sivunywa kanjaini?
- ✓3. Umbhabhaziso, uyini, zingaki izinhlobo zawo?
- ✓4. Umoya ongcwele (wemukelwa kanjani, usebenza kanjani?)
  5. Kusho ukuthini ukuba umzalwane?
  6. Siphila kanjani nemindeneni yethu uma sesikholwa?
  7. Siphila kanjani nomakhelwane bethu?
  8. Siphila kanjani emsebenzini?
- ✓9. Mayelana nabantu abafuleyo
- ✓10. Ukunikela
  11. Ukuphathana kwabashadile
  12. Ukukhuliswa kwabantwana
  13. Ukubusiseka, ukulingwa, ukhupheka nokufa. Uthini unkulunkulu ngalezizinto)
  14. Ababusisekile nabampofu, uthini unkulunkulu ngabo?
- ✓15. Sonke sinomsebezi wokufakaza ngoJesu, kwenzeka kanjani lokhu?

**Figure 5: Pastor's programme for circuit Bible classes**

According to the Pastor, he started these Bible classes as orientation classes for the new converts who were to be inducted into the church doctrine. When the Pastor realized that many congregants other than the new converts were happy about them, he decided to continue with these classes. Different topics are raised and discussed here and in most cases it is the Pastor who plans and prepares for these Bible classes. Although the congregants appear to have input in deciding on the topics to be addressed, it seems that the Pastor dominates the platform of facilitating and teaching.

The way these Bible classes were started is similar to that of the Catholic sacraments of initiation as discussed by Barton et al (2000). According to Barton et al (ibid), sacraments of initiation practiced in the Catholic Church in England involve several literacy practices. These are classes that prepare the youth for the membership of the church. Among the things that are done here are the production of artefacts (posters with words like sorry, forgiveness, love) and documents (cards of congratulations, certificates, hymn sheets, etc.) which involve literacy. This means that once people gather for a workshop/class, literacy will be involved. Although the African Gospel Church members did not produce artefacts and documents as was the case with the Catholics in England, there were literacy practices involved.

### **3.3. Church committee meetings**

Any church as an organization must have a working committee/s depending on its structure. The whole congregation cannot lead, manage and decide on the matters of the church and it is for this reason that it becomes necessary to elect certain people as members of a church committee. Once there is a committee, positions are involved and it is at this point that the issue of literacy becomes important because there are key positions that need literate people. In my experience I have seen that taking part in or having a position in a church committee is desirable to many people. According to Blackledge (2010), many people attend adult learning centres to learn literacy skills so that they can participate in the activities of the church, which among others include leadership positions.

This confirms what I said when discussing literacy and religion in the literature review when I referred to an interview that I conducted as part of an assignment required for one of my M.Ed modules. In this interview I found that people tended to be literate in their mother

tongue so that they could participate in the church activities like being able to read the Bible and use hymn books. The most relevant part to the issue of leadership positions is that they wanted to be useful in the church, like participating in particular positions such as secretaries, chairpersons and treasurers.

Church committee meetings are meant for specific members only. The church has sub-organizations which are sometimes called societies and they include a Women's Forum, which is called Dorcas Society, a Children's Forum called Sunday school and a Youth forum, called Christian Crusaders. All these forums have their own respective committees. For the objective and focus of study, I limited myself to a Circuit Committee meeting chaired by the Circuit Pastor (Pastor Zulu). The Circuit Committee is the governing body of the church and consists of Local Preachers who are managing the branches as well the Circuit Executive Committee consisting of the Pastor, the Secretary, his Deputy, the Treasurer and the Deacon. The meetings of this committee are convened by the Pastor. After consulting with his executive, the Pastor mandates the Secretary to issue invitations to all members which will specify date, venue and time of the meeting. The format of such invitations is often oral and in the medium of isiZulu. The issuing of invitations does not involve much literacy as the following responses from the interviewees show.

**Pastor:** We do schedule meetings but we do not have a written schedule/program of meetings. As a Pastor, I see the need for a meeting or my executive advises for a need of a meeting and verbal announcements will be issued repeatedly until the day of meeting comes. Sometimes we do pin notices on the notice boards but this has not replaced verbal announcements because not all people are used to this culture of reading notices.

**Secretary:** We rely on oral announcements although sometimes written invitations are sent as reminders.

Although the church leadership maintained that they sometimes issue written invitations, they failed to provide me with a specimen copy of this document. The absence of a printed/written schedule /program of meetings was another indication to me that literacy was not commonly practiced by committee members in this context. Verbal announcements are a standing

routine that is used when meetings are scheduled (it is a common practice that if there is a need for a meeting, it will be scheduled for the second Saturday of the month which is the weekend for a “Big Church Service”). This could be interpreted in two ways regarding the use of literacy in this church. The first interpretation could be that literacy is not used by the majority of congregants during church meetings. The second interpretation could be that another form of literacy is preferred when it comes to organizing and running meetings. In my own analysis, more than one reason can be given for this. One could be that the level of literacy of some members poses a challenge. Secondly, the new trend in the form of using cell phones also seems to be preferred when it comes to the issue of sending invitations. The use of cell phones is fast and convenient for everybody. One youth member whom I interviewed commented:

When we decide to call meetings we do not use letters any more but we have adopted the system of using cell phones because it is quick and convenient. We just phone or send messages, just that!

The use of cell phones seemed to be the convenient method that had been adopted by the congregants when sending invitations for their church committee meetings. This method also requires literacy because use of numbers, reading and writing as well as some operational skills are involved when sending and reading messages and for this reason, it also has its own challenges. Consequently, verbal announcements done on regular intervals appeared to be a more useful and convenient method in this church.

According to the Church Secretary, all circuit meetings had a common pattern and procedure that is followed by the committee members. In the process of the meeting, literacy is practiced for different reasons (like reading and writing of minutes, signing of attendance register). First, the agenda is issued either in the printed or handwritten form to all members and this involves reading because congregants must read through the agenda which guides the meeting. The agenda was printed in IsiZulu (see Figure 6 below). The first item on the agenda is Opening (*Ukuvula ngomthandazo*), where the Pastor reads an opening scripture from the Bible before passing some remarks and stating the purpose of the meeting. Some of the members write in their diaries even though the Secretary is taking minutes.

The signing of the register is also done at the beginning of the meeting and is an activity that is compulsory. It is here that writing becomes crucial for everybody, and the non-literate members need to get help from other fellow congregants. In my experience and observation, I have seen that the Secretary circulates the register but will also record the names of the members present in the meeting himself.

The meeting that I observed was on the 24 April, 2009 at KwaMashu Circuit. The meeting was scheduled for 18h00 but started at 18.48. I was not told the total number of members expected as the Pastor himself seemed not to be sure because the Circuit committee was going to meet with the Sunday school committee. According to him, the attendance was fair. There were 12 men and 10 women, a total of 22 members. The meeting started with a short chorus after which the Pastor read a scripture from his own Bible (Zulu version) and passed a few opening remarks. There was a general prayer by all members followed by the noting of apologies. Some committee members made oral apologies on behalf of those who were absent and the Secretary noted their names in the minute book. No attendance register was circulated on that day but the Secretary simply entered the names of the members in the minute book. In our discussion during an interview session, I found that the attendance registers were not commonly used, hence there were no separate documents provided as attendance registers. The names of the attendees were entered into the minute book by the Secretary.

The Secretary then issued copies of the agenda in a printed form (in isiZulu) to all members. All members there were checking the agenda which gave me an indication that they were interacting with it. The chairperson then embarked on the agenda by requesting the Secretary to read the minutes. However, no copies of minutes were issued. The Secretary read from his own copy while the rest of the committee listened attentively. The reading aloud by the Secretary was followed by questions and comments on the minutes read and while this continued, the Secretary wrote minutes of the proceedings. I observed that only the Secretary was actively involved in writing, all other members simply listened. Members of the committee did not have pens and notebooks or diaries or even copies of the agenda in their hands. Oral communication seemed to dominate among the committee members. Those who were participating in the discussion were mostly men and I observed three of them asking question and making follow ups on matters arising from minutes. The women were very quiet

and it was only towards the end of the meeting that one woman broke her silence when a particular issue needed to be clarified by Sunday school people. She seized the opportunity as a Sunday school leader.

Among the items that were read, were reports from the Good Friday Conference and a brief financial report on moneys that were collected towards the conference. No copies of these reports were issued and the Secretary read from his own copy while the rest of the committee listened without writing anything down. The main item on the agenda was about preparations for Sunday school conference which was to be held during the month of May, 2009. The reason for reading these reports was because some of the moneys that were collected were budgeted for this conference.

The financial report showed that the money collected was insufficient. It was then resolved that new targets be set for all branches as a fundraising strategy. Deadlines for submitting these targets were set and when everything was concluded, the meeting was closed by prayer (one committee member was asked by the Pastor to conduct a closing prayer).

My deduction was that the Secretary is the pillar of the proceedings. He seemed to be doing most of the things that relate to literacy. He read the minutes while other members only listened and he also wrote the minutes for record purposes. He also had the responsibility of registering members present and those absent. He also confessed to me that even if the attendance register was there, he sometimes helped those who claimed to have sight problems to fill in the register on their behalf. When I probed him if sight problems were not used as an excuse for illiteracy, he was not sure as he had not tried to find out the truth about it.

Although my literate interviewees (Pastor, Secretary and literate congregants) contended that a few committee members write during meetings, on this day I did not see anyone writing except the Secretary. The committee members mostly participated in the oral discussion and the people who seemed to be engaged in literacy were the Secretary and the Chairperson. The Secretary read and wrote the minutes whereas the Chairperson kept on checking the agenda in order to monitor the progress of the meeting. The fact that copies of the agenda were issued to members, is an indication of the intention that they should read through the agenda, as well, but there was no way of checking if they read the agenda. Although they all looked at

the copies of agenda, that cannot confirm that they were reading. I asked the Pastor about this during the interview and he responded as follows:

It our common practices to issue the agenda although we realize that it does not have any value to some, but the majority wants it. The agenda helps me as a chairperson to control the meeting because those who do not use the agenda have a tendency sometimes of going out of agenda and I will use it as a guiding tool.

I noticed that the copies of minutes were not issued in that meeting and it was only the Secretary and the chairperson who had copies. The rest of the committee members listened to the Secretary reading. However, it appeared from their follow up questions and comments afterwards that they were concentrating. When I interviewed the Secretary I asked him about the unavailability of minutes to members and his response was that the meeting was a special one aimed at discussing the fundraising issue for Sunday school conference, otherwise minutes and financial reports are provided to everyone during official meetings. (By official meetings he meant scheduled meetings programmed by the committee).

In conclusion, my observation was that literacy did not play a big role in the church meetings (except for the Pastor and the Secretary), from the invitation stage right up to the process of the meeting and this is confirmed by the following responses from the interviewees:

**Pastor:** Verbal announcements are issued repeatedly until the day of a meeting because our people are not used to the habit of reading notices.

Sometimes we do write or pin notices on the notice boards but this has not replaced verbal announcements.

**Secretary:** We rely on oral announcements (for all events) every Sunday because we seem to have a problem with written circulars because people read once and forget.

**Moses Msomi:** In most cases it is the Secretary who practices reading and writing when he reads and writes the minutes. Some few members do as well but the majority relies on listening.

The participants were comfortable with IsiZulu since it was their home language. The minutes and agenda were written in isiZulu. A few English words were adopted and used as they were, but with understanding (even by those who were not literate in English). Words like “targets” and “pledges” were commonly used when the issue of moneys was discussed

and I could deduce from the discussions that these words were used with understanding by the committee members.

The documents which were found to be important and crucial for the meeting were; agenda and minutes. Although the attendance registers and invitations are important documents used in formal meetings neither was found in this church meeting. The Secretary claimed that these documents were optional since their meetings were usually invited orally and attendance registers were covered by recording names in the minute books. The only documents which were readily available that I was able to check through following ethical procedures were agenda and minutes. Photocopies of these are shown below.

*AFRICAN GOSPEL CHURCH KWA-MASHU CIRCUIT COMMITTEE MEETING TO  
BE HELD ON THE 24 APRIL 2009 AT 18H30*

AGENDA

- ✓1.) Ukuvula Ngomthandazo
- ✓2.) Izixoliso
- ✓3.) Ukufundwa kwamaminithi omhlangano odlule
- ✓4.) Ezivukayo
- ✓5.) Umbiko we delegate ngomhlangano wesifunda sikaMengameli 2009
- ✓6.) Umbiko ngokubuyekezwa kwama Targets ka Sunday School
- ✓7.) *Umbiko ngencwadi evela* ku Mama Mengameli 2009
- ✓8.) KwaMashu Workers Bible Forum
- ✓9.) Ukuvala ngomthandazo

**Figure 6: An example of an agenda**

The copy of an agenda shown here is a printed document by the Secretary. It is in isiZulu, since all congregants of this church use isiZulu as their mother tongue. This is neatly typed and is free of printing errors. In short it is professionally done and this is an indicator of a well-resourced church in terms of stationary and office equipment like computer, printer and photocopying paper. However, this church is not well resourced, but the product that we see is due to the effort of a Secretary who uses his office amenities at work. This is an expression of a sophisticated literacy practice.

**Amaminithi omhlangano wekomidi ye Sekethe laka Mashu owawuhlangene ngomhlaka 29 January 2009 ngesikhathi sika 18h30.**

Ababekhona: Mfu. A.Zulu (uSihlalo), Msh. T. Ngubo (uNobhala), Msh. M. Msomi (uSkhwama), Msh. N. Nene, Msh. S. Langa, Msh. D. Banda, Msh. K. Sono, Msh. B. Faya, Msh. T Dladla, Msh. C Thobela, Msh. L Lamula, Msh. E. Hlomuka.

**1. ukuvula ngomthandazo**

Usihlalo uvule umhlangano ngokufunda izwi lenkosi encwadini yabase korinte 10: 31 “ngakho noma nidla, noma niphuza noma nenzani, konke kuwudumo lukaNkulunkulu” ugcizelele ukuthi njengebandla kuhle siqonde ukuthi konke esikwenzayo kuwudumo lukaNkulunkulu.

**2. izixoliso**

Abaxolisile kube yilaba: Msh. M Madondo, Msh. S Bhengu, Msh. P. Ngcobo. Msh. H. Dlamini.

**3. Izihloko**

- 3.1. Umbiko ngodaba luka Mama osiza eMission
- 3.2. Umbiko ngencwadi evela endlunkulu
- 3.3. Umbiko ngokhetho
- 3.4. Umbiko ngomhlangano ka Sunday school
- 3.5. Umbiko nge Project yokwakha
- 3.6. Umbiko ngombhabhadiso
- 3.7. I bible Forum
- 3.8. Umbiko ngomsebenzi wasePhoenix
- 3.9. kuyavalwa

**Figure 7: An extract from a copy of minutes**

This is a printed document produced from a written source document that was originally written by hand. I was interested in getting an original document written by hand but the secretary could not find it. These are not complete minutes as I only scanned the first part of the document which shows attendees, opening by Chairperson, apologies and topics of the day. The copy of minutes is written in isiZulu and this seems to be an indication that this is the dominant language of procedures. According to the Secretary, he always records minutes by hand. After that he edits the draft at home and then types and prints the final document during his spare time at work. This document is also an expression of a sophisticated literacy practice by an educated member of the church. This has become a big advantage for the committee members because they no longer only listen to the Secretary reading but get printed copies which they keep for themselves. However, it appears from the meeting I observed and during the discussion I had with the Secretary that he is not regular in his practice of providing minutes to committee members.

#### **4. Participation/exclusion and coping strategies**

As I pointed out in the introduction, literacy is not regarded by African Gospel Church members as centrally important in the practice of Christian faith. The congregants of this church often claim that those who are not literate for whatever reason are not excluded from participating in church activities. This may be true in some events like during the church service where the word of God is the core of everything that is done and literate congregants read the Bible for the benefit of those who are not able to read. It appears that literacy practices in this church are similar to the Catholic Church in Uganda in the sense that the Catholics emphasized orality which was instilled through rote learning, recitation and oral skills, as Openjuru and Lyster (2007) found. The congregants of the African Gospel Church practice literacy but they end up internalizing some of the activities like singing and citation of Bible verses. This habit of memorization is practiced by all congregants including those who are literate. That the congregants of the African Gospel Church sometimes use orality and literacy mediators does not mean that they do not value literacy.

In some other events like those I found in KwaMashu Circuit, exclusion does occur in different ways and it is not easy to notice. Sometimes it is the decision of an individual to exclude himself/herself due to fear of stigmatization or by regarding himself/herself as not belonging to that group because of his/her literacy status. An example of Mantombi

Mthethwa (non-literate interviewee) can be given here. In my discussion with her she mentioned that she did not attend Bible classes because much reading and sometimes writing was done which made her feel that she was not going to cope.

She also confessed that she was a Branch Treasurer but wanted to resign due to personal reasons. The first reason was that she had been in this position for too long. The second reason was that the people she was elected with (in other positions) had all gone. Thirdly, she mentioned that she was not literate hence she was no longer comfortable to handle church moneys. She was elected on the grounds of maturity in Christianity (faith) and honesty which made her qualify better than others. They justified her election saying that she only needed to get the Secretary to help her when it came to literacy matters. Since she was elected, she had never experienced major challenges in doing her work as other executive members had been helpful and supportive to her. However, she personally felt that her time had expired because she does not even do financial reports. They are done by the Secretary on her behalf.

In my interview with Nokuphiwa Cele who is Branch Youth Organizer, I found that she also wanted to resign due to the literacy challenges she experienced when performing her duties.

Not all church activities exclude the congregants of KwaMashu Circuit. For example, during church services, congregants seem not to be excluded owing to the help they received from literacy mediators and coping mechanisms based on orality like listening and memorization. Although this cannot be strongly maintained and generalized as I only observed one meeting and one church service, deductions from discussion with my participants form the basis of my argument.

Malan (1996a, p. 39), argues that an inability to read the Bible does not say much about a person's religious commitment especially because such people can rely on literacy mediators or use of rudimentary literacy skills. The implication raised by this writer is that literate church members always have some strategies of ensuring that the non-literate congregants are not excluded from participation in church activities. The theory is that while they are being helped, they also develop rudimentary skills in the process so that they are better able to cope in the absence of literacy mediators.

The African Gospel Church seems to be using same style of using literacy mediators and development of rudimentary skills mentioned by Malan above. There is a great reliance on literacy mediators in almost all literacy events occurring in the church. In my observation, I found that literacy mediators play a big role when it comes to reading, writing and interpretation especially of English printed or written text materials. This cannot be regarded as a complete solution or alternative for the non-literate because literacy mediators cannot help them when it comes to leadership roles. Each of these literacy practices will be discussed separately.

#### **4. 1. Reading**

In all three literacy events discussed earlier (church services, Bible classes and church meetings), reading is dominant. The following statement was made by the Pastor during the interview:

In my own observation, reading is more practiced in the church than writing and the language that is mostly used is isiZulu.

It must be emphasized here that the Pastor was referring to all three types of literacy events cited above, in which reading was found to be dominant. In the church services there was reading of the Bible, the use of the hymn books when the congregation was singing (which involves reading) and again there was reading of announcements by the Secretary. Reading the Bible appeared to be very important to all congregants because it is what the message or the sermon was based on. It appeared to be an accepted practice that one person volunteered or was called upon to read aloud while other members of the congregation followed in their own Bibles quietly.

I gathered from the interview sessions that there is more than one reason for having one member reading aloud for the rest of the congregation. One is that the church (KwaMashu circuit) acknowledges that there is a great possibility of having a few congregants who are non-literate. Secondly, some congregants have serious sight problems and cannot read. Thirdly, there are a few whose literacy is at an elementary level and they cannot read well and with understanding. Fourthly, having one person reading for all helps the church to move simultaneously at the same pace and to have a common articulation of the meaning of words read. Lastly, and importantly, this kind of communal reading is a tradition of this church that

is believed to promote unity by means of sharing and becoming of help to other fellow congregants.

For all this to happen there is a need for literacy mediators. These are usually good readers and when they read, everybody (including the literates) is inclined to listen to them. This literacy practice of having literacy mediators allows for participation of all members of this church.

Other than reading the Bible, there is also singing whereby literate congregants use hymn books and while they sing, the non-literate congregants follow either by humming or mumbling and this becomes a continuous practice until they learn to sing the song from memory. When I observed the church service I noticed that despite the fact people had hymn books, when the Pastor asked the congregation to sing song number 49 from *Icilongo Levangeli*, most were singing the song from memory. This indicates that literate congregants are acting as literacy mediators as well when it comes to singing or it could be that many of these songs have been around for a long time and learnt from childhood.

Another type of reading is done by the Secretary during the reading of announcements. During my observation of a church service, I noticed that the Secretary also becomes a literacy mediator for different reasons. All announcements are submitted to him either verbally or written and he reads them out to the congregation or writes them down if they are not for that moment. His role is very crucial as he relays information, explains analyses and sometimes interprets circulars. The Secretary also acts as literacy mediator during meetings where he read minutes and all correspondences for the committee.

Literacy mediators also help during workshops/Bible classes, particularly when there was reading to be done. I observed that even though the Pastor encouraged all members to read, there were a few who did not read and I was not sure whether it was because they were illiterate or had low levels of literacy, which could make them poor readers. I noticed that there were regular readers. In reality, I agree with Blackledge (2000, p. 118), who contends: “We cannot afford to abandon or ignore literacy because it is important in all spheres of life including religion”. Despite the availability of other coping means it is a fact that in any religion there are documents which need to be accessed by the congregants. There will also

be a need to write in one way or another for various specific reasons and this is discussed below.

## 4.2. Writing

Writing is not a common literacy practice in this church as has been mentioned a couple of times before. De la Piedra (2010), contends that the *hermanos* (Protestant Christians) of Uripipata mostly use reading rather than writing. In the African Gospel Church, the few who practice it are among the educated group and students. During the church services, the majority of Christians rely on listening and very few of them write. I also gathered during the interview with the Secretary that sometimes congregants approached the literate congregants who took notes after the service asking them to give them a list of Bible verses that were read during the service, but this was uncommon. When it was time for reading announcements, I observed that there were a few who passed announcements verbally to the Secretary who in turn made an entry in his diary. Some requested others to write announcements on their behalf before submitting those papers to the Secretary. The following was the Secretary's response when I asked him about the most commonly practiced literacy skill:

Reading is more practiced than writing in this church and I think this is caused by the fact the culture of writing is displaced by the emphasis that is put on the importance of listening attentively when the Preacher is preaching. The level of education also has a role to play when it comes to this.

The only event where writing was found to be commonly practiced (even though it is mostly done by the Secretary), was in the church meeting. During church meetings the Secretary did more writing than any other member in the committee. The Secretary remarked as follows during an interview:

I am the one who does a lot of reading and writing during meetings. There is a bit of reading done by other members, but very few. As a Secretary, I do more literacy work during meetings than any other person.

Writing becomes crucial during committee sessions for obvious reasons like recording of important issues, resolutions and announcements. I found that most of the committee members did not write but relied on the Secretary who recorded the minutes and sometimes helped those who could sign the attendance register. This meant that the minutes became the

only record that members could refer to. The fact that minutes are not often handed out is not the main issue because they know that the Secretary keeps the records. Those members who are able to write also have their own record in their diaries.

According to the Secretary, writing is also done when signing the attendance register. The attendance register becomes available when a meeting has been well prepared. Based on what he said, it appeared that the members of the committee in this church do not practice one method when making a record of attendees. Sometimes the Secretary records those present and absent by simply making an entry in the minute book and this is normally covered at the beginning of the meeting when apologies for those absent are made. In the meeting that I observed, this is exactly what happened. Regarding the issue of apologies, the Secretary explained that it was very uncommon for members to write letters. Instead, apologies for non-attendance were usually done orally. Oral apologies during A.G.C. meetings seemed to be shorter and simpler than writing letters. Although oral apologies are generally accepted, letters were welcome indicating that literacy cannot be totally replaced. Although Malan (1996a), maintains that illiteracy is not a hindrance to the church members to participate in the church activities (like reading the Bible, singing and praying, to mention a few), she does not reject the importance of literacy in the church.

From this discussion with the Secretary and what I observed in the meeting, I can deduce that the secretary is the main literacy mediator during the church meetings. The nature of the meeting depends on him in many ways. If he has time for preparing the meeting, minutes and attendance register become available. Sometimes if it suits him he just records the names of members present and absent in the minute book which could mean that the minute book is taken as a reliable recording document rather than a separate attendance register. The reporting/apologies of those absent indicate that attendance at the meetings is taken seriously.

#### **4. 3. Coping strategies**

Besides reliance on literacy mediators, the congregants of this church have developed other coping strategies for participating in the church activities where literacy events were involved. These mainly involve orality in the form of preaching, listening, memorization and recitation. Writers like Cabrita (2010); Malan (1996a and 1996b); Whitaker and Sienaert (1995), contend that orality heavily depends on the skills of listening, recitation,

speaking/oratory, narration and memorization. All these orality skills mentioned here appear to be used by the members of the African Gospel Church in respective instances. Although orality cannot be regarded as literacy, oral skills like speaking, listening, recitation memorization and so on, are very useful in literacy practices. According to Ek (2008), orality is more traditional in the sense that it existed and was relied on in times when written and printed texts were not yet available.

Preaching in this church is the most commonly used method of accessing the Bible teachings. Hence the Bible is the most important book and the source of information and knowledge regarding Christian life. The Pastor prepares his sermon and presents it during the church service through preaching. This is like the interpretation of the Bible verse or message whereby even the non-literate congregants are not excluded. Preaching is the most crucial part of the service that everybody does not want to miss, especially the non-literate members. Preaching offers them a chance to access the Bible's message. This supports Openjuru and Lyster's (2007, p. 104) findings:

Both the preaching and reading enable the non-literate members of the church to access the Bible teaching, memorize some verses and even refer to them during their conversations with fellow Christians. Over the years, some committed non-literate Christians eventually acquire some rudimentary Bible literacy skills.

Listening skills here become very important and the Pastor always ensures that the congregation listens and follows the sermon. He ensures this by shouting "Amen." The congregation responds the same although this could be automatic. This is therefore regarded as another means to participate in religious practices of the church (skill of listening). Listening has a connotation of obedience as was the case with Shembe. Cabrita (2010, p. 67), relates how Shembe when he was still a young boy was visited by a 'Voice' when praying and how he listened. This voice spoke just as if a person was reading aloud into his ears and he would not forget even a single word of it. This was a sign of wonderful memory which helped him in the development of *Izihlabelelo*.

Another skill that the congregants use is that of memorization. Although they do not memorize word for word of the sermon preached they are able to grasp the content of the message and certain important phrases of the sermon highlighted by the Pastor. This skill is

practiced by all congregants of this church, not only the non-literate members. In my experience, it is very common to hear the congregants of this church (literate and non-literate) citing verses from the Bible (a book, chapter and verse) and highlights of sermons orally and this act is regarded as a sign of growth and maturity by other congregants. Memorization also becomes very useful in the learning of songs which are often eventually sung from memory. This makes memorization an important skill to the members of this church because they all become eager to cite Bible books, chapters and verses orally and sing as well.

This issue of memorization discussed above has already been discussed in Chapter 2 under the topic “Recitation and memorization”, where Malan (1996a and 1996b) argues that reading from the Bible was for the beginners who in the long run internalized their literacy practices to the extent that everything was ultimately recited orally.

In her discussion, Malan further cites one of her informants (Mrs Smal) who relates the story of her husband who got converted and was suddenly able to read the Bible despite the fact that he never went to school. This is an example of some of the stories that were told by different denominations and many of them are beyond human investigation, hence they cannot be accepted as truth. It is therefore difficult to use Mrs Smal’s story as reason to regard literacy as optional in the church. I personally regard this as relating to what Probst (1993) calls the “battle between the letter and the Spirit in religious practice”.

Mrs. Nokuphila Cele, one of the non-literate members that I interviewed did not go to school at all. She attended an adult class for a short while before it was disbanded due to poor response from the adult learners. For this reason, she is not literate but participates in the church activities by relying on orality skills (listening and memorization) as well as on the help of her children when she needs to read the Bible at home.

The use of listening skills and memorization by non-literate members comes out strongly here and is seen to be used not only by non-literate but even by literates as well.

## **5. Value attached to literacy**

The argument by Openjuru and Lyster (2007), that some committed non-literate Christians eventually acquire some rudimentary Bible literacy skills as a coping strategy in order to participate in the literate social practices of Christian life, does suggest the value that Christians attach to literacy. This means that those who are not literate are not satisfied about relying on others but develop basic literacy skills which help them cope so that they are not totally dependent or excluded from participating in the church activities.

Malan (1996a), also stresses the importance of literacy to Christians despite her argument that non-literate congregants are able to participate in religious activities. I think what she means is that the value of literacy cannot be over-emphasized, despite the fact that there could be coping means for those who are not literate.

The value of literacy to the members of the African Gospel Church is seen in their use of it during the literacy events discussed earlier, regardless of the fact that the church does not have programs planned to promote literacy among its members. The three literacy events identified (church services, Bible classes and church meetings) can be used here as an evidence that literacy is important in this church. These literacy events involve three basic literacy skills, which are reading, writing and calculating (commonly known as 3 R's). These skills become crucial to the congregants when they are interacting with text, (especially the Bible), writing Bible verses for reference purposes, writing messages/announcements to be read by the Secretary, participating during Bible classes and church meetings when reading and writing is practiced, etc.

This research study established that literacy is not used by all congregants of the African Gospel Church, but its value is seen in the literacy events discussed where it has been found to be indispensable. For the congregants, reading and writing are important as long as they enable them to communicate with the text, which in this case meant reading the Bible and being able to write biblical verses down during the delivery of sermon.

Busingye (2005) found that several activities of her respondents became easier for those with literacy skills, especially in the church, market and women's group and this seems to indicate the value of literacy in this particular instance.

In this study as well, I found that the value of literacy to the members of the African Gospel Church was seen when there was a need to interact with the Bible and other Christian literature books. Literacy became a vehicle for accessing information that they needed for the development of their religious faith and also to participate fully in all church activities as well as qualifying for church positions. The following were the responses of the participants during the interviews:

Secretary: The value of literacy to the church members is seen in the following areas:

- Independent Bible studies. Congregants are very committed to this exercise. Reading the Bible when they are at home or during their spare time is one of their hobbies.
- Documenting of information is also an advantage for those who are literate because they are able to keep information for themselves.

Non-literate congregants

Nokuphila Cele: Literacy is important for all Christians and I have seen that because it is one of the reasons that made me to resign from a being a Youth Organizer because I realized that I did not have expertise warranted by this position (literacy). Although I am not quite literate but I see the value of literacy for a Christian so that he/she can be able to access any information and become independent.

Literate congregants

Moses Msomi: The value of literacy these days cannot be overemphasized since most of the information in the church these days is accessed through reading and kept through writing. Secondly, literate congregants in our church are able to participate fully in all church activities and roles without any exclusion, for an example, in certain church positions.

Sfiso Chamane: The culture of networking and sharing of expertise with other churches and community organizations as well as starting of developmental projects has been adopted by our church and the people who lead this initiative are those who are educated and literate.

When one looks at these responses, it becomes evident that the congregants do attach great value to literacy. This is despite the fact that the church does not have organized programs to promote literacy or even recognize it as an issue, or know who the non-literate members are. Although there are some means and coping strategies which have been developed by and adopted to assist the non-literate congregants, all these do not undermine the importance and value of literacy to the members of the church.

## **6. Tensions between faith and literacy**

The African Gospel Church is one of the faith based Pentecostal denominations and like all Christian religions, it strongly embraces the use of the Bible more than any other book. Those who are educated and highly literate do read other Christian literature books for enrichment purposes. Interacting with the text (Bible, in particular), is an indication that this church is embracing the literate culture. However, the church members strongly believe in what they call “*ukuholwa uMoya Ongcwele kanye nemisebenzi yakhe*” (leadership and works of the Holy Spirit). This fervent belief supersedes everything and regards the Holy Ghost as the great leader and counsellor. Consequently, a congregant filled with the Holy Ghost is “independent”. Education is not a priority here but what comes first is faith. To be literate merely becomes an added advantage. During the discussion with one of my non-literate interviewees about her election as a Treasurer, she responded as follows:

The qualifications were obvious that they needed a literate person but unfortunately maturity in Christian faith was prioritized and I became the preferred candidate

During this interview it emerged that the branches from the rural areas have a problem of shortage of skills versus the tradition of the church. The tradition of the church is that positions are reserved for people who are matured in terms of their faith and age. Even if people have skills and expertise, age and maturity in faith will be used as important criteria for selection to leadership positions. The fact that Mantombi used the word “unfortunately” means that she was preferred even though she was not literate. This is creating some tensions between literacy expertise and maturity in Christian faith as these two appear at times to compete with each other.

Another important statement made by one of my literate interviewees (Sfiso Chamane) reads as follows:

Literacy does not make one a Christian but the latter makes much use of literacy to grow/ develop his/her faith and Christian life.

In my opinion, this issue of literacy versus faith causes a big tension within the church context. This was not part of my study, but I found it to be causing conflict between the non-literate and literate congregants. Since I became a member of this church, I have found this tension to be manifesting itself between the contemporary and conservative congregants. I have heard the following general remarks from the conservative members of the church:

The spirit of God teaches us everything, even if we are not literate but when it comes to spiritual matters, we know all.

In my own understanding, the above stated belief implies that children of God are led by His Spirit even if they are not literate but in religious practices participate without problems. The book of Isaiah 35: 8 supports this view:

And a highway shall be there, and a way, it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. (The Holy Bible Authorized King James Version).

The different literacy practices within the context of literacy and religious discourse discussed by Malan (1996a), describe the kind of tension referred to above. She uses the phrase, "Inspired interpretation of the word" whereby people receive a special wisdom through religious practice. The ability to read the scriptures has an altogether different meaning from literacy learning. In this case the reading and interpretation of the scriptures become the gift of the Spirit. The issue of tension between faith and literacy is also elucidated by Whitaker and Sienaert (1985). These writers cite from Shembe's biography that he had divinely inspired wisdom despite the fact that he was not educated. While literacy has been perceived as important in religious practices, Shembe's statements (in his biography) mean that preaching the word of God did not always require literacy.

## **7. Vernacular/local language versus English literacy**

Writers like Kulick and Stroud (1993) and Openjuru and Lyster (2007) discuss the relationship between literacy and language and contend that the two (literacy and language) cannot be divorced from each other. It appears that when we talk about literacy we cannot afford to divorce it from the language, whether a vernacular or second /official language. The issue of literacy and language is contextual; therefore whether it is a local/vernacular language or a second language, it is not an important issue here.

Once people in the context are considered, it becomes impossible to ignore their local language. I think it is on this ground that the writers mentioned above all share the same view that literacy can be well defined on the basis of a local language since the latter is the tool or key to the understanding of their context. This issue of language and context applies even in the church context (Kulick and Stroud, 1993, pp. 35-36). Openjuru and Lyster (2007, p. 100) contend:

The main reason why churches use local languages is to ensure that all people in the local communities are able to access the Bible, prayer books, hymn books, and other religious texts.

Trudell (2009, p. 76), maintains:

Local language use ensures that the learning is locally relevant, while use of official language distances the learning content from the realities of adult learners.

However, in KwaMashu Circuit, bilingualism in the church seems to be gradually growing. The members of the African Gospel Church in KwaMashu Circuit use both vernacular and second language (IsiZulu and English). English is used by very few congregants as compared to the majority that is using IsiZulu. During my observations and discussions with some of my interviewees, I found that borrowing of certain English words is a common habit practiced particularly by educated individuals. In my discussion with Pastor, he had the following to say:

The language that is used in my church is IsiZulu but with the mixture of English here and there.

The Secretary also had the following to say regarding the language used in the church:

All members carry Bibles when coming for a church service and the difference is only in the versions of the Bibles as others use IsiZulu while there are also few who use English.

However, I must emphasize that the language that is predominantly used in KwaMashu Circuit is isiZulu and even the texts that are mainly used during church services and Bible classes are in IsiZulu. This was confirmed to me by the Pastor who said that to the congregants of this circuit being literate means to be able to read and write in isiZulu. The growing habit of the use of English by few congregants is becoming a common practice to the extent that those who are not literate in this language sometimes feel left out.

Perumal (2004) writes that Steinberg and Sutter (1991) use the term literacy to mean basic literacy skills in one's own language and English. She further argues that these authors maintain that in a South African context, once a person can speak, read and write the basics of English, he/she is functionally literate for the purposes of life. Perumal, (2004, p. 10), concurs with this view when she contends:

In South Africa, definitions of literacy are complicated by the fact that knowledge of second language, usually English, is as vital as the ability to read and write in an African language.

The increasing use of English by the congregants of this church supports this conception discussed above which means that sooner or later they will have to learn English so that they are not excluded in some of the religious activities of the church which warrant the use of this language.

The congregants of KwaMashu circuit regard the use of English as an attempt by the educated elite to modernize the church. Nokuphila Cele responded as follows regarding the use of English in the church:

When someone is preaching I feel very bad when he/she uses English because for me there is no reason for using English if that person is Zulu speaking. As non-literate we feel excluded sometimes, especially when we are at youth conferences because they are the ones who have this habit of mixing isiZulu and English.

The Circuit Pastor as well, seems to be promoting literacy in English because he usually carries both isiZulu and English Bibles and during the church services he loves to complement the Zulu Bible version by reading the English Bible. However, I observed that he ensures that if English is used, there is interpretation either by him or a mediator who is literate in English. During the discussion I had with him, he had the following to say:

I always encourage the church members to read all languages, especially English because this is a language that is used almost by all racial groups. As Pastor I use both isiZulu and English Bibles because they complement each other.

When I probed him about his insistence on the use of the English Bible, he further explained that the Bible was originally written in Hebrew before it was translated into other languages like English and African languages. According to him, IsiZulu is one of the youngest languages which sometimes lack accurate words to articulate correct meaning of some Bible verses. In isiZulu some words may mean something else which is not actually the original meaning and it is only after reading the English version that the correct meaning is articulated. This view could be contested by theologians but I have personally found that the English Bible gives more clarity to some ambiguous words used in the isiZulu version.

Ever since Pastor Zulu assumed his position in this circuit, those congregants who are literate in English have found an opportunity to use their English Bibles since the Pastor likes to use the English Bible as well. In my experience as a member of this church (not only in KwaMashu but generally), I found that in the past, anything that has to do with education or the use of English has been criticized as related to hypocrisy; consequently, carrying an English Bible to church was regarded as an act of showing off or distinguishing yourself as different or belonging to an elite group. Pastor Zulu seems to be promoting the use of English and he insists that people must feel free to use the versions that they are comfortable with. In our interview, he had the following to say:

As a Pastor, I ensure that during the church service all Bibles available are read so that we get the correct understanding of the word of God and that people understand their own versions that they are comfortable with.

As mentioned before, there may be different reasons for people to use English in the church as was the case in other contexts. According to Mbatha, (2004, p 19), learners associate literacy skills in English with success. Employers, especially when they are funding the literacy program, are interested in having their employees literate in English. In the church context the following were identified by interviewees as reasons:

1. The first one is for complementary purposes, as some of the verses in the isiZulu version are sometimes not well articulated. One interviewee (Moses Msomi) contended as follows:

The Zulu Bible is sometimes not easy to understand. Some of the words are ambiguous and interpretation of such words depends on how you read them. For example, Jeremiah 17: 9 reads thus (in isiZulu): *Inhliziyo iyakhohlisa ngaphezu kwakho konke, futhi yimbi, ubani ongayazi?* (The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?) The Zulu phrase, “*ubani ongayazi*”(who can know it), can have double meaning. It may mean “who can know it?” and it can also mean “who does not know it?” The correct meaning is; who can know it?

2. Some people use English just because they feel more comfortable with it.

3. For those who are more exposed to the use of English due to their respective environments, it has become a habit to borrow from English. Sometimes it is due to lack of accurate Zulu words to articulate the intended meaning, I also suspect that sometimes it is about status and showing off although interviewees were unlikely to admit to this.

The use of English as discussed in the previous paragraphs does not seem to be a problem or big challenge to those who cannot use it. In that case congregants in KwaMashu Circuit do not generally define literacy in terms of the ability to read and write English, but for them, the ability to read and write isiZulu is more crucial. The presence of Pastor Zulu has however changed their previous attitudes and perceptions about the use of English and they are now beginning to understand one of the reasons behind its use. Those who are literate in English have automatically become mediators in terms of translating English to non-literate congregants.

I can therefore conclude that although IsiZulu still dominates as the language that is used by the majority of African Gospel Church congregants, this will not remain the case for too long. English will gradually be introduced as a second language and this will mean that the congregants of this church need to be literate in it as well in order to participate fully in all church activities and also to find their place in a global world. In actual fact this is the trend that most of the Christian churches in Africa and abroad are now taking, as we often see them in T.B.N. (Trinity Broadcasting Network) channel (national television) presenting their programs in the medium of English.

## **8. Conclusion**

The key questions that were posed at the beginning of this chapter as a guiding compass of the study helped me to keep focused and ensured that the purpose of the study was not lost. There were three main literacy events which I found to be significant in so far as the practices or uses of literacy in the African Gospel Church were concerned. They were church services, meetings and Bible classes.

Appended to the main critical question of literacy practices was the issue of coping by those who were not literate. The study has also tried to address the issue of inclusion and exclusion of those who are non-literate. The question of the value of literacy in the church could not be overlooked. Although it seemed to be a generally accepted value among the church members, some tensions remain.

The issue of leadership positions appeared to be crucial when discussing literacy practices on this church. The findings of the study suggest that other than various leadership attributes, literacy was a requirement.

Lastly, this chapter has also addressed the issue of language which could not be neglected when talking about literacy practices. Although IsiZulu and English were both used, IsiZulu was found to be the accepted language related to literacy in this church.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

### **1. Introduction**

In concluding this study it will be necessary to reflect on its original purpose. The purpose of this study was to investigate the literacy practices of a sample of African Gospel Church congregants at KwaMashu circuit. The focus was on their literacy practices, and the uses and value they attached to it. This was guided by the key critical questions stated as follows:

- What are the literacy practices that the church members engage in?
- How do non-literate members cope with the literacy demands of the church literacy practices?
- What are the literacy events occurring or identified in the church?
- How do church members value literacy?

In this chapter I recap what has been discussed in each chapter. This is therefore a summary of the entire report where findings of the study are highlighted and recommendations for further research are suggested.

### **2. Summary**

Chapter 1 of the study presented an overview of the background to the study by describing the character, ethos and structure of the church. The rationale for the study was also explained with the intention of exposing the drive or motive for undertaking the study. Since the focus of the study was the literacy practices of the congregants, I was careful not to be distracted by other peripheral issues.

I have highlighted the contribution of the study by pointing out that this is a new field that to my knowledge has never been studied in Pentecostal churches in South Africa, particularly, the African Gospel Church. Another significant aspect of it is that it could place this denomination on the map for further research.

Lastly, the theoretical framework of the study was informed by Street's theory of New Literacy Studies, particularly the ideological model which regards literacy as a social practice. The study was described as being framed by the interpretive paradigm as it dealt with interactions, practices and perceptions of human beings in a particular setting.

I did not take things for granted, so, concepts like church, congregants, units/branches, as they are used in the study are clearly defined. Lastly, as part of Chapter 1, the structure of the study was set out.

The introduction of the study was followed by Chapter 2, the literature review, and it is in this chapter that the orientation of the study was covered. The issue of literacy and literacy practices was discussed here under the following headings:

- Introduction
- Definition of literacy
- New literacy studies' view (NLS)
- Literacy practices
- Literacy mediators
- Literacy and religion
- Language and literacy.

Chapter 3 of the study focuses on a description of the study design, a description of sample size together with the sampling strategy that was used, as well as the scope of study. Sources of data, methods of data collection and research instruments used, were also discussed here. While all of these are discussed, methodological limitations encountered in the course of the study were also pointed out. Again, it is important to point out that the research as a whole was based on a qualitative research approach.

The data analysis was characterized by an interpretive and descriptive approach in which the findings were summarized according to themes and patterns. This made the data analysis a continuous exercise from the beginning of the process of data collection. The thematic approach used here was accompanied by another method of organizing data for analysis by research question as suggested by Cohen et al (2007). This method helped me as a researcher to stay focused on the objectives of the study.

It is not fair to the reader to wind up this chapter without acknowledging some practical problems which bore methodological implications. These included dishonouring of set

timeframes and the inability to achieve the desired number of targeted participants. Consequently, I was compelled to re-arrange my sample in terms of the number of non-literate and literate participants, and also to go beyond the originally targeted setting or location so that I could find non-literate congregants to interview.

Chapter 4 of the study covers the findings and analysis of the research. The presentation of data was done according to emergent themes which included background information about participants; common types of literacy events, (church services, Bible classes and meetings) the value of literacy to the congregants (respondents), participation/exclusion and coping strategies, tension between faith and literacy and lastly, vernacular/local language versus English literacy.

The presentation of the findings and analysis of the findings were done simultaneously in this chapter and it took the same order as in the above paragraph. The data pertaining to each theme was presented as provided by all respective research methods used (observations, interviews and document analysis). Throughout the research, the four main critical questions were a guiding compass to ensure that the intended objectives were achieved.

This last chapter then presents concluding remarks and highlights findings and recommendations of the study as well as potential areas for further research by scholars who may have interest in the subject dealt with in this study.

### **3. Key themes and issues**

In the previous chapter all data that provided answers to the posed questions was presented and the findings of the study were also analysed and discussed. On the basis of the findings of this research study I have drawn some conclusions regarding the issue of literacy in the African Gospel Church and these are highlighted below.

This study lists three literacy events in which literacy practices occur. The events that are documented here are church services, Bible classes and church committee meetings. In the event of a church service, I have listed activities like singing, preaching, making announcements and offerings which were found to be dependent on literacy (reading, writing and numeracy).

During the church meetings, I found that documents like agendas, attendance registers and minutes were used. These documents show that literacy practices took place during church committee meetings. The minutes documented resolutions taken and were always read in the next meeting. However, the documents mentioned here were not always used. In my discussion with the Secretary about the meeting that I observed, I found that committee meetings did not involve much literacy practice by the members as the Secretary became the main literacy mediator. The absence of copies of the agenda and attendance registers was not an obstacle to the meeting as the Secretary had ways of dealing with them.

In the event of Bible classes, literacy practices also took place. The dominating activity here was reading the Bible and the religious book (*Umdobi*). This study also tries to address the issue of exclusion and non-exclusion in this church (AGC). Firstly, the presence of literate congregants appears to be an advantage to the non-literate congregants when it comes to literacy practices in the events mentioned here. The former act as literacy mediators to ensure that the non-literate congregants are not excluded from participation. The literacy mediators generally ensure that their literacy skills are available for the non-literate congregants so that they are able to accomplish specific literacy purposes (Baynham, 1995). Those who read during bible class were good readers and they read for everybody. This communal reading instils the listening skill and assists the teacher to have everybody's attention and be able to move with them at the same pace. Whether one is literate or non-literate, the accent is on understanding the subject.

I observed that literacy mediators did not mediate writing because it is an independent activity. The Secretary appears to be a very active literacy mediator during meetings and church services. However, exclusion cannot be denied because some non-literate congregants wanted to abdicate their positions because they were not literate. This could be just the tip of the iceberg because there may be other members excluded from participating in particular activities for other reasons involving literacy. It is important to note that congregants mentioned above recused themselves from positions. The church (congregants) did not put literacy as a criteria because for the church maturity in faith is important and literacy is an added advantage. This was confirmed during an interview with one of the non-

literate congregants when she explained reasons for her appointment to the position that she was abdicating.

One other thing that is revealed by the findings of this study is that illiteracy does not appear to be a major issue in this church, especially if one considers that the leadership does not know which congregants are non-literate, let alone the fact that they do not have recorded statistics or profiles of the members. The unavailability of recorded statistics could indicate two things. The first is that literacy is not relied upon much when performing religious practices. The second thing is that the culture and the character of Pentecostalism (which tends to rely on orality and claims to be led by the Holy Spirit) show themselves strongly in this church. The issue of illiteracy appears to be a taboo in that it is not spoken about and there is no planned program or intervention to help non-literate members. Instead it is presumed to not place any obstacles to one's faith and religious practices. At the same time, this study also highlights that although literacy is not openly encouraged, it seems to be of great value to the congregants. One instance that can be cited as an example (although it is not an official or pronounced criterion) is that leadership and office positions require literacy. If those elected are not literate, they suffer from feelings of inferiority and may even decide to abdicate their positions as discussed above.

This study records orality as being commonly practiced in this church, not only by non-literate congregants but by literate congregants as well. Orality here is expressed in the form of memorization, recitation, speaking and listening. This seems to be a way, besides the use of literacy mediators, which enables non-literate congregants to cope with most religious practices.

The Bible seems to be the main document or text that the congregants of this church want to interact with and in this instance the value of literacy is unveiled. In this instance, it is difficult to regard the non-literate congregants as in "deficit". This was discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4: Participation/exclusion and coping strategies. Besides the help of the literacy mediators, non-literate congregants internalize activities like citation of Bible verses and reciting them. Rudimentary literacy skills are developed in the process of literacy mediation which helps non-literate congregants to cope in the absence of literacy mediators. In my introduction the issue of literacy practices was presented as if it was separate from the issue

of the value of literacy. The two are found to be intertwined as it is not possible to deal with one and ignore the other. The value of literacy to members of the African Gospel Church is among other things seen when there is a need to interact with the Bible and other Christian literature books. It becomes a vehicle to access information that they need for the development of their religious faith and also to participate in all church activities as well as qualifying for church positions. Although the congregants of the A.G.C. value literacy but it appears in the above paragraph that it is not generalized as a universal skill in the A.G.C.

Literacy is essential for crucial reasons which can be summarized as follows:

- Independent Bible study and documenting information:
  - ❖ The Bible is an important text for Christians and for them to grow in their faith and religious practice, it must be studied.
  - ❖ Most of the religious information in the church these days is accessed through reading and then documented (recorded).
- Full participation in all church activities and roles without any exclusion, for example, in certain church positions.
  - ❖ Participating in church services, church meetings and Bible classes, without being dependent on other people.
  - ❖ Ability to stand for church positions without any feelings of inferiority
- Networking and sharing expertise with other churches and community organizations as well as launching developmental projects.

The findings of the study reveal that although literacy is essential for the members of the A.G.C., it is not a substitute for the social literacy practises that they have developed and cherished over the years.

I have also raised an interesting argument through this research which is the tension between literacy and faith. In my experience as a member of this church, the congregants are very committed and dedicated to the doctrine that romanticizes the Holy Spirit as their “leader” and “teacher”. The belief that is cherished by some of the members of this church is that the Holy Spirit supersedes everything. Hence He is regarded as a key to their faith. Faith is a priority and to be literate is an added advantage. This topic of tensions between faith and literacy was not part of my research but was prompted by the responses of some of my participants. I then found it important to raise this argument because in my experience,

maturity in faith is more valued than being literate. In my discussion with Mantombi Mthethwa (a non-literate congregant) she made it clear that she was elected as a Treasurer disregarding the fact that she was not literate because her maturity in faith qualified her for this position. Her illiterate status was not an issue to those who elected her but now she confesses that she is not comfortable with this position because she feels that she is not doing justice to the church. This makes me conclude that there is tension between this issue of faith and literacy in this church. Earlier on I alluded to the embedded culture of this church which believes in leadership of the Holy Spirit and I mentioned that in my experience this sometimes causes tension between the youth and the elders of the church, especially the literate and non-literate congregants.

Lastly, the study also records the issue of language as inseparable from literacy. The importance of a local language is stressed because the literacy practice is contextual; therefore it must be done in a local language so that it becomes relevant and meaningful to the local people. I have also pointed out that the use of a second language cannot be totally avoided or ignored. The majority of the members of this church use IsiZulu and the texts they use are in IsiZulu. Being literate to them in the church context means to be able to read and write in this language. The non-literate congregants as well use their coping mechanisms in the medium of IsiZulu.

However, the trend of using English in the church is gradually becoming very common to the extent that those who are not literate in this language sometimes feel left out and thus regard it as an attempt by the educated elite to modernize the church. This is another area where tensions manifest themselves. Those who use English justify it by saying that IsiZulu does not always articulate the correct meaning of the Bible because it was translated from English.

Finally, it appears from the findings of this study that the congregants feel more confident and have a sense of belonging when they participate in all the activities of the church without barriers. Although basic literacy appears to be a requirement for this to happen, it is not given a priority in this church. Most of the congregants agree that interacting with the text, especially the Bible, is a priority for all congregants and it is not only required during a church service but must be a lifestyle of a congregant for his/her faith and spiritual edification. Since teaching has become important just as preaching is, A.G.C. congregants

may not ignore literacy education for too long. It would be wrong to assume that non-literate congregants in this church cannot benefit from bible classes because the latter were there even before literacy education became an issue.

Most denominations if not all, value literacy and in my own opinion, the African Gospel Church is not an exception. However, it is worrying that the church does not appear to have the means to check the levels of literacy of all its members and also to ensure that the planned church activities include literacy programs to help those who are either not literate or have lower levels of literacy.

#### **4. Recommendations of the study**

On the basis of the conclusions, the following recommendations are made.

The issue of literacy education in the African Gospel Church must be given a greater priority than it is given at the moment. However, care should be taken not to stigmatise non-literate congregants. It has been established that the value of literacy in this church cannot be underestimated, thus a need for intervention programs for those who are non-literate cannot be overlooked again and this must be done in a sensitive manner. The programme developers and facilitators should be sensitive to the feelings and attitudes of the non-literate congregants. The launch of a literacy program for non-literate congregants can afford members of this church an opportunity to participate fully in all church activities without dependence on the literacy mediators or reliance on orality.

Other than the need for literacy education mentioned above, church literacy practices found to be prevalent can be used as a basis for developing literacy skills among the members of this church. I am referring to literacy practices like reading the Bible and writing notes during church services and also writing that is done in the church meetings (like writing of minutes and signing of attendance registers). The issue of orality and use of English cannot be left out. Orality improves one's mental capabilities as has been the case with the Church of Nazareth (Cabrita, 2010). Being literate in English can no longer be ignored by the members of this church as the findings of the study revealed that English is used by only a few people. The Pastor himself appears to be promoting the use of English. I think I can agree with Steinberg and Sutter (1991. p. 7) cited in Perumal (2004) when they contend:

In the South African context, once a person can speak, read and write the basics of English he/she is functionally literate for the purposes of life.

Since literacy practices were found in the church, I believe it may be helpful for the church to initiate literacy education based on these literacy practices.

The study has revealed that the levels of literacy in this church vary as the education levels of the congregants do. Those who dropped out of school as early as Grade one or two can be categorized as non-literate congregants since their literacy skills were not well developed and articulate by then, hence they struggled or could hardly read and write without assistance. It is on these grounds that the study recommends that the focus should not be on non-literate congregants only, but intervention programmes on literacy should also accommodate those whose literacy is at an elementary level.

The church leadership should be conscientized and sensitised about the effects of illiteracy and importance of literacy on their congregants' ability to participate fully in all the activities of the church. They must be made aware that these are not salient characteristics or issues but when they are ignored they can cause poor relationships and feelings of inferiority among congregants. This is apparent when the predicament of the two non-literate women is considered. These congregants decided to resign from their positions due to their non-literate status. It is not known how many congregants are disadvantaged by this factor because some of them may have recused themselves from election by making excuses.

There is also a need for the church to develop records of its membership that will, among other things provide profiles of the congregants which includes information like their levels of education, type of employment (if employed) etc. This can help the church to know the members who are literate and those not literate. It can assist the church to assess itself in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. As it is now, the leaders do not know exactly the number of non-literate congregants in the church and everything is based on generalizations. The fact that the Pastor didn't know and had not thought about it (as he responded in the interview), can imply that the leadership of the church did not pay much attention to literacy education. Development of such records should not be done in a way that will label or stigmatise the non-literate congregants. Great care must be taken not lower their self-esteem.

Leadership must ensure that the strengths which non-literate congregants have are recognised.

My expectations therefore are that in each and every church or denomination, literacy should be part of the churches' year planning. Probably, the point of departure should be that of doing a thorough research or demographic study in terms of finding out more about literacy abilities of the congregants and literacy programmes in the church. As an institution that has a mandate to impact on the lives of people not only spiritually but economically and socially, the church needs to deal with negative effects of illiteracy not only in the church but even in local communities. However, this will not become feasible if the church community, especially leadership, is not conscientized about the importance of literacy and the effects of illiteracy which are sometimes subtle.

The church leadership appeared not to be able to identify correctly whether non-participation in the literacy practices was due to non-literacy or other challenges like hearing and sight problems. I think this area needs to be analysed by church leadership so that they do not make incorrect assumptions which can also lead to incorrect interventions.

Finally, I think it is important at this point (as I am now serving as a full-time Pastor) to mention a few things that I will do differently in my circuit, given the weaknesses that were identified in KwaMashu circuit as a unit of analysis of this study. Firstly, I will strategically try to find out if all preachers leading the branches are literate and also find out about their level of literacy. This will help me to start a relevant literacy programme to develop and empower them. Secondly, I will request the preachers to furnish me with the profiles of their branch members and all this will help me develop the database of the circuit which will be updated every year. This database will provide me with a comprehensive picture about the status of a circuit I am leading and managing and it will help me to develop relevant intervention programmes. Lastly, I will encourage the congregants to carry notebooks/diaries for note taking when attending any of the discussed literacy events. I will promote literacy by ensuring that both literate and non-literate congregants realize that they need one another's help in the process of enhancing literacy practices in the church.

## **5. Areas for further research**

There are different aspects of this research study which appeared as it unfolded but could not be followed since they did not fall within the focus of the study. I personally feel that these areas could be of great interest because they could help to assess the success, impact and effectiveness of some of the findings of the study, not only in the lives of the congregants, but also in the growth and development of the church in fulfilling its mandate.

The first one is the impact of literacy on the social and spiritual development of literate congregants as compared to their counterparts (non-literate congregants). This can be analysed across all literacy events studied or even outside church boundaries.

The second potential research area is the success and effectiveness of the use of “coping measures” by non-literate congregants. These include among other things, the use of rudimentary literacy skills, orality and literacy mediators.

Lastly, the issue of tensions in this denomination seems to be manifesting itself in different areas like education/literacy and faith as well as the way in which the work of the Holy Spirit is understood by some congregants. These areas of tension were just hinted at but not followed up in depth. It seems as if there are more causes for such tensions than the ones mentioned here. I feel that doing a study on it could make a great contribution to the reading community.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: Interview schedule**

#### **Introduction**

This is an unstructured interview schedule for a qualitative study of literacy practices of the African Gospel Church members (one of the Pentecostal churches in KwaMashu Township). Respondents will be selected to participate in this study and they will be requested to provide correct information by responding honestly to the posed questions regarding their literacy practices in the church. **The interview will be conducted in isiZulu.**

#### **Confidentiality statement**

All information that will be supplied by the respondents will be treated with strict confidentiality and will only be used for the purpose of this study and the reports and publications that may come out of it. Names of the respondents will not be quoted in any of the reports and publications without their consent; hence they are free not to supply them here.

#### **GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR ALL RESPONDENTS**

Respondents will be divided into three categories (3 illiterates, 2 literates and 2 from the leadership). The first two categories will be selected from ordinary members and from the leadership; it will be a Pastor and one member of the executive.

##### **1. Setting of the interview**

- 1.1. Date of the interview
- 1.2. Time scheduled for interview:
- 1.3. Place/venue: KwaMashu mission house

##### **2. General Socio biographical information**

- 2.1. What is your name?
- 2.2. How old are you?
- 2.3. What do you do for a living?

- 2.4. Are you married? If so, when did you get married?
- 2.5. How many children do you have?
- 2.6. What are their ages?
- 2.7. How long have you been a member of this church?
- 2.8. Are you holding any position in the church?
- 2.9. If yes, what position is that and how you were appointed (If it was democratic elections, explain how they were conducted)
- 2.10. What were the requirements for this position?
- 2.11. If not holding a position, is it because you have not been fortunate or not interested (explain)

### **3. Educational information/ background**

- 3.1. Can you read and write?
- 3.2. If not, what is the cause for your being not able to read and write?
- 3.3. What can you read and what can you write?
- 3.4. What is your level of education?
- 3.5. Where did you learn to read and write?
- 3.6. If having a tertiary education, what qualification do you have?
- 3.7. Why did you choose to study this course?
- 3.8. Was this before or after you became a Christian? (Explain)
- 3.9. If dropped from school, what was the cause?
- 3.10. If never went to school at all, what was the cause for that?
- 3.11. Why have you not gone to adult literacy classes?
- 3.12. Is the church leadership literate? (If yes) What could be their level of education?

### **4. General questions about literacy practices**

#### ***4.1. In the church services***

- 4.1.1. When are reading and writing used in during church services?
- 4.1.2. Which between the two (reading and writing) do you find dominating in church services? (Explain)
- 4.1.3. Give examples of events where you find these mostly used?

4.1.4. Which literacy skill (reading/writing) that you (as an individual) practice the most?  
(Cite practical situations)

4.1.5. Which of these events mentioned in 4.1.3, do you take part in? (Why?)

4.1.6. Do you find yourself excluded from church services in the event of a literacy skill (reading/writing) that you cannot afford? If not, how do you find your way?

4.1.7. Do you have the Bible and the hymn book?

4.1.8. Do you carry these books when going to church services?

4.1.9. If yes, when and how do you use them?

4.1.10. Other than the Bible and hymn book, what other documents (reading/writing) or materials are used during church services and what are they used for?

4.1.11. To what extent do you manage to use these and if not able, does this affect you as a member of the church?

4.1.12. Are there any literate church members who act as literacy mediators or have you ever acted as one/ (Explain)

4.1.13. If you have ever acted as one, what was your experience?

4.1.14. How often do you use numbers in your church? (Explain)

4.1.15. Are you able to do calculations? If yes, how do you manage when you are not literate? If no, how do you cope?

## **4.2. In the church meetings**

4.2.1. Is there any schedule or written program of meetings and workshops/Bible classes?

4.2.2. If yes, who does this and how is it accessed by church members?

4.2.3. Do you participate in church meetings?

4.2.4. If yes, do you have any special role that you play? (Mention it)

4.2.5. If no, what could be the reason?

4.2.6. Do literacy skills like reading, writing and being numerate become useful in the meetings (Cite events where these become useful?)

4.2.7. Which one among the three do you practice the most during meetings? (Cite events)

4.2.8. Is there any among these three literacy skills (reading, writing, numeracy) that you have difficulty with when it is practiced in the meetings?

4.2.9. If yes, how do you cope in that situation?

4.2.10. When either of these literacy practices mentioned above is practiced, what language is used or mostly used?

4.2.11. In the event of these literacy skills mentioned above being practiced, how do you cope if you are illiterate?

### **4.3. In the workshops/Bible classes**

4.3.1. What kinds of documents that are used in these meetings and workshops/Bible classes?

4.3.2. Is reading and writing practiced in these workshops/Bible classes? If yes, cite events where these are practiced

4.3.3. If not able to read and write, what do you do in the event of these being practiced?

4.3.4 Who are responsible for running and facilitating these workshops/Bible classes?

4.3.5 What criteria are used to recruit/appoint them?

4.3.6 What kind of material resources (stationery, books, handouts, charts, etc.) used in these workshops/Bible classes?

4.3.7. Do you experience any difficulty in handling these or communicating with some of the written texts mentioned above?

4.3.8. Are there any designed developmental programs which inform these workshops/Bible classes?

## **5. General questions about value and importance of literacy**

5.1. Is reading and writing encouraged in your church, if yes, how?

5.2. How often is reading and writing practiced in your church

5.3. Are there any opportunities for learning to read and write provided by the church?

5.4. Is reading and writing commonly practiced in the church? (Explain)

5.6. Would you consider reading and writing practices as indispensable in your church? (Explain)

5.7. Are there any valuable and important opportunities in the church where literacy is put as a priority?

5.8. What do you think is the value of literacy in general (ability to read and write) for a Christian?

## **6. General questions about educational aspirations and views**

6.1. Are you satisfied with you current level of education (just being able to read and write), if not, how far would you wish to go

6.2. Are you currently engaged in any adult literacy classes or further studies? (If yes, what are you studying?)

- 6.3. If there was a chance for you to go to adult literacy classes would you take it? (Why?)
- 6.4. What is your opinion regarding literacy and education in your church?
- 6.5. Are there any other people who are not literate in your church and does this worry them or not (motivate)
- 6.6. Would you consider the number of literate congregants as more than illiterates or vice versa? (What could be the cause of this and what does this tell?)
- 6.7. Would you agree that inability to read and write hinders one to participate fully in all church activities? (Explain from your own experience)
- 6.8. What do you do to ensure that your participation is not limited by this?
- 6.9. Are you currently involved in any project or activity in the church where reading, writing and numeracy are practiced?
- 6.10. What is the reason for your involvement and what role do you play there?

### **7. Perceptions and attitudes towards literacy among the church members**

- 7.1. Would you regard reading and writing skills as important for Christians/church members?
- 7.2. Do you see any value of literacy in your life as a Christian/church member?
- 7.3. What is your opinion about the teaching of reading and writing and launching of such literacy programs in the church?
- 7.4. Are you involved in any literacy program outside the church or have you ever considered to do anything to help those who cannot read or write? (Explain)
- 7.5. Do you know or have got any idea about the number of members who are not literate, according to statistical demographics (like age and gender)
- 7.6. What are the disadvantages of being illiterate for you as a Christian?

### **Conclusion**

Is there any other thing that you would like to add (probably not covered by questions asked) to what we were discussing regarding literacy?

***THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND PARTICIPATION!***

## Appendix 2: Observation schedule for public notices

Public notices	Tool/Material used e.g. Cards, chalkboard, etc.		Language used		Language Level	Date of the notice
Sign posts for directions						
Notices for planned services, meetings & Bible classes etc.						
Advertisements						
Invitations						
Announcements						
Thank you messages						

NB. 1). Tools= The columns will be filled according to kinds of tools that will be observed.

2). Language= The language used will be entered for each public notice

3). Language level= The standard/level of language will be explained for each notice

4). In the last column, the date or the condition of the notice will be analysed as this could signify the regular usage of the tool.

### Appendix 3: Observation schedule for literacy events and practices

What literacy skills are used by congregants in performing or participating in the respective church activities?

No.	Activities	Literacy events	Literacy practices	Target group
1.	Church committee meetings	a)..... ..... b)..... ..... c)..... ..... d).....	a)..... ..... b)..... ..... c)..... ..... d).....	..... ..... ..... ..... ..... ..... .....
2.	Training/teaching & tuition	a)..... ..... b)..... ..... c).....	a)..... ..... b)..... ..... c).....	..... ..... ..... ..... .....
3.	Announcements	a)..... ..... b)..... .....	a)..... ..... b).....	..... ..... .....
4.	Prayer	a)..... ..... b)..... .....	a)..... ..... b).....	..... ..... .....
5.	Sermon	a)..... .....	a)..... .....	..... .....

		b)..... .....	b).....	.....
6.	Offerings	a)..... ..... b).....	a)..... ..... b).....	..... ..... .....
7.	Singing	a)..... ..... b).....	a)..... ..... b).....	..... ..... .....

**NB.** 1). Target group=Illiterates, Literates and Leadership.

2). When literacy events are identified, careful observation will be done to check literacy skills practiced during those events.

3). Demographic Aspects like age, marital status, race etc. although not listed on this schedule, will also be analysed as they may have some significance on the issue of literacy.

#### Appendix 4: Guide for documentary analysis

Document	Primary or secondary	Language used	Level of difficulty	Purpose/use	Target group	Significance
Bible						
Hymn book						
Attendance Registers						
Agenda/ program						
Minutes						
Financial reports						
Diaries						
Note books						
Spiritual text/lit.						

**NB.** For each row, brief explanations will be entered according to each document entered. These explanations should signify or relate to literacy practices.

## Appendix 5: Informed consent to participate in the research study

Dear Sir/ Madam

### INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

I am doing a research study which is part of the dissertation that I have undertaken to do in fulfillment of my Master of Education degree with the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal. I am kindly requesting for your participation in the form of an interview that I will be conducting.

The research study seeks to explore the literacy practices of church members, which is simply about the uses of literacy (reading and writing) by the congregants. My target is the Pentecostal churches of which the African Gospel Church is one of them. The objective is to uncover the value of literacy within the church community, the coping means for those who are not literate and probably the role of the church in promoting literacy.

It is important to mention that participation is voluntary and that you will be treated fairly and with great respect and dignity. Decision to participate will not result to any harm, humiliation or exploitation. You are also free to withdraw from participation at any stage should you feel uncomfortable. However, I want to assure you that your dignity will be protected and that the information given will be treated with strict confidentiality and will not be used for any other purpose which is not intended for this study. Real names of the participants will not be used but only pseudonyms for the sake of anonymity and protection.

You are free to ask questions where you are puzzled or not clear of what is required. Further comments and additional information which can add value and more clarity on this topic will also be appreciated.

You are humbly requested to be honest and sincere in your responses and comments, not to pretend with the intention of impressing the researcher. You can express your likes and dislikes during the process of interview. I also want to assure you that as soon as this study is accepted by University authorities; all collected data will be kept safely for a period of at least five years after which documents will be shredded and videos and cassettes, incinerated and audio tapes erased.

### DECLARATION

I, H. E. HLONGA.....(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I have read and understood the contents of this document and nature of the research study undertaken by the applicant (researcher) and that I have not been forced to participate in this interview.

SIGN H. E. HLONGA DATE 28/05/2011 PLACE PMB.....

## Appendix 6: Application for permission to do a research study

1

### APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO DO A RESEARCH STUDY

FULL NAME OF THE APPLICANT: LEONARD DUMISANI DLAMINI  
AFFILIATION: .....: STUDENT (UKZN), ST. NO. 922314452  
QUALIFICATIONS.....: B.A, U.E.D., B.ED.  
ADDRESS.....:PO BOX, 3694  
PITERMARITZBURG  
3200  
CONTACT NUMBERS..... 033-3461663  
0829502966  
SUPERVISOR.....:DR. ELDA LYSTER (UKZN)  
CONTACT NO/ADDRESS.....:031-2602567  
lyster@ukzn.ac.za

**FOR ATTENTION** : PASTOR I.M. SHEZI  
AFRICAN GOSPEL CHURCH  
H. 120 KWA MASHU MISSION  
4360

DEAR SIR

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

This is as per our telephonic discussion held on July 17, 2008 concerning the research study which is part of the dissertation that I have undertaken to do in fulfillment of my Master of education degree with the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The intention of this document is to give a brief but clear and understandable idea about the title of the research, its objectives, the role of the participants/respondents who will be identified to participate in this research, as well as the conditions that will govern the whole process of the proposed study.

#### 1. TITLE OF THE RESEARCH AND ITS AIMS

It seeks to explore the literacy practices of the church, which is simply about the uses of literacy (reading and writing) by the congregants. This of course would automatically expose the value of literacy within the church community, the coping means for those who are not literate and probably the role of the church in promoting literacy.

## 2. HOW THE SUBJECT WAS IDENTIFIED?

As a Christian and member of my church, I have had different kinds of experiences and have also made some general observations and informal discussions with people from different denominations on this issue of literacy. I have had an impression that in some denominations, literacy is a subject of choice, whereas in others it is encouraged and the church would have some interventions to support and promote it. In some denominations literacy is criticized and not romanticized, especially by the leaders. This has aroused some interest in me to investigate if there is any relationship or relevance and usefulness of literacy in the church activities and that if it is so, how the illiterates manage in the context. Further question could be around the future of literacy in the church.

## 3. ABOUT THE SUBJECTS/PARTICIPANTS

The congregants, who will be willing to participate, will be treated fairly and with great respect and dignity. A decision not to participate will not result to any harm or form of disadvantage. Also important, is the fact that participation is voluntary and that subjects are free to withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason. I understand that the issue of literacy sometimes can be very sensitive; therefore, I will ensure that it is handled with great care and respect and that all participants are comfortable and protected from any possible threats or hazards. All what is expected of them is just to avail themselves and provide responses to questions asked. They are also free to ask questions where they are puzzled or not clear of what is required of them. Further comments and additional information which add value and more clarity on the topic will also be appreciated. Participants are also expected to be honest and sincere in their responses and comments, not to pretend with the intention of impressing the researcher. They must be free to express their dislikes and likes during the process of discussions.

The estimated total time of involvement will be 30 minutes per person and since my participants are anticipated to be six, this will amount to three hours. If I take three people a day, it will last for two days but this will be negotiated with my participants if one day is convenient for all of them.

Other than the interviews, there will be observations for two church services, one committee meeting and one workshop. Observations alone will need four different days not unless some of these activities (at least two) can be done on one day. However, this is just my wish as I personally would not like to interfere with the standing program of the church.

## 4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

The benefits of the study to the congregants can never be overemphasized since some of the members of the church might not be aware of the impact that literacy has on the development of their religion, cultural values, faith and getting positioned for the current economical, political and social challenges brought about by democracy and transformation in South Africa. Secondly, the findings of this study will among other things conscientize the church to critically consider if religious literacy practices have any impact in the development and empowerment of the church members.

5. FINANCIAL EXPENSES

All financial expenses that may be incurred by the participants in the course of their participation in this study will be reimbursed. The only expense that is negotiated and implored on their part is nothing more than sacrifice of their time.

6. TOOLS TO BE USED DURING INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

Writing pad, voice recorder and video recording camera will be used for different methods of data collection. These tools will be used with the consent of the participants, after the purpose and the procedure have been fully explained to them.

7. DATA COLLECTED AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All data collected will be strictly used for the purpose of this study and no information gathered for this study will be utilized for any other purpose or published without the consent of the people participated in this study. The real names of the participants will not be used but only pseudonyms for the sake of anonymity and protection. As soon as this study is finished and approved by the University authorities, all collected data will be kept safely for a period of at least five years after which documents will be shredded and videos and cassettes, incinerated.

8. DECLARATION

I, MARYZENI ISRAEL SHEZI (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I have read and understood the contents of this document and the nature of the research study, and I allow the applicant (researcher) access to do this research study in my church.

I consent to participating in the research study and also understand that I am at liberty to withdraw at any time should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF THE PARTICIPANT/AUTHORITY: Maryzeni

DATE: 21 July 2008 PLACE: KWAMASHU



### Appendix 7: Projected research program

<b>TASKS</b>	<b>STARTING DATE</b>	<b>COMPLETION DATE</b>
Develop and refine research proposal	15 April 2008	30 June 2008
Doing literature review	01 May 2008	On-going (2008)
Meetings with supervisor	06 May 2008	08 July (2008)
Doing corrections	14 July 2008	31 July 2008
Meeting with supervisor and doing some corrections for re-submission to H.D.C. and F.C.	04 September 2008	30 September 2008
Arrange appointments and conduct observations and interviews	20 October 2008	15 November 2008
Data analysis and synthesis	20 November 2008	15 December 2008
Writing up findings of research study	19 December 2008	30 December 2008
Submit draft dissertation	19 January 2009	30 January 2009
Final editing	09 February 2009	16 February 2009
Printing/Duplication	17 February 2009	23 February 2009
Submission	-----	30 February 2009

## Appendix 8: Detailed budget for the study

The projected costs described in this table will be self-funded.

No.	ITEMS	PROJECTED AMOUNT
1.	Internet and library loans	R 2500,00
2.	Transport	R 4500,00
3.	Voice recorder and digital camera	R 300,00
4.	Stationary, printing, paper and bounding related costs	R 2500,00
5.	Light refreshments for respondents	R 250,00
6.	Transcription costs (self)	R 250,00
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>R 11300,00</b>