



# Baptist identity and mission in a rainbow nation: Distilling imperatives from mixed-methods research within the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (1994–2012)

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The Baptist Union of Southern Africa's (hereafter BUSA) future is conspicuous unless it understands the context within which it ministers in our 'rainbow nation'. As a union of churches, BUSA faces significant challenges that have been highlighted through a mixed-methods research approach. Through many months of data collection at the Baptist Union archives, an online survey and informal interviews spanning many parts of South Africa, the researcher practically demonstrates the importance of the cumulative results for the future of BUSA. This article highlights, in overview fashion, a few of the major challenges that need to be urgently addressed in the light of BUSA's historic ecclesiological presuppositions that have their roots in the missional ministry of Hugo Gutshe who saw each of his Baptist congregants as missionary, and expanded the influence of BUSA in South Africa.

## Introduction: Setting the scene for research

This article presents an analysis of the author's doctoral research findings on the state of BUSA in post-1994 South Africa through a process of mixed-methods research applied to BUSA's local churches. An important motivating factor for this study relates to the emergence of the Global South as an important role player in global Christianity, and as such, highlights the inherent value of a mixed-methods study on the Baptist movement in South Africa. It is clear that Christianity will exercise greater influence upon global Christian trends in years to come thus shaping the face of the future of the Christian faith worldwide – with strong Afro-centric and Asiatic overtones (Henry 2013; cf. Jenkins 2007; Ruiz 2005). As a whole, South African Baptist history is both rich and diverse and continues to play an important role within the church scene in South Africa, and through partnership with many other Baptist groupings within various Southern African countries that look to BUSA for direction and continental leadership and coaching.

Before we proceed, it is important to note that there is a plurality of Baptists in South Africa, with a number of 'denominational coverings'; the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA), the Baptist Convention of South Africa (BCSA) and the Baptist Association of South Africa (BASA), as well as various independent-type Baptist groups that are representative of this movement. BUSA, however, is the main focus of this article, in which the author hopes to expound on some of the macro trends operating within BUSA in the present-day and share some common micro trends observed at grass roots level. This study is unique, but has built on the foundation of Peter Christofides (2009), who undertook a similar study entitled; 'The rediscovery of the role of the laity in the mission of the church', in which similar field research was conducted with the aim of rediscovering the role and importance of the laity in local BUSA churches. In some respects, the author's doctoral dissertation (listed in the paragraph below, and underpinning this article) has taken Christofides to the 'next level' as far as missional church proposals within BUSA are concerned, and the denominational trends since 1994 reveal some of the areas BUSA needs to focus on as a whole in its mission.

The author's doctoral thesis, 'Leading toward missional change' (Henry 2013), deals extensively with both qualitative and quantitative data in a mixed-methods approach, and although this is a relatively new approach (cf. Roberts 2010), the author felt that 'the purpose of this study itself necessitates a varied approach' (Henry 2013:28). Furthermore: 'The mixed-methods approach is expanding as a viable methodology in the social and human sciences, evidenced by a variety of books and journals reporting and promoting mixed-methods research' (Roberts 2010:144). Creswell & Clark (2011:1) observe that the mixed-methods approach has been called the 'third methodological movement'. It has also been named the 'third research paradigm' (Johnson &



Onwuegbuzie 2004:15) and 'a new star in the social science sky' (Mayring 2007:1). The results are, of course, interpreted through a BUSA framework outlined by the author that forms the all-important foundation for the interpretation of the prevailing trends and their practical outworking. The research was multilayered and included primary research in the Baptist Union archives, quantitative surveying and analysis and other valuable qualitative elements described below.

In this article, I will deal with the results and application of qualitative and quantitative research, as a participant observer in BUSA, as it applies to the above-mentioned methodology. The main inputs in my research methodology relate to the 'missional church survey' (quantitative research), which was designed to give 'impressions' or 'snapshots' of local churches and where these see themselves presently, and a national research field trip (qualitative research). Interpretation of the realities described in this research, are possible, as the author's role in this research is what can be termed a 'participant observer'. Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) helpfully define participant observation as a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture. This is important as most human settings do not give up the insiders' world of meaning and action except to a person willing to become a member. Accurate, objective and truthful findings are more likely as the researcher engages directly, personally as well as existentially with people in daily life (Jorgensen 1989). Participant observation viewed positively is most useful during the preliminary stages of scientific enquiry for both exploration as well as description. These preliminary descriptions can then be used 'to formulate concepts for measurement, as well as generalisations and hypotheses that with further testing may be used to construct explanatory theories' (Jorgensen 1989:7).

Regarding due process, the missional survey was electronically distributed among pastors and leaders of BUSA churches listed in the South African Baptist Handbook ([SABH] 2009–2010) and the results were collated and analysed further – especially in the light of data collected from BUSA archives and qualitative research (given the most 'weight' due to inconsistent data). An important part of my mixed-methods methodology includes qualitative research, which has come from the following sources:

- structured interviews with BUSA staff
- informal interviews with leaders involved with BUSA mission (past and present)
- informal interviews with our BUSA seminary staff and principals
- informal interviews with local church pastors representing a reasonable segment of most of our provinces and racial divides
- informal interviews with church members and leaders representing a reasonable segmentation of most of our provinces and racial and economic divides.

This qualitative research, described above, is what ties the components together and bonds the mosaic of what represents a growing challenge for the continuation and further growth of BUSA witness in South Africa and other partnerships developed by BUSA in many other parts of Africa. The study itself is both retrospective (in as much as it helps me to interpret present-day traditions and trends) and prospective (in as much as I look into the future of BUSA ministry). My prayer is that this study will add great value to our union of churches as we are his witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth – fulfilling the Christological, teleological, imperative.

## Current trends in BUSA churches

### Description of macro trends operable within BUSA

In this section some discernible trends will be described that have emerged from quantitative research through the missional church survey specifically, and provide foundational justification of the broad-based relevance and reliability of the presentation of the data collected in preparation for prescriptive measures outlined later in this article. The 2012 Assembly of BUSA churches held at Baptist House in Roodepoort, Johannesburg, represented 499 fully constituted member churches and approximately 139 fellowships; a total of 638 churches. All churches in membership or association with BUSA are fully autonomous, meaning they are legally constituted, self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating (cf. Scheepers 2008:6). This is in keeping with the Declaration of Principle accepted at the formation of BUSA that guaranteed the right of every separate church to interpret and administer in and for itself the laws of Christ (Vink 1993:7). As a direct result of BUSA's great diversity, there is some uncertainty regarding what continues to define us as a denomination today, except a shared history and similar core beliefs (Baptist Principles). Any study dealing with such a broad spectrum of individuals can easily be adapted to one specific grouping, however, as I will prove, my study (although limited) has covered a wide spectrum of individuals, churches, cultures and contexts.

Over a period of around seven months qualitative research was conducted among churches within BUSA. Emails with direct links to the online missional church survey were distributed to each Baptist church that had an email address published in the 2011/2012 BUSA directory. Respondents completed the survey online and the results were recorded accordingly.

Figure 1 is a representation of the numbers of respondents recorded on a daily basis from 12 February 2012 to 18 August 2012. Out of all the surveys sent, 110 responses were recorded for further research, reflection and analysis as per the researcher's initial proposal and design.

One of the immediate questions that come to mind relates to whether the research into missional ecclesiology within BUSA is limited to a specific group of individuals within

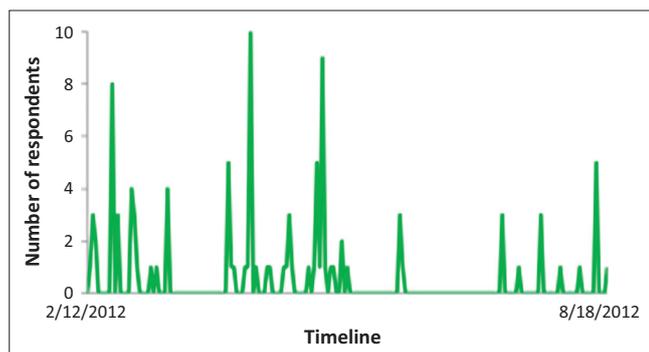


FIGURE 1: Online respondent timeline.

TABLE 1: Geography of respondents.

Variable	n	%
Village (no/ very little basic infrastructure & sparse population)	2	2
Rural (little basic infrastructure & medium-sized sparse population)	5	5
Semi-urban (basic infrastructure in place with medium-sized population)	20	20
Informal settlement (on urban/ semi-urban fringe with higher density population)	1	1
Suburban (sophisticated infrastructure with denser population)	61	62
Urban (inner city with high density population)	16	16
Other	1	1

BUSA with a certain ‘agenda’ (e.g. Isaiah 58 network, Sola 5 etc.). However, the missional church survey covered a wide field of respondents from within numerous geographical, cultural and ideological or theological settings. From the geographical perspective, respondents came from varied settings within South Africa, that in many respects reflect our own population trends, with the bulk of the populace centred within urban contexts. The values in Table 1 indicate the broadness in terms of inclusivity within the scope of this study. The only section that did not receive much response is from those ministering in informal settlements. The reason this is lower, is that many respondents would classify their informal settlements within the context of ‘semi-urban’ in the South African setting. However, there are not a large number of BUSA churches engaged in ministry in informal settlements (as a proportion to the whole).

This spread of respondents is further reinforced by the socio-economic data collected from the survey. As can be seen in Table 2, there is great diversity within the socio-economic standing of member churches within BUSA. What is significant to note here is our innate ‘comfort’ in ministering to those in the middle-class segment, which represents the vast majority of churches in BUSA. Our constituencies are weak in reaching the higher-income groups and are not really scratching the surface of reaching those within the lower-income groups of South Africa.

What is the relevance of this study within the context of BUSA? Is there a place to talk about the concept of a missional church? It seems clear from the grass roots up that the missional conversation is *highly relevant to the future of our denomination*; in fact I would argue that without a focus on a missional church, we will not speak of a BUSA in years to come. Table 3 indicates the broader understanding of the

TABLE 2: Socio-economic standing of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa members.

Variable	n	%
Predominantly middle-class congregants	20	20
Predominantly lower-income congregants	10	10
Predominantly higher-income congregants	1	1
Mix of middle & upper income earners	25	25
Mix or lower & middle income earners	19	19
Mix of lower, middle and upper- income earners	26	26
Other	1	1

TABLE 3: Understanding of ‘missional’.

Variable	n	%
Just another ‘fad’ that will eventually pass	2	2
A challenge towards renewing the mission of the Church	93	95
A radical movement that must be avoided at all costs	0	0
I am unsure of what this means	3	3
Other	1	1

term ‘missional’ among the leaders in our union. Given the great diversity of respondents, it seems that a vast majority of BUSA leaders see the missional conversation as a challenge toward the renewing of the mission of the Church.

However, what makes this conversation even more relevant to BUSA is the self-understanding of churches within BUSA. Notwithstanding the fact that respondents may select more than one checkbox – so percentages may add up to more than 100% – it seems significant to me that 34% of our churches see themselves as missional (cf. Figure 2). This, in conjunction with Dion Chang’s (2012) ‘Faith-based youth’ urban tribe, unpacked in his light-hearted exposé on South African tribes entitled, ‘New Urban Tribes of South Africa’, makes the missional conversation even more essential to BUSA’s future.

Another key indicator of the missional change that is emerging at grass roots level within BUSA churches nationwide relates to how the church views and practices missions. In many BUSA churches there exists a dichotomy between what can be termed ‘missions’ and ‘evangelism’. Mission is seen as crossing frontiers (culture, geographical etc.) and is the task of those specially called and trained as missionaries, supported by the local church and denominational base. Evangelism is seen as a local enterprise involving those within the congregation with an inclination towards this. Both of these concepts have been concretised into programmes and ministries run by lay leaders, often without the full knowledge of those attending a church, and with little feedback to members about work done and results achieved (perhaps only at an annual AGM). As the missional church concept gains ground in our Baptist praxis, churches within our denomination will move away from what has been illustrated in Table 4 (40% only support local and foreign missionaries financially and through prayer), toward more *personal involvement* in the mission and vision of a Baptist Community of Faith. Many churches, though, are working toward this becoming a reality but do not have a national forum or platform to gauge what others within our

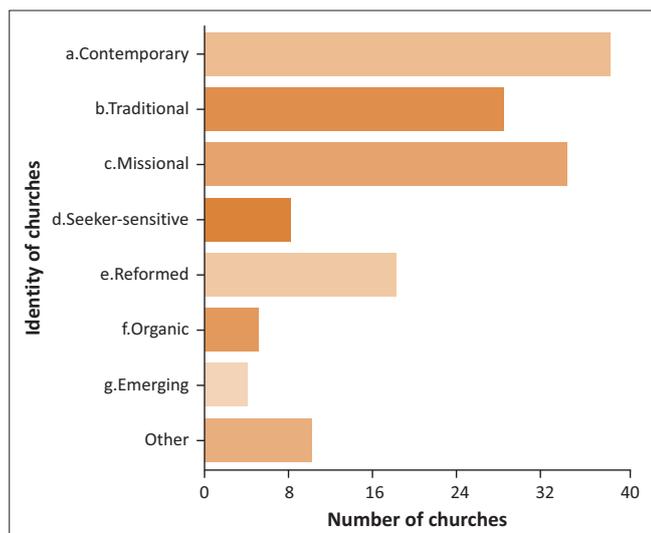


FIGURE 2: Self-identity of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa churches.

TABLE 4: The Baptist Union of Southern Africa churches and discipleship.

Variable	n	%
Sporadic and unplanned	8	8
Cell-based	65	65
Solely through Sunday preaching/teaching	14	14
Intentional events and seminars/courses	26	26
Mentorship & coaching relationships	33	33
Other	3	3

family of churches are doing in relation to their context and community (cf. Table 5).

## Reviewing BUSA's biblical theological mandate in South Africa's 'rainbow nation'

The results of the study are clear, and both qualitative and quantitative data collected confirm the continued need to practise what Van Gelder (2007) encourages: *Ecclesia semper formanda, ecclesia semper reformanda* – the church must always form and reform, BUSA must seek to be true to both 'text and context' as it fulfils the *missio Dei*. There is much congruence with Daniel Akin in his address to Southern Baptist Churches entitled, 'Ten Mandates for Southern Baptists' and the South African Baptist context. Inasmuch as there is a great deal to celebrate within BUSA, I concur with Akin (2007:7), where he states: 'I am not convinced we have a clear understanding and a clear vision of who we are and what we should be'. There are many challenges that can be drawn from an analysis of the data, to name a few: leadership continuity and racial integration; pastoral devotional integrity; leadership skills; critical evangelical contemporary scholarship; growth in youth and children's ministry at both local church and denominational support and envisioning; holistic ministry to young adults; Inter-generational ministry initiatives; spiritual growth in terms of discipleship processes and effectiveness, and the nature of the church (being missional). As my research will indicate, BUSA is at a crucial junction, and the author contends that BUSA's main problem is primarily a

missiological one, with ecclesiastical challenges that urgently need to be addressed by BUSA's leaders, at national level, as well as the grass roots. The importance of BUSA's critical self-reflection and analysis is paramount in securing a future. In this section, the author will briefly introduce a number of imperatives (Akin 2007 speaks of ten specific mandates for Southern Baptists in his analysis) that will ensure BUSA remains close to its ecclesiastical heritage, yet faces the current and ever-changing contexts with boldness. These imperatives move away from the descriptive data mentioned above with a view toward prescriptive measures for a new milieu of ministry effectiveness. The brief descriptions of each imperative are based on descriptive research within the corpus of my mixed-methods research project.

### Imperative one: Church membership standards need to be re-envisioned

It is clear that there is an incremental paradigm shift in the way people think about church membership that needs to be acknowledged and understood. The current trend within BUSA is indicative of a shift from official church membership toward being affiliated with a church without formal application or recognition. This can be seen at denominational level with the emergence and growth of affiliate churches that are not full members of BUSA, but choose to align themselves to BUSA because of historical ties, personal or corporate preference and theological congruence to Baptist ecclesiology.

In part, perhaps this is due to the increasing consumerist culture prevalent within much of South Africa that breeds a lack of commitment and valid participation in a biblical community. There are many reasons that can be given for this trend; from lack of teaching on church membership, to lack of confidence in the mission and vision of local churches, or migration trends within our globalised world that lead to professionals relocating due to career opportunities. Whatever the cause, one thing is clear in growing and healthy BUSA churches there is a higher standard or expectation placed on being a church member versus attending. Perhaps the global importance of this trend can be illustrated in Thom Rainer's recent book (with a North American audience in mind); *I am a church member* (2013), where he categorically states that many church members have lost the biblical understanding of what it is to be a part of the body of Christ. Akin (2007) furthermore encourages Southern Baptists to be anchored to the biblical imperative of a regenerate church membership and the privilege of membership needs to be promulgated against what he terms, 'easy believism and a compromised gospel' (2007:8).

### Imperative two: A workable process of discipleship needs to be instilled

Making disciples is a recurring theme of importance in scripture (see Mt 28:20; Mk 8:34–35; Mt 4:19; 11:29; 12:30 etc.), coupled with spiritual maturity evidenced through faithfulness and fruitfulness. BUSA churches have a varied approach to discipleship, but few manage to articulate



and follow through with their process effectively. Perhaps the decline in attendance and participation by children, youth and young adults in our churches, and the declining numbers of BUSA students entering the Baptist Theological College (BTC) or the Cape Town Baptist Seminary (CTBS) is indicative of this discipleship malfunction. A good example of a similar challenge for evangelical churches with a Baptist background can be found in Willow Creek church's 'reveal' study (cf. Parkinson & Hawkins 2009) describing results from research completed tracking their real effectiveness in the long-term. As is illustrated in Branaugh's (2008) online news post, 'Willow Creek's "Huge Shift"':

After modeling a seeker-sensitive approach to church growth for three decades, Willow Creek Community Church now plans to gear its weekend services toward mature believers seeking to grow in their faith ... But the analysis in Reveal, which surveyed congregants at Willow Creek and six other churches, suggested that evangelistic impact was greater from those who self-reported as 'close to Christ' or 'Christ-centered' than from new church attendees. In addition, a quarter of the 'close to Christ' and 'Christ-centered' crowd described themselves as spiritually 'stalled' or 'dissatisfied' with the role of the church in their spiritual growth. Even more alarming to Willow Creek: About a quarter of the 'stalled' segment and 63 percent of the 'dissatisfied' segment contemplated leaving the church. (n.p.)

In BUSA, churches are reasonably good at reaching new converts (mostly de-churched population segments) and integrating them into the church community, but the longer Christians remain in the church, the less they seem to grow spiritually. The author does not suggest that BUSA is not growing any disciples, but what is evident from Table 4 and Table 5 is that the cell group or small group approach to discipleship is prevalent. However, although 65% of respondents stated that this was their main focus, only 57% reported a level of success in their chosen platform for discipleship. Additionally, what concerns me is the 14% of respondents that indicated a limitation of discipleship to Sunday preaching and teaching. Many churches are re-thinking the practical aspects of models of missional discipleship that BUSA will need to consider engaging with to provide a platform for dialogue, debate and discipleship.

### **Imperative three: Effective evangelistic efforts, in partnership with others will be beneficial**

BUSA started the second millennium with a renewed national and associational thrust on mission and evangelism from a denominational perspective. The focus here remained on associational church planting, reaching Muslims, inner city ministry, and every church being a mission church. The effectiveness of this approach, however, is questionable and needs further establishment. One of the indicators of BUSA churches taking their ministry to local communities seriously is their rate of baptisms that are submitted to the annual report. Given that the South African Baptist Handbook's (SABH) return rate was 29% in 2011, the number of baptisms has decreased

significantly since 1994. There may be several reasons for our contemporary state, one being that BUSA churches have not adequately responded to the annual returns since 2002, which in itself is a serious indictment on BUSA leaders and pastors. Perhaps, baptism by full immersion is no longer only a BUSA distinctive, where other churches now perform baptisms by full immersion. However, I prefer to look at baptism figures as a key indicator of churches engaged in local community outreach, witness or mission. Thus, numbers of baptisms can represent converts won to the Christian faith in any given year. If this approach is applied, then it can be assumed that BUSA is seeing some 1500 converts every year (using the 2011 figures as a basis). If this is the case, then it means that every BUSA church has only reached three people on average this last year with the transformative gospel it claims to bear and witness to. If the average church membership in BUSA is 100 members (50 000 members in 500 churches = 100 member average), it would take on average 33.3 members to reach one new convert. Compared to Acts 2, where 3000 (an opposite ratio of almost 300 new converts per disciple of Christ, of those gathered together at the time) people were added to the church in one day, it seems indicative of a more serious problem – BUSA churches no longer take their missionary calling seriously and have settled into being 'mission-minded' and complacent. This can be further substantiated when considering the rate of numbers of people being baptised as compared to those taken into BUSA membership. Christofides (2009) includes this component in his research and indicates the following:

- There is a major shortfall in the rate of people who stay on in church and become fully participatory members.
- Not since 1997 have there been more people joining BUSA than people being baptised.
- The problem lies in the discipleship process within our churches – people are leaving BUSA churches without being grown and discipled in the Christian faith (cf. pp. 185–186).

### **Imperative four: Next-generation ministries must become a core focus reflected across board in collaborative and creative ways**

When looking toward the future, one often looks to the next-generation, to children, youth and young adults. What are the growth trends within BUSA among its ministry and outreach to children, youth and young adults? Are there any significant changes in trends that can be noted here that are of any great importance for BUSA mission and ministry? The new millennium was inaugurated with a conference entitled 'Baptists in the 21st century' that was held at the Gariiep dam in February 2000 (cf. SABH 2000–2001). One of the focus areas of the conference was a new emphasis on youth and children (a change of perception towards youth and children's ministry was needed). Following this were numerous national meetings of importance leading to the 2005 Assembly where BUSA's vision of 'Impact 2010', adopted at the 2005 Assembly, has taken pre-eminence in the recent era of Baptist history. This, in the light of 'impact

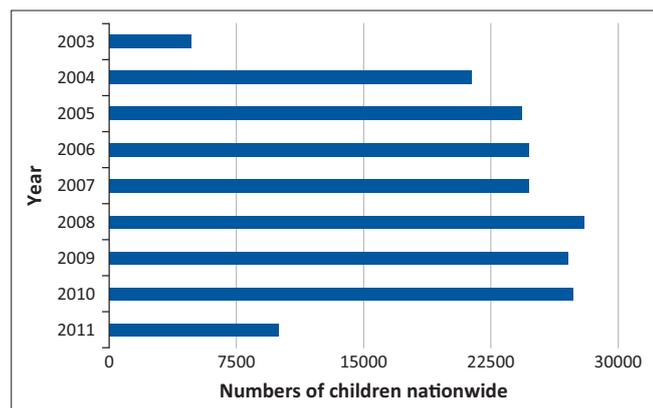


FIGURE 3: Number of children on the national front.

consultation' and the Lekkerood Declaration (cf. SABH 2003–2004), had the following outcomes (which have not all been met, especially as they relate to next-generation ministry):

- renewed focus on spiritual renewal-prayer
- doubling the Baptist Union (BU) membership
- doubling the number of churches
- doubling the number of children and youth being ministered to in our churches
- doubling the number of children workers and Sunday school teachers
- at least 300 'missions involved' sending and caring churches
- at least 300 churches with active youth and young adult ministries
- development of regional consultancies
- an effective Pastoral Care Mentoring programme in place.

Statistics South Africa in their 'Mid-year population estimates' report (2011:12) indicate that nearly one-third (32.3%) of the South African population is younger than 15 years; approximately 7.7% (3.9 million) is 60 years or older. Additionally, of the 32.3% under the age of 15, 3.6 million (23%) live in KwaZulu-Natal and 3.07 million (19.4%) live in Gauteng. Additionally, the Northern Cape, the province with the smallest population, has nearly one-third (30%) of its population aged younger than 15 years (cf. Statistics South Africa 2011:12). Figure 3 indicates a general growing trend in children's ministry from 2003–2010, which is confirmed by Christofides (2009:186) in his study on the numbers of Sunday school children in BUSA since 1993. However, 2011 depicts a tragic departure from this trend, as is evident within all spheres of ministry to the 'next-generation' in BUSA.

The 2011–2012 SABH Handbook (2012:115) reports of the associational change in children's ministry figures between 2010 and 2011 (cf. Table 5).

There may be a simple explanation for the drastic decrease in numbers; the statistical return rate differentiation between 2010 and 2011. Table 6 indicates the difference on a regional basis (SABH 2012:115).

TABLE 5: Children's ministry changes (Associational).

Year and percentage	BANC	BNA	BBA	EPBA	FSBA	KZNBA	WPBA	BUSA
Children 2010	277	6319	5105	1552	1411	4587	8069	27320
Children 2011	100	2643	1729	699	135	2360	2301	9967
% change in number of Children	-177	-139	-195	-122	-945	-94	-251	-174

BANC, Baptist Association of the Northern Cape; BNA, Baptist Northern Association; BBA, Baptist Border Association; EPBA, Eastern Province Baptist Association; FSBA, Free State Baptist Association; KZNBA, KwaZulu-Natal Baptist Association; WPBA, Western Province Baptist Association; BUSA, Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

TABLE 6: Statistical rate of return.

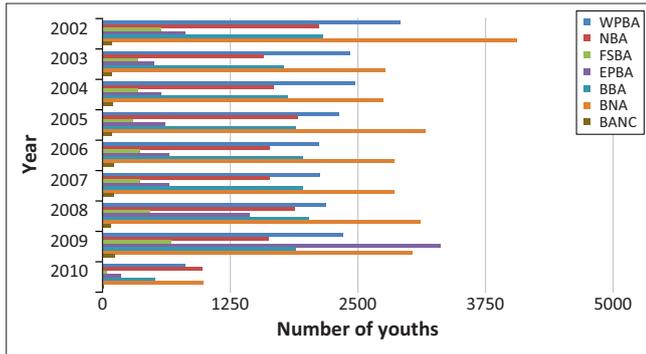
Returns	BANC	BNA	BBA	EPBA	FSBA	KZNBA	WPBA	BUSA
Statistical Returns 2010	10	48	17	23	20	25	53	196
Statistical Returns 2011	2	43	16	14	7	28	35	145
Returns as a % of Churches 2011	14	27	22	33	29	31	35	29

BANC, Baptist Association of the Northern Cape; BNA, Baptist Northern Association; BBA, Baptist Border Association; EPBA, Eastern Province Baptist Association; FSBA, Free State Baptist Association; KZNBA, KwaZulu-Natal Baptist Association; WPBA, Western Province Baptist Association; BUSA, Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

This may explain some of the overall decline by simple deduction. However, KwaZulu-Natal records an increase in the rate of returns from 2010–2011 (from 25 returns in 2010 to 28 returns in 2011); however, the result is a net decrease in children from 4587 recorded in 2010 to 2360 in 2011. This seems to go against the grain of a simple deduction as far as the overall correlation between the rate of return and growth or decline in numbers is concerned. The Baptist Border Association's (BBA) difference in rate of returns between 2010 and 2011 was one church, yet, the rate of decline in children's attendance in 2011 was -195%. What happened to nearly 3500 children? Another example of this is the Baptist Northern Association's (BNA) rate of return difference between 2010 and 2011, of five churches, which could hardly account for the difference between 6319 children attending in 2010 to 2643 in 2011– even if these five churches were the largest Baptist Churches in the country! So it seems reasonable to conclude from the data above, that we did not heed Christofides's warning in 2009.

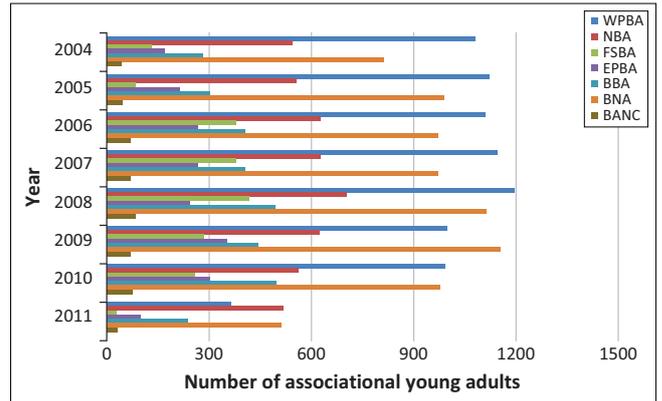
These children will need to be developed in areas of the church where there are needs and people will need to model a way of life to them that will keep them in the church and encourage them to participate in activities and programmes in the church. Goals and objectives will need to be set up in order for the children to get a good grasp of the biblical teaching of the priesthood of all believers, as well as empowering children to think 'missionally' and eventually to grow up to be effective leaders who will train others to do the same (Christofides 2009).

What has led to this downward spiral? I am sure that there are a number of factors, however, the most obvious relates to the decrease in children's workers over the same period. Christofides (2009:188) confirmed that the steady flow and involvement of teachers in children's ministry within our BUSA churches contributed to the overall 'stability' of this growth among our churches.



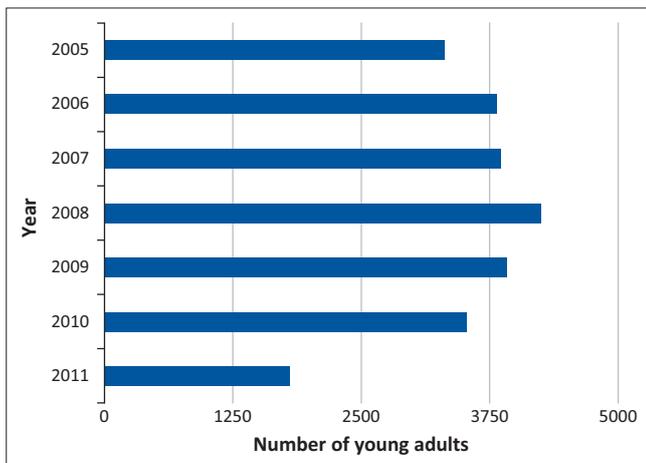
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**FIGURE 4:** The Baptist Union of Southern Africa regional distributions of youth.



BANC, Baptist Association of the Northern Cape; BNA, Baptist Northern Association; BBA, Baptist Border Association; EPBA, Eastern Province Baptist Association; FSBA, Free State Baptist Association; KZNBA, KwaZulu-Natal Baptist Association; WPBA, Western Province Baptist Association; BUSA, Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

**FIGURE 6:** Associational young adult breakdowns.



**FIGURE 5:** The Baptist Union of Southern Africa young adults nationwide.

Figure 4 illustrates the associational and regional figures for consideration which detail the trends in youth ministry since 2002.

Despite the focus of BUSA's vision 2010 to double local church membership, double Baptist Union (BU) member churches, double the number of children and youth being reached, 300 churches with youth and young adult ministries, doubling the number of children's workers and teachers, 300 churches being 'mission involved', it seems that the exact opposite has been the net result. A similar trend regarding children and youth can be found within the young adult segment of BUSA. The only difference between children, youth and young adults is that the downward spiral in membership and participation for young adults started nationally from around 2008 (cf. Figure 5). This trend specifically is of great significance as it shows an evident weakness of BUSA churches to engage a generation of South Africans meaningfully with the gospel, disciple them adequately in the faith and deploy them responsibly in the mission of the church as it follows the *mission Dei* in its teleological orientation.

Figure 6 (below) depicts the 'associational' breakdown of young adults nationwide. The Western Province Baptist Association (WPBA) has experienced the greatest decline in young adult membership and participation since 2004,

alongside the BNA and BBA. The only region to maintain a reasonable young adult segment in churches is the Natal Baptist Association (NBA), which incidentally, according to the Statistics South Africa's (2011:14) mid-year report, has the greatest population of young adults in South Africa (aged 20–24), and the second largest population of young adults in South Africa (aged 25–29) by a small margin compared to Gauteng. The same report records KwaZulu-Natal as having the lowest number of people migrating outward (-10 174) in the years 2001–2006. In the period between 2006–2011 this trend changes somewhat with KwaZulu-Natal currently being the third largest region in terms of in-migration figures in South Africa (Statistics South Africa 2011:13). Thus, despite the NBA's steady growth in the young adult segment, it is not nearly as significant as the overall growth trend within the NBA region.

I conclude this section with the Youth Executive Committee Report to the BUSA annual Assembly by Ndogo (2012) that adequately sums up the current state of our youth ministry (and ministry to the next-generation, including children and young adults):

The Baptist Union of South Africa has an undeterminable future if youth ministry is not highly prioritized forthwith. The resignation of Tony Christian this year leaving only Mohau Radebe in our national office perhaps registers the state of affairs at denominational level, not only to mention comparable concerns at local church levels. From our observation of the delegates at the Port Elizabeth Assembly (2011), we noted among the delegates a dwindling representation of youth. We would like to register that if the Baptist Union exists for its current membership of adults and has no serious consideration for the next generation, then our Union is an endangered species. In leadership it is a given that an organization that exists for itself will not grow. This invariably means our future lies in establishing interventions that will ensure the perpetuity of this denomination until the Lord comes. (p.1)

Additional imperatives worth noting that may need to be dealt with in addition to the above points are:

- *The congregational principle of leadership and governance must be explored more fully in the light of the evident*



*elder-led church approach in many Baptist Churches across the spectrum.* Many of our BUSA churches operate on a type of democratic process, where there is often much debate and division. Unfortunately, congregational church governance, taken to its extreme is evident in that 7% of pastors reported that they were unable to make any decision without board approval, and gifted leaders are not enabled or empowered to lead where there is a misrepresented biblical understanding of congregational church governance. Elders must lead; church members must discern and serve, while pastors must be equippers of the saints and shepherds of God's flock with varying roles, as a first among equals, in accordance with their gifting and circumstances. BUSA churches need to rethink and reformulate their own theology and praxis of church leadership and governance dynamics in order to survive and thrive in this new paradigm.

Effective care and personal development structures for pastors with a network affiliation need to be fostered. When considering the number of pastors struggling in ministry, at various levels, and the rise of Isaiah 58 and Sola 5 networks, it has become clear that leadership has moved to the margins and is attracting various pastors and leaders toward the periphery of denominational allegiance and leadership avenues. It is clear that our current structure and ministry philosophy does not – and perhaps cannot – cater for the needs and desires of each pastor in the union. In recognition of the diversity we have, BUSA needs to strengthen and encourage the sideline ministries like Isaiah 58 and Sola 5 through collaborative effort and creative engagement, making it essential for pastors to belong to a group within the parameters of our historical theological framework. This will become increasingly important. As it is, 14% of BUSA pastors state that church ministry consumes all their time and that they find it hard to fulfil family and recreational needs, let alone physical, emotional and spiritual needs! There seems to be a direct correlation between pastors whose lives are 'consumed' by ministry (not taking seriously the priesthood of all believers and full giftedness of Christ's body), and a spiritual disconnect in pastoral service, which has far-reaching implications for BUSA leadership.

To break this down further, according to BUSA pastor's self-identification, it appears that of the six pastors who do not have a regular time of devotion, two identify themselves as part of a contemporary church, three pastors as part of a reformed church and one pastor from a traditional church setting. Of those pastors who find it difficult to have devotions most days, eight are from contemporary churches, three from reformed churches, two from a traditional church, and one from a missional setting. The others did not identify a particular type of church setting. Of the 68 pastors that have a daily time of prayer and study, 19 are from contemporary churches, eight are from reformed churches, 18 are from traditional forms of church, 13 are from missional ones, two are organic churches and three are identified as seeker-sensitive churches.

BUSA exists as a denomination, as a custodian of Baptist beliefs and principles, and for functional and practical purposes (the terminology employed by Van Gelder [2007] is missional and confessional), as it carries out its mission in the world. BUSA pastors are a part of this mission vision, and are, in many respects, responsible at grass roots level for the dissemination of Baptist beliefs and praxis. As a denomination, BUSA is under serious threat and needs to be critical, contemporary and intentional in leadership in the medium term if BUSA is to transit into a more positive phase of ministry. What has become evident during the course of this study is that BUSA leaders (in national positions) have not listened to – and heeded – researchers (like Christofides 2009), and taken their work seriously. Ministry in this era has been dominated by a pragmatic approach to vision and ministry that has not adequately captured the imagination of most BUSA pastors, nor church members (especially youth and young adults). This, in part, has led to the formation of Sola 5 and Isaiah 58 as relational networks within BUSA (both holding to the 1689 Confession of Faith). Du Plessis (2012:169) reminds us that BUSA stands right in the middle of these groups as far as epistemology is concerned, neither taking a very strong stance on its theology (yet not compromising on the essentials of the gospel), nor being postmodern and 'emergent'. The focus of BUSA ministry has been on maintaining a post-apartheid representation at leadership level (understandably so!), without being too critical regarding the actual content and long-term vision of the union including leaders or all backgrounds and ages at every level of leadership. According to Du Plessis (2012:169) 'BUSA seems to focus more on the pragmatic functions as an administrative organization and less on the assertion and dissemination of doctrinal truth'. A positive step was taken at the 2004 Assembly, where members mandated the BUSA Executive to appoint a person to spearhead the development of a Department of Pastoral Care. Due to financial constraints, this appointment was only implemented in June 2007 with the 'part-time' appointment of a retired pastor, Rick Inglis:

- *BUSA will need to be demonstrate greater care and intentionality in the thought, collection, storage, analysis and communication of data collected from its constituency.* Leadership cannot make uninformed decisions relating to the realities experienced on the ground. My research has a few limitations related directly to this point; it found the following elements concerning:
  - data availability (gaps present in the BUSA annual handbook)
  - data accuracy and consistency is questionable.
    - In addition to the above, there has been little effort on the part of those tasked with the collection of the data to gain relevant information relating to key areas that will assist the BU Executive in their understanding of our current context and challenges. I brought this point to their attention at their June 2013 meeting held at Baptist House, Roodepoort. We will need to be clearer on the measurable outcomes of what we desire to



know, and allow the experts we have within our structures to advise us on the path ahead.

- *What has become clear in recent BUSA history is that denominational structures and processes need to be reviewed, defended and re-imagined, including the Baptist Missions Department (BMD), associations and local fraternals.* There is the recognition that ministry today cannot be done effectively using historical structures that no longer fit the current context, and it is clear that many associations within the BUSA are feeling the need to structure differently for ministry in this era and are preparing proposals to present to the BUSA Executive in due course. It seems clear to me that denominational support is at an all-time low point, and confidence in the vision, direction and capacity of BUSA has waned. This can be demonstrated by the decline in real growth, and the decline in churches affiliated with BUSA in recent years. BUSA Assembly attendance and participation is indicative of this downward trend, and there is a lack of dialogue and interaction among leaders across the spectrum.
- *Theological education needs to be 'for the church' and in partnership with local churches as it seeks to provide quality education, relevant professional development and practical, on-the-job skills to practitioners and leaders in the context of local churches in South Africa.* This is happening to a large extent, and needs to be developed more in time. Additionally, a national, mandatory continuous education curriculum for all pastors on BUSA ministry lists needs to be set up. This function should be coordinated independently by the BTC and CTBS as a joint, cooperative effort, which should set in motion a plan to grow the capacity and ministry competency of BUSA pastors moving ahead. Continuous professional development is mandatory for most professionals operating at the levels of influence that many pastors do, and pastors should be no different. As the bare minimum, it should be a requirement for any new applicant for BUSA ministerial recognition. Du Plessis (2012:207–210) comments on the importance of the continuing development of pastors and leaders which needs to be urgently considered by the BUSA Executive for immediate implementation:
 

Whilst the requirement to grow ... in the BUSA code of pastoral ethics does exist, there is no formal programme to firstly monitor compliance and secondly to ensure that pastors obtain the kind of training required to keep them up to date in terms of the latest developments with respect to areas in which they minister. (Du Plessis 2012:208)
- *Racial integration, where possible, is a must.* The 1990 BUSA presidential address surprised many delegates and served as a watershed for transformation within BUSA. Terry Rae, BUSA General Secretary at the time, urged BUSA to move towards further racial participation and recognition within all levels of BUSA.
- In 1991 there was a definite change in relation to race and gender issues, and BUSA took a proactive stance towards being non-racial in both practice and leadership

(BUSA Executive Minutes June 1991b:29). Furthermore, in 1991, BUSA reasserted its unequivocal rejection of apartheid as a sin and it committed itself to work towards the establishment of a just society in South Africa (BUSA Executive Minutes, March 1991a:30). One of the challenges that it faced in the South African context, relates to the social interaction, assimilation and acceptance of the diverse populace that makes up South Africa's 'rainbow nation'. Churches, being communities of Christians, are not exempt from Paul's injunction in 2 Corinthians 5:17–20: being involved in reconciliation as Christ's ambassadors in the world. As Baptists, Scheepers (2008:17) is correct in his summation that BUSA's history has not been all that glamorous, especially when it comes to race relations and structure, which should make us all the more determined to see a better, united eschatological community.

This needs to be an area of concern for many churches that are located in multicultural or multinational communities, where the immediate community is not homogenous (given that there are many that still are). By self-proclamation, many BUSA churches that have heterogeneous communities still struggle toward full integration and leadership representation with a majority of cases desiring change and working proactively toward this end.

## Conclusion

This article has presented the results of a mixed-methods study using BUSA as a primary interlocutor and has shown the importance of leading toward missional change in BUSA. However, unless BUSA leaders 'hear' the concerns, challenges and threats described in this research, incorporating afro-centric missional perspectives on the history of South African Baptists, its future will be undeterminable!

In summary, being missional is less about *definition* and more about *mission*. One cannot exist without the other, but both work hand-in-hand. BUSA churches tend to focus more on the *definition* aspect of mission and missions, which often prohibits action. Being missional relates to the intentional sending posture adopted by Christians living in post-1994 South Africa, within the shadows of postcolonialism and postmodernism. The role of the church in mission today relates to her understanding of her essence and divine call, rights and responsibilities *in* the world, *for* the world and *with* the world. Being missional is more of a partnership in mission with the church acting in concert with individuals and communities through the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God. Missional, I believe, is contextual and takes the concerns of the Triune God for the world seriously and is willing, no matter what the cost, to engage others as they practise what Jesus taught – being salt and light.

Being missional in our day and age is more than simply a passing 'fad'. Being missional is part of a rediscovery of the nature of God, his church and his mission in the world – a discovery that is an urgent need in BUSA. This concern for



the church and mission is correctly reflected by BUSA pastors who completed the survey part of the quantitative research approach. A vast majority of participants in the survey saw being 'missional' as the *quintessence of Christianity*, and being missional as a rediscovery of the eternal, Triune God's purpose in, for and with the world.

However, despite the importance *being* missional has for BUSA, its *definition* needs to be clearly understood to avoid confusion and irrelevance. After all, if everything is missional, nothing is missional. Both mission and definition are key to unleashing the mission potential of churches within BUSA's sphere of influence. There is an evident need for a missional ecclesiology that is centred on South Africa (and Africa!). This concept is relevant in Africa within the 21st century, and is needed as the church in Africa participates in the continuation of the work of Christ until he comes.

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