

CHAPTER 4 – AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE BAPTIST UNION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (BUSA)

1. BACKGROUND OF THE BAPTIST WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

At the end of 1819, and the beginning of 1820, between four and five thousand emigrants left England for the Cape. The British government promised aid for the support of a minister of religion if a party of 100 families or more could be gathered by any one denomination. The Wesleyans fell just short of this goal, and Baptists would never have attained it in the first place, so a group of 11 Baptists associated themselves with the Wesleyans and arrived at Algoa Bay in 1820. At first they met for worship in a cottage in Salem near Grahamstown, and one of them, William Miller, became their "tent-maker" pastor. They were without an ordained pastor until William Davies was sent out to South Africa from England by the Baptist Missionary Society in early 1832 – and he came despite a shipwreck, in which his son was lost.

Meanwhile, the church was moved to Grahamstown, and a work was begun at Kariega. However, tensions between Calvinistic and Arminian factions resulted in a split in the Grahamstown church, and the building at Kariega had to be abandoned in 1834 due to a conflict. But, within a few years several Baptist churches had emerged in the Eastern Province and Border areas. A Baptist church was formed in Cape Town in 1876; its first pastor was sent out to South Africa by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Shortly after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand, a Baptist church was established in the bustling mining town of Johannesburg in 1888.

In addition to British settlers, German settlers immigrated to South Africa in the 1850's. These included a number of Baptists, among whom was Carsten

Langhein, who founded a Baptist church in Frankfort in 1861. From this base, Baptist works were also commenced in Braunschweig, Berlin and Hanover. The German Baptists in South Africa appealed to Oncken for pastors, and in 1867 the German Baptist Assembly meeting in Hamburg appointed Oncken's assistant, Carl Hugo Gutsche, to the work. Gutsche was an outstanding and godly man. In twenty-five years he built twenty-five churches in the Border area. Emphasising planned giving, he never opened a church that was not debt-free. "Although thwarted by internal quarrels and dissensions, and characterised by puritanical strictness which over-emphasised the unimportant, [the German Baptists] demonstrated a persevering faith and hope, and a loyalty to the church which made for growth and progress second to none in the annals of our history" (Hudson-Reed nd:23). By the time of the formation of the Baptist Union of South Africa in 1877, German-speaking Baptists slightly outnumbered English-speaking Baptists, and there is still a strong German Baptist tradition in the Border region.

In 1867 an Afrikaans-speaking farmer by the name of J D Odendaal was converted to Baptist views. He was baptised by Gutsche, and for some years served as a lay preacher. In 1875 he was ordained by the German Baptists, and in 1886 he founded the Afrikaanse Baptiste Kerk. Unfortunately, the Afrikaans Baptist work never grew as rapidly as the English and German works owing to strong resistance from some of the local churches and the suspicion that Baptists were a "sect".

From very early on, Baptists had dreams of taking the gospel to the interior of the country. In 1873 the "Baptist Sustentation Fund" for home missions was established – the first attempt at meaningful co-operation among South African Baptists. The formation of the Baptist Union of South Africa in July 1877 seemed almost accidental. A new pastor was inducted, the Rev. G W Cross, at the Bathurst Baptist Church in Grahamstown, where pastors and deacons from six other churches were present. One of the pastors suggested that the opportunity be taken to form the Baptist Union of South Africa. This they did immediately.

The next day, a constitution was adopted. Its objects were as follows:

1. To promote unity and brotherly love among its members.
 2. To promote the evangelisation of the country.
 3. To disseminate Baptist principles.
 4. To plant and assist Churches in which those principles shall be or have been adopted
- (Hudson-Reed nd:39).

The success of the new Union is surprising in that it contained both English-speaking Baptists (who held to “open communion” and the autonomy of the local church) and German-speaking Baptists (who took a “closed communion” position and advocated the centralisation of power in the denomination). As things developed, the congregational principle was a strong emphasis from the start, and Baptist Principles (especially the authority of Scripture) frequently constituted the topic in Presidential addresses in the early days.

The Union's desire "to promote the evangelisation of the country" found expression in a number of ways. This desire was stated by the Rev. H J Batts in his 1883 Presidential address:

It is not for us to ask a neglected people who know not their spiritual needs to provide a salary, to give us subscriptions, and then we will send them a minister. Ours is to take them the Word of Life, to teach them their need, and to direct them to the 'Mighty to save', and God will not forget the labourers who are sent (Batts nd:12).

The needs of the indigenous peoples of South Africa thus slowly came into the Baptist vision. In 1892, Baptists formed the South African Baptist Missionary Society (SABMS) for Gospel outreach to the indigenous peoples of the country (home missions was for Europeans, the SABMS for Africans). Among the Baptist Union churches in 1898 (not all Baptists had joined the Union) there were 3033 "European" members and 172 "Native" members; but by 1918 the figures had increased to 5 156 and 4 185 respectively (Hudson-Reed nd:84).

In 1894 the *South African Baptist* magazine was established; it remained the denomination's mouthpiece until the late 1980s, when its name was changed to *Baptists Today*.

In 1899 South African Baptists launched a programme called the "Forward Movement" to provide funds for church extension, and they planned to employ a full-time General Secretary and travelling missionary evangelists. But the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) dashed these hopes and dealt severe setbacks to the Baptist work.

In 1908 an effort to alter the structure of the Baptist Union surfaced. F B Meyer, in one of his visits to South Africa, suggested that the "loose union" be altered into "The United Baptist Church of South Africa", a more centralised structure apparently motivated by a desire to give the denomination more direct control over the appointment and movement of pastors, and to group smaller churches in a given district to enable them to support a joint minister. In 1910, when the plan was publicised to the churches, only one out of thirty-seven objected. But the plan never got off the ground, and eventually it lost favour and was abandoned.

By 1911, four new ventures took place, which indicate that Baptists had recovered from the war, and were again ready to move forward: 1) the

establishment of a Sunday School Department and promotion of the concept of Sunday Schools; 2) the foundation of the South African Baptist Women's Association in 1911; 3) a pension scheme for Baptist pastors; and 4) the formation of a book depot, mainly to supply literature to the Sunday Schools.

As early as 1902, the Rev. T Rangiah had come from India to introduce Baptist work among the many Indian labourers on the sugar plantations in Natal. This work was carried on completely independently of the Baptist Union until 1923, when Rangiah applied to become a minister of the Baptist Union and the Indian Baptist Association affiliated with the SABMS. Internal dissension led to a split and to the formation of the Baptist Association of South Africa (BASA) and Indian Baptist Mission (later called simply Baptist Mission).

The period from the 1890s to the 1920s was a period of theological turmoil for Baptists – and those Baptists in South Africa were not exempt. The period was characterised by the heyday of liberalism and the fundamentalist/modernist controversy. In the South African Baptist scene, the controversy resulted in the adoption of a Statement of Faith at the Baptist Assembly which was held in Durban in 1924, a Statement which has served the Union over the years with very few amendments. The preamble read:

Resolved, that having no authority to accept a doctrinal statement on behalf of our churches, but knowing that there is unsettlement in some of our Churches, we agree to commend this statement to them for their consideration as a general expression of our Baptist belief (from Baptist Archives, Randburg, South Africa).

The 1924 Statement of Faith was later adopted into the Union's Constitution. The work among the black people of South Africa continued under the SABMS,

and in 1927, the Baptist Convention, a "union" of black churches, was formed under the SABMS.

As elsewhere, Baptists in South Africa suffered from a shortage of trained pastors. Consideration was given to the possibility of providing theological education in South Africa already before 1900, but in 1898, G W Cross wrote, "The time has not yet come for establishing a theological school here." Such students as presented themselves for ministerial training were placed under the tutelage of experienced pastors, and provision was made for a comprehensive course of part-time study which, already in 1902 required Hebrew and Greek. The great majority of pastors, however, had been trained in the United Kingdom. As late as 1936, 37 out of the 55 accredited ministers of the Baptist Union had been trained overseas. Ernest Baker formed a "Baptist Bible School" on his own initiative in 1928; in 1931 it was reported that "the relationship of the Baptist Bible School to the Union was still under consideration". By 1932 the school had lapsed. Meanwhile, the Union set up a "Ministerial Education Committee" which oversaw part-time studies. However, in 1935 it was reported that of the 15 registered ministerial students, only two were working hard at their studies.

After World War II there were more determined efforts to provide ministerial education. In 1949 the Assembly voted 59 to six in favour of establishing a theological college, but there were 35 abstentions, so the project was deferred. The difficulties were worked out, however, and in 1951 the Union opened the Baptist Theological College of South Africa in Johannesburg. The first Principal of the College was A J Barnard from Birmingham, and within two years, the College had 21 full-time students.

Problems arose in 1954 when Union leaders learned that Barnard neither held nor taught "the doctrine concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures which the majority of the Executive requires to be taught in the College, which the majority of the ministers of the denomination believe." By his own admission, Barnard

was seriously at variance with those beliefs. Barnard was dismissed and the College was temporarily closed. It was soon reopened, however, with the well-known Baptist linguist Dr. C M'Doke serving as acting Principal before the appointment of Dr. J C Stern to the position in 1956. In 1958 Dr. J D Odendaal was appointed the first full-time tutor in addition to the Principal. In 1968 the College moved from Wellington Road, Parktown to an elegant mansion on the Parktown ridge, which served the College well until its move to the present premises in Randburg in 1993. In 1973 a branch of the College was opened in Cape Town; in due time, this college gained its independence as the Cape Town Baptist Theological College (now, Cape Town Baptist Seminary). The SABMS ran a training school for black pastors, the Baptist Bible Institute, at Fort White near King William's Town.

When the Nationalist government was elected to power in 1948, Baptist structures already reflected the political *status quo*. Until the 1960s, most of the churches affiliated with the Baptist Union were white. The black "Bantu Baptist Churches", as they were often called, of the Baptist Convention, were affiliated to the SABMS, and overseen by white "Missionary Superintendents". The so-called "Coloured" churches were grouped together in the Baptist Alliance, and there were two Indian groups, Indian Baptist Mission and Baptist Association. Although a number of statements were passed at Assemblies protesting some of the grosser abuses of apartheid, they made little practical difference to Baptist life, and there was very little contact across the colour bar in Baptist churches. In 1976 the Baptist Union Assembly passed the following "resolution re: absence of race or colour discrimination in churches of the Baptist Union":

1. Assembly reaffirmed that the Baptist Union is open to all churches which qualify in terms of its constitution, regardless of race or colour; affirmed that such churches would be welcome into the Baptist Union, and charged the

Executive to make this known to all churches within Baptist Union Associations.

2. In the light of the Scriptural doctrine of the church, and recognising the importance of the church's witness and the need to work for cordial relationships between all groups in society, Assembly, while recognising the autonomy of local churches, affirmed that, Scripturally, a local church should be open to all persons, irrespective of race or colour, in respect of membership and attendance at services. Assembly charged the Executive to make this known to the various Associations of the Baptist Union

(Hudson-Reed (ed) nd:136, 137).

But once again, this policy made little practical difference. Relationships with the black churches of the Baptist Convention deteriorated to the extent that in 1987 the Convention withdrew from the Union, and an embittered relationship ensued for several years. It was particularly unfortunate and embarrassing that this conflict was played out on the world stage before the Baptist World Alliance. More recently, the various Baptist bodies in South Africa (Baptist Union, Baptist Convention, Afrikaanse Baptiste Kerk, Baptist Association of South Africa and Baptist Mission) have agreed to form the South African Baptist Alliance (SABA), an umbrella organisation which, it is hoped, will lead to much deeper fellowship and co-operation between the various bodies, and perhaps even merger in the long run. SABA was launched in August 2001.

The Baptist Union has never joined the World Council of Churches, although it did hold membership in the South African Council of Churches for a time. In 1967 it reduced its status with the SACC from "Member" to "Observer", and in

1975 the Union voted – by a large majority – to withdraw from the SACC completely, largely on political and theological grounds. The Baptist Union has generally stood aloof from ecumenical affairs, although there have always been a few lone voices within it advocating closer relationships with other churches. For some, the Baptist Union policy over the years has been an attempt to remain faithful to Biblical principles; for others, it has seemed like denominational snobbery and isolationism. A few years ago, the Assembly agreed to appoint a committee to investigate, yet again, the pros and cons of membership in the SACC; at the next year's Assembly, the committee itself was voted out of existence!

An important development in recent years has been an increasing emphasis on regional affairs in Baptist life, and correspondingly less emphasis on national affairs. The six territorial associations which comprise the Baptist Union are the Baptist Northern Association (BNA – essentially the old Transvaal), the Central Association of Baptist Churches (CABC – the Free State and Northern Cape), the Natal Baptist Association (NBA), The Border Baptist Association (BBA), the Eastern Province Baptist Association (EPBA), and the Western Province Baptist Association (WPBA).

In an attempt to enhance fellowship with other Baptist bodies, the Baptist Union is also a member of the Baptist World Alliance and the All Africa Baptist Fellowship.

It is difficult to conceive of a time when Baptists will not be grappling with issues on which there will be conflict. Motions relating to the nature and authority of Scripture have regularly come before the Assembly; a high view of Scripture has been maintained, although some would like to see the Union's affirmations on Scripture made even more explicit than they are. The changing political and social structure of the country has brought enormous challenges, and Baptists have not always been as prompt or effective in responding to them as they

should have been. The AIDS crisis is a case in point. Furthermore, although there have been some encouraging signs, there is still a long way to go before there will be meaningful racial integration at all levels of Baptist life. Affirmative action has sparked much debate. The rise of the charismatic movement and the influence of liberation/social theology have brought into the Union a theological diversity with which some have found it difficult to live. Congregationalism and the role of leaders within it is under the spotlight at the moment. This is a major contributing factor why the BUSA is finding it difficult to grow the churches – there is no real understanding of the role that leaders have to play and the role that the laity have to play. No progress can be made unless the understanding of the role of the laity is taken seriously.

The role of women in Baptist churches and the structure and financing of the Union are also burning issues on which agreement will probably not be found in the immediate future. For many Baptists, the reality of the African context still needs to be taken earnestly. It is for these reasons that some churches have left the BUSA.

Nevertheless, despite a mind-boggling degree of diversity and an array of challenges, the work continues to move forward. One of the noteworthy features is that more than 200 new Baptist Union churches have been planted during the last decade.

2. BACKGROUND AND METHOD OF INFORMATION COLLECTED

This study was carried out among the churches affiliated to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA). Data about these congregations were collected via a questionnaire (questionnaire attached) given to leaders of congregations. Information was gathered about multiple aspects of congregations' social composition, structure, activities, and programming.

Congregations – the relatively small-scale, local churches in and through which people engage in religious activity – are a basic unit of South African religious life. They are the primary site where religious activity takes place. They also provide for a place where people can socialize and are a place of community (κοινωνία) for many. Local churches encourage religious identities through education and practice and opportunities are created where congregants can engage in a variety of community and social activities. The congregations under BUSA are a significant number of people (498 churches with 44 077 congregants in 2005 and 501 churches with 43 986 congregants in 2006).

There are a number of ways of conducting studies on congregations and their significance in the population and organization. One way is to examine a single congregation to examine some fundamentals of the congregants, the change over time of the congregation, how it has adapted in the community, and many other things. Another way, larger numbers of congregations can be surveyed – in this case, congregations under the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA). In surveys like this one, one can examine the growth and decline of the denomination – and even of local churches within the denomination – finances, leadership dynamics, involvement in social activities, to name a few. The positive side of a survey like this is the accuracy one can have – if affiliated congregations have submitted the correct figures. One is not randomly taking churches of different denominations – even some which are unaffiliated – and doing research. Major gaps have been discovered in surveys that take churches randomly because of the above point mentioned: the unaffiliated congregations. Research has also shown that many churches do not respond to the survey undertaken as they are independent and therefore do not feel accountable to others.

From surveys conducted mainly by Professors Hendricks and Erasmus through the Centre of Religious Demographic Research in 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005, about the “religious landscape” of South Africa, there have been a number of

shortcomings that are present and are errors when it comes to compiling an effective survey. These errors are listed in these surveys. These listed errors are but a few of a larger number of questions that congregations need to answer. One can go into much detail in such surveys and get congregations to answer more descriptive questions, however intrinsically interesting they might be – that is not the purpose of this denominational survey though. Broader theoretical questions also could be explored. Questions about religious practices and the formation of culture in congregations, questions about activities shaped by social contexts, and so on, could be asked.

The statistics in this paper have been conducted by field research in order to show the condition of congregations under the BUSA. Leaders from local congregations have answered questionnaires, interviews have been conducted and observations and discussions have been had by learners of the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa (BTC) in Randburg, Gauteng, South Africa. 86% of those that had answered questionnaires or interviewed were actually on the staff of their local church being represented. The other 14% were non-staff congregation leaders of some sort of ministry in the church. Approximately half of the questionnaires were completed and returned by mail while others were done by personal interviews. The response of the questionnaires completed was good with a response rate of 56%, that is, 384 questionnaires.

Even with a response rate at high as 56%, it is worthwhile to assess whether those whom did not respond may affect the data collected in any discernable way. It is assumed “probably not” and can therefore conclude that the representativeness of this survey is very good. One needs to also mention that those reporting on their congregations’ characteristics are reliable and would have no reason to submit false numbers or information. One always faces the danger of people answering questions with their own biased views and can always over-estimate figures or even give beliefs or attitudes of other. Another

danger is that there may not be interrelated and unified goals of the one completing a report and the congregation being represented. Different people have different perspectives on issues and are more passionate about different parts of the congregation and this can result in different, sometimes conflicting goals and may see the congregation's mission in very different ways.

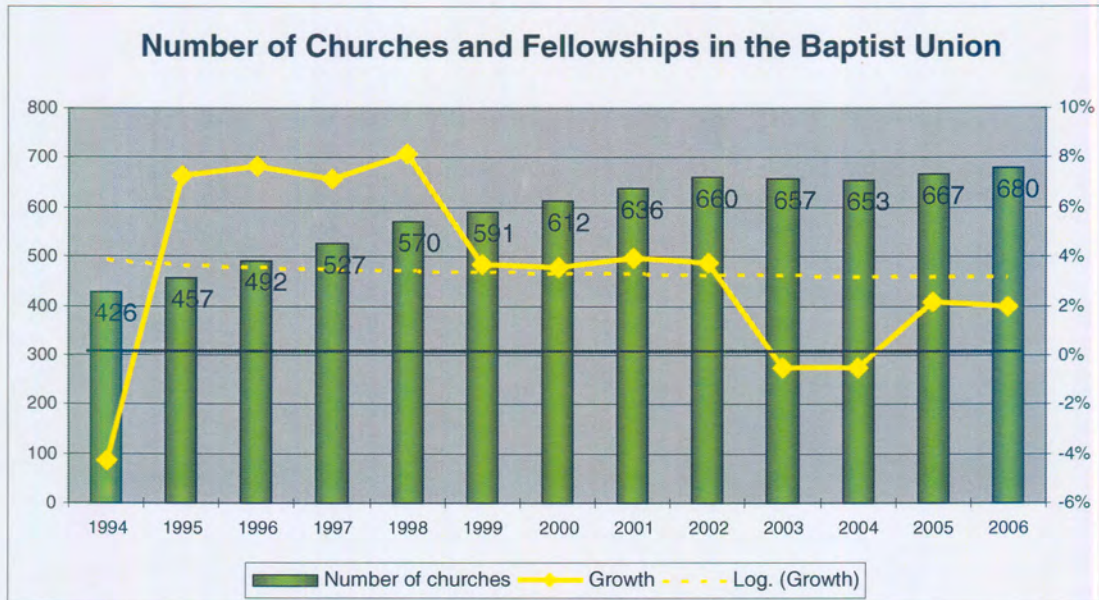
There might, of course, be official and formal goals or missions in the congregation that are not consistent with the practices of the congregation. It would be ideal to have people who are transparent and do not fear the threat of getting into trouble in being honest about completing the questionnaire – in this case, anonymity was advantageous.

It is of importance that those completing the questionnaire are clear about the questions about the congregation and that their response is consistent with their judgement on the goals and mission of the congregation. The questions were set up in such a way that there is no ambiguity or uncertainty in understanding them. With all of the above in mind, it is understood that questionnaires have been answered with reduced known threats of validity and reliability.

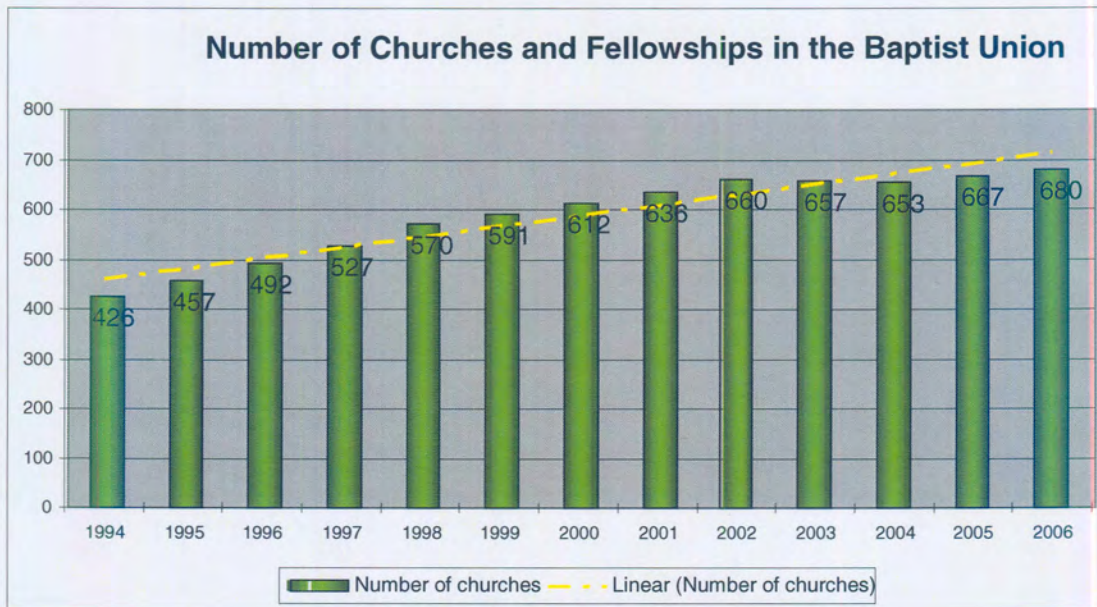
3. RESULTS OF THE INFORMATION AND STATUS OF THE BAPTIST UNION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (BUSA)

A number of very important questions were asked in the questionnaire (Covering letter and full questionnaires are attached in the Appendix). These questions help us to understand the tangible cultural facts of the congregations rather than a guess about the internal lives of congregants or a private and possible peculiar interpretation of a congregation's set of activities. Always keeping the purpose of this research and information collection, one needs to evaluate the results in order to move to a positive contribution – from knowledge to resultant action. As a survey of the representative congregations in BUSA, one of the most obvious contributions this study might make is to enable the description of the most basic

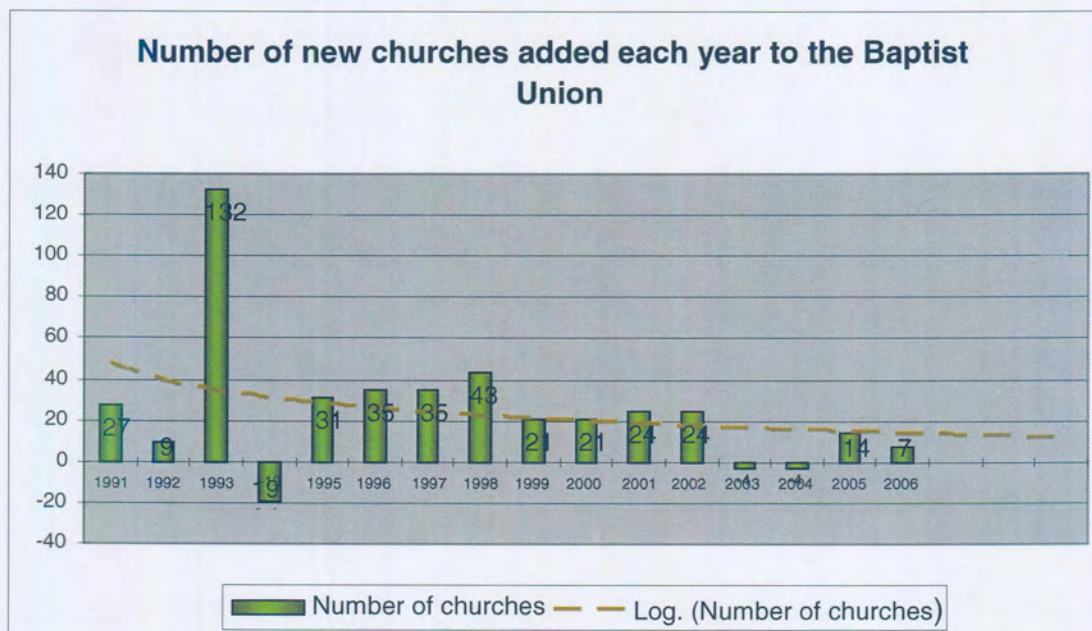
features of these congregations' members to respond and take action. It is hoped that the results will make it sufficiently clear of what the status of BUSA is and the scientific knowledge will allow movement for change.



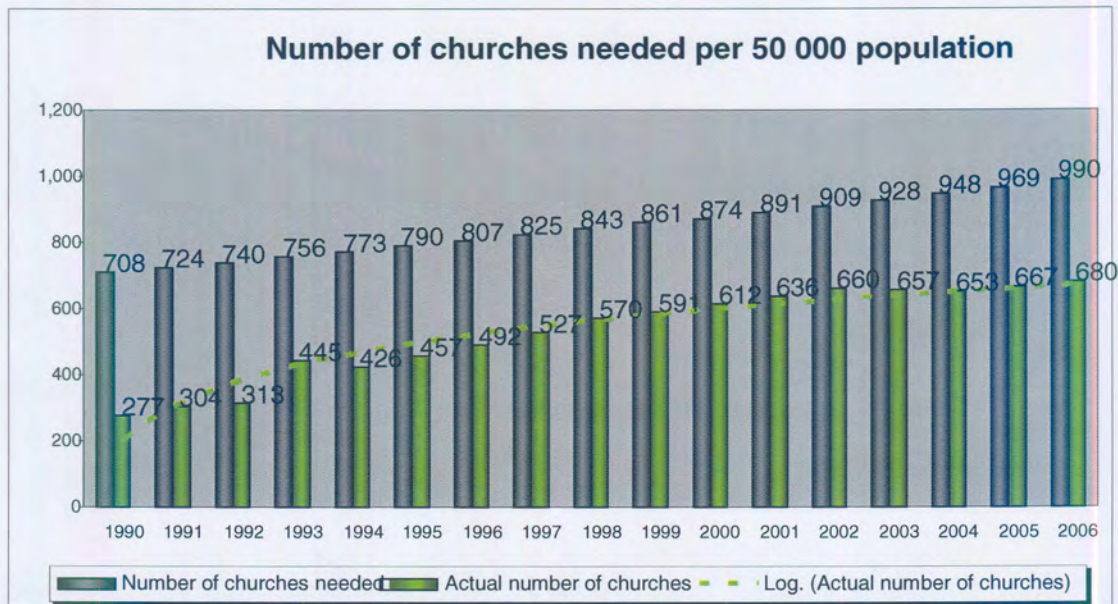
From the above graph, we see that there has been a steady growth in the number of new churches in 1994 (426 new churches) to 2002 (660 new churches). There seems to have been a drop in 2003 and 2004 but the number of churches started growing again in 2005 and 2006.



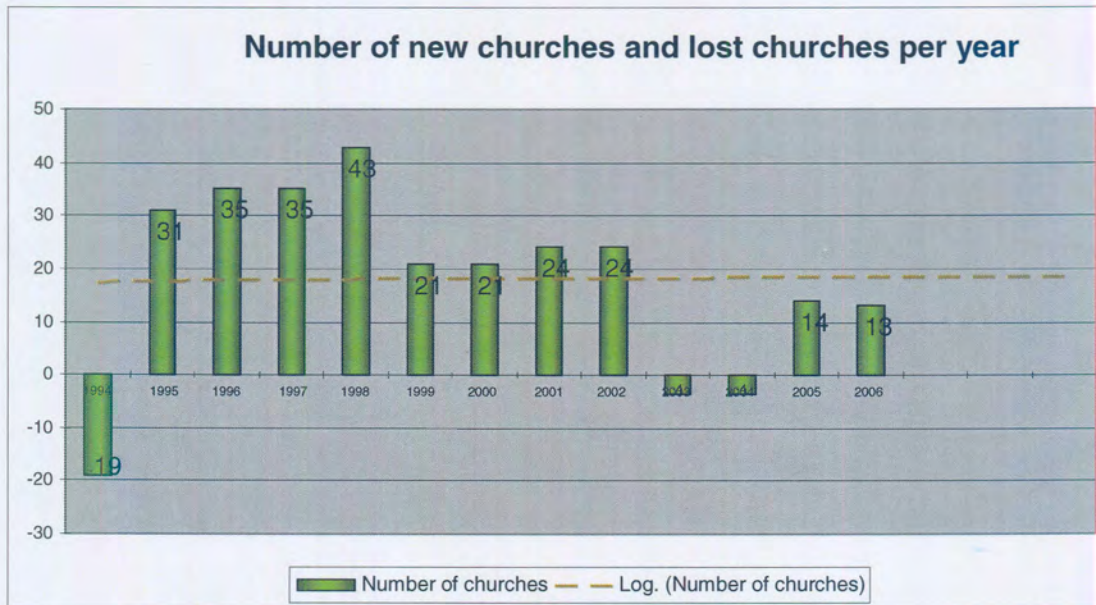
If one were to plan a projected growth rate to 2010 to be approximately 3% per annum, this would give us 694 churches in 2007, 715 churches in 2008, 736 churches in 2009 and 759 churches in 2010. However, the graph below shows the reality of the situation.



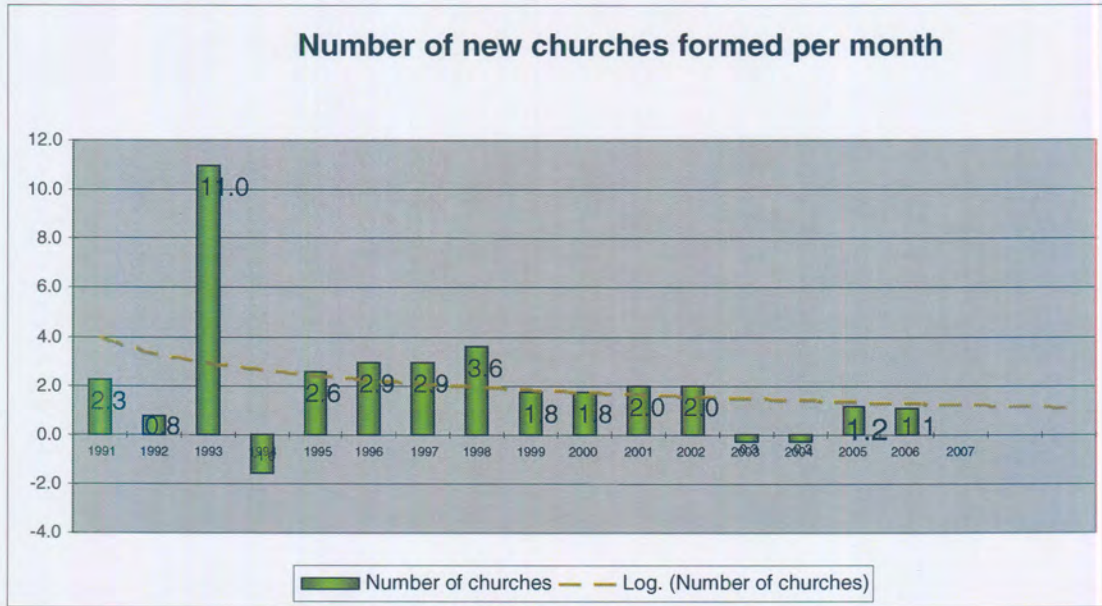
From 1991 up until 2002, for a period of 12 years, there was an average growth of 32 new churches per year. Since then, there has been a significant drop in the number of new churches – from 14 new churches in 2005 to 7 new churches in 2006.



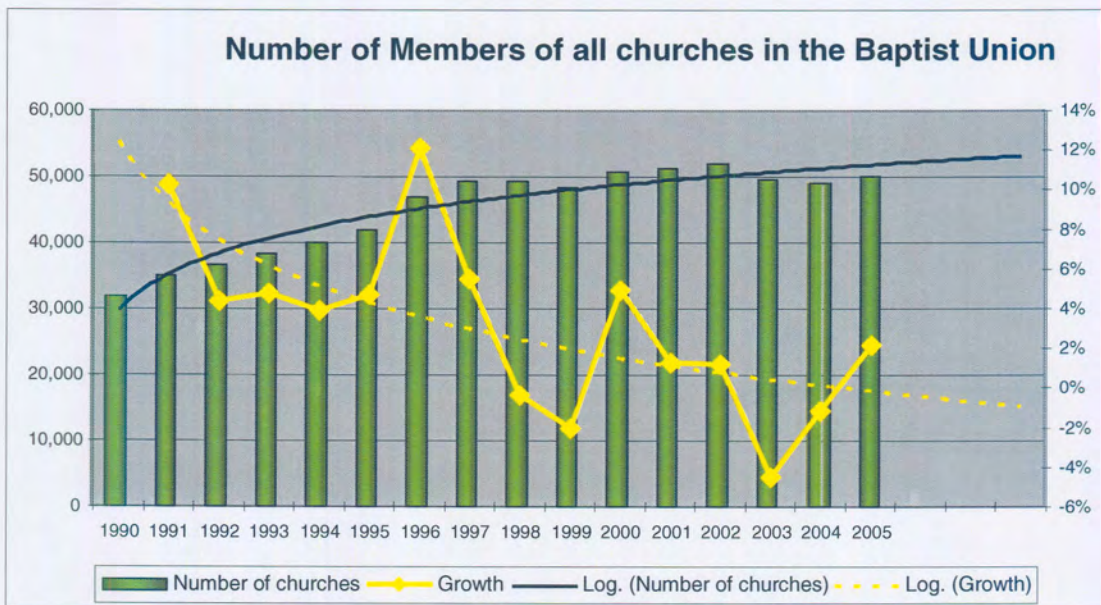
From the graph above, it seems that the BUSA is doing well if one were to compare it to a church per 50 000 people. However, the growth needs to be seen against some benchmark. If one were to take the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in America which has 44 000 churches within an American population of 240 million people, an average of 5,000 Americans per SBC church. If we work on a benchmark of one Baptist Church per 50 000 South Africans, we ought to have about 1 000 churches. To achieve this goal we will need to launch 80 churches a year over the next four years. This is an annual growth of about 10%.



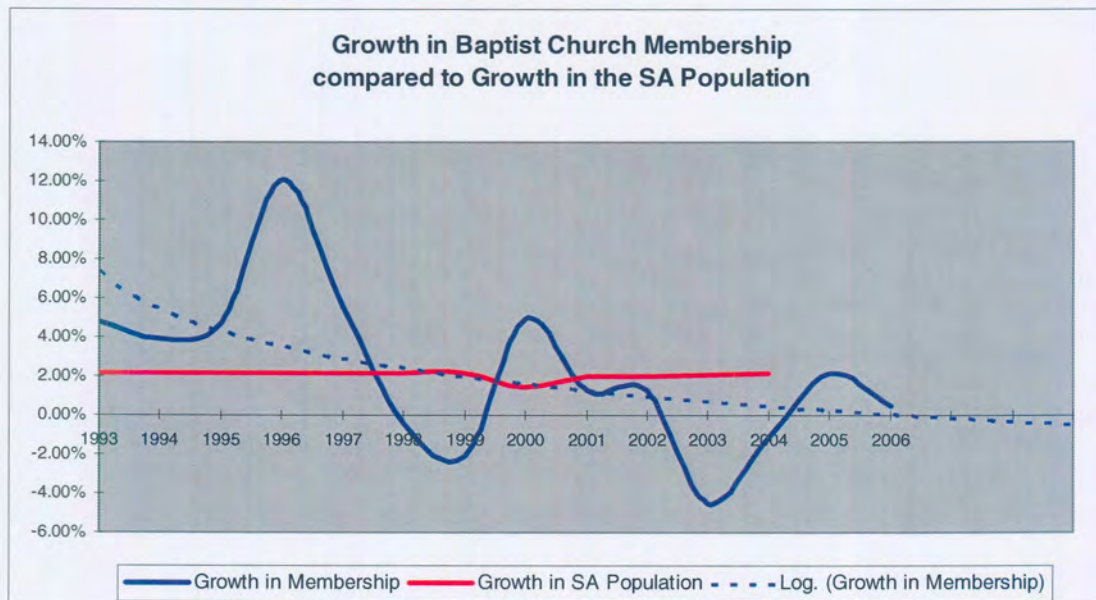
According to the graph above, there seems to have been a steady growth in the number of new churches in the mid-1990s. At the turn of the century, there was a consistent medium growth in the number of new churches. However, in 2003 and 2004, the BUSA actually “lost” churches – four per year in these respective years. This is, in fact, alarming as it not only shows no growth but rather a negative state of affairs. The next two years, namely 2005 and 2006 were more encouraging years as there were 14 and 13 new churches respectively. The existing situation is not a pleasant one. The current trend line suggests we will only achieve about 30 new churches a year, unless we do something exceptional or change our structures and strategy. This poses an enormous challenge to BUSA – hence this study of the role of the laity and its rediscovery in its function in the local mission of the Church.



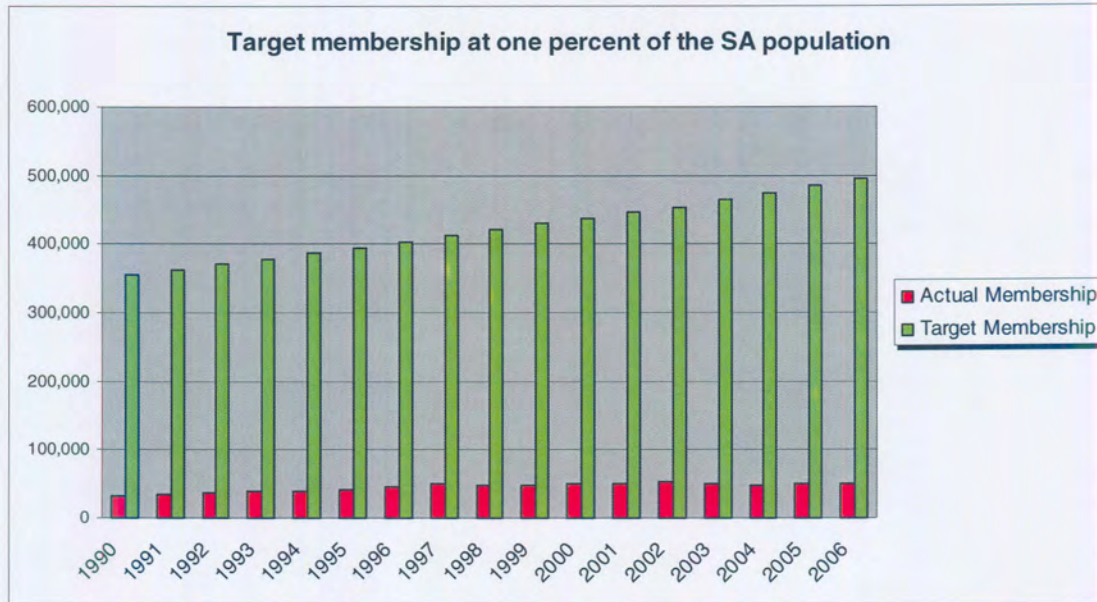
To achieve the desired goal of reasonable growth in the number of churches per annum, the required number of new churches would be 80 new churches per annum, which translates to seven per month or two per week. At the moment the BUSA are launching two per month, so there needs to be an increase in new churches launched of 350%. A new church every two weeks, for ten years is what is ideal!



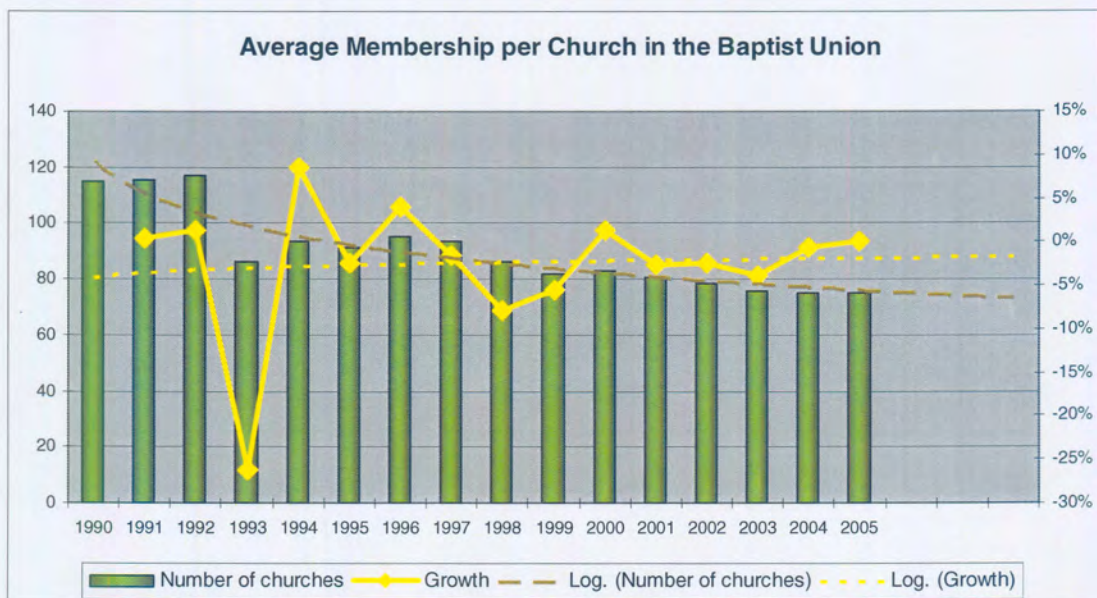
It makes sense that the growth in the number of churches was in the mid-1990s. Subsequently, the number of churches remained constant yet the number of members dropped significantly. If one examines the number of church members in 1995 (41 792 members) through to 1999 (48 215 members), there seemed to be a steady growth – even if it was a small percentage. From the year 2000, there has been a steady decline of members in the BUSA. From 2002, the numbers did not drop significantly but despite the small decline in church members, there should have been an increase. If one followed the average growth trend, there was an increase in church members of 0,90 % growth rep annum from 1991 to 2001. Since 2002, there has been an average decline of 0,43 % per annum. The distressing result is quite simple: many of the churches have become “empty shells”.



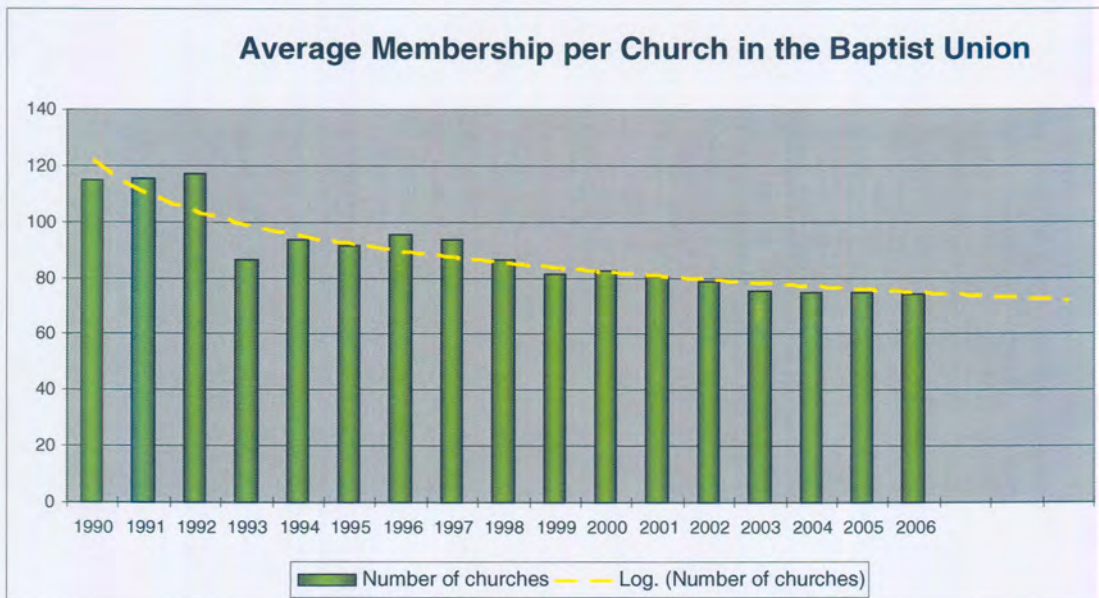
The South African population growth has been at roughly 2 % per annum. Baptist membership growth has historically been at higher than this 2 % per annum – certainly between 1990 and 1997. However, the trend is downwards and the projection is for it to fall below the population growth into the future.



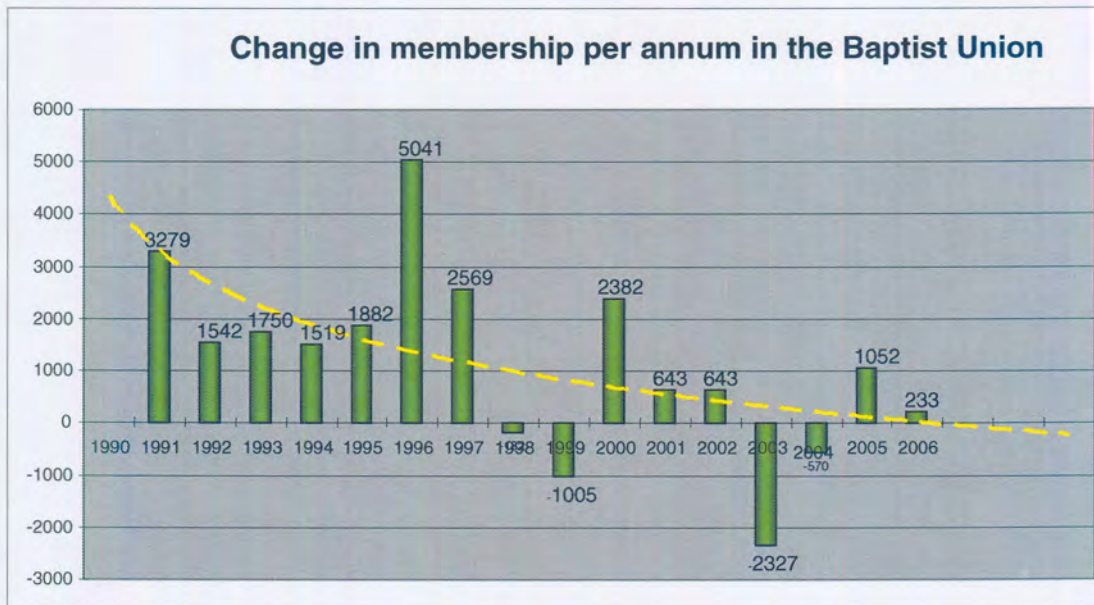
To get to a level of 1 % of the South African population, the BUSA will have to grow 10 fold. This does not necessarily mean that more churches need to be built. It does, however, mean that there needs to be a significant growth in the involvement of the church members so as to get participation and contribution of more church members and their role in the local church.



It would seem that the average church membership numbers have been irregular over the years. If one were to follow the trend, it seems that there is a decline in the average church membership – just as there is a decline in the number of new churches. Even from the graph below, one can examine the numbers and see that even if there are no new churches, the numbers of new members should be growing. However, this is not the case. So, one can deduce that there is no increase in new churches as there is no need for new churches as there are no new members to “occupy” these churches. This should raise an urgent alarm for the BUSA.



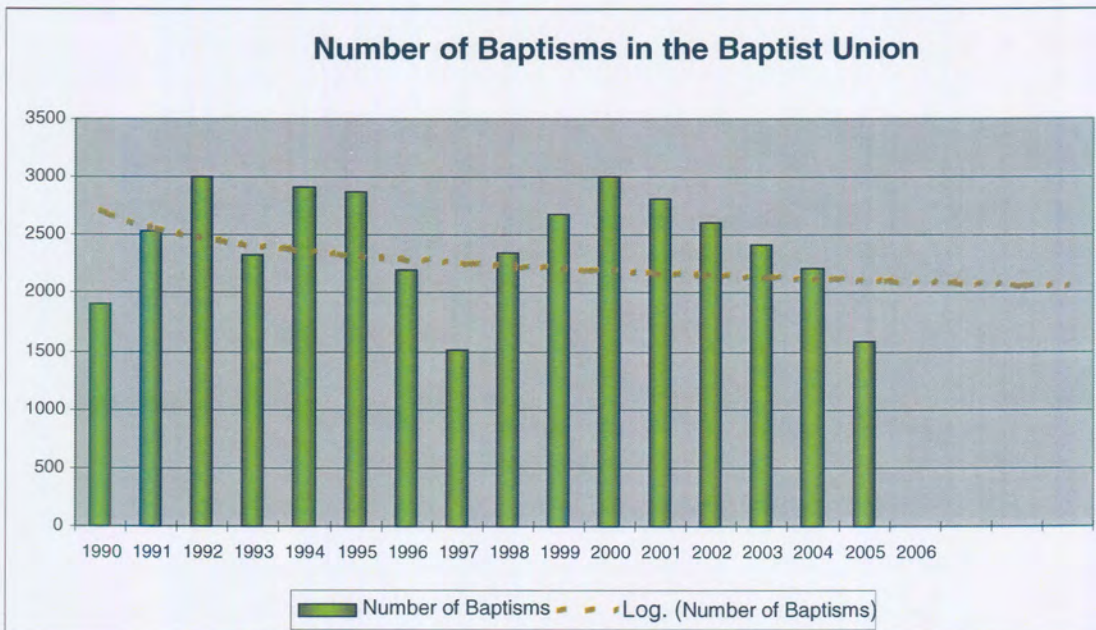
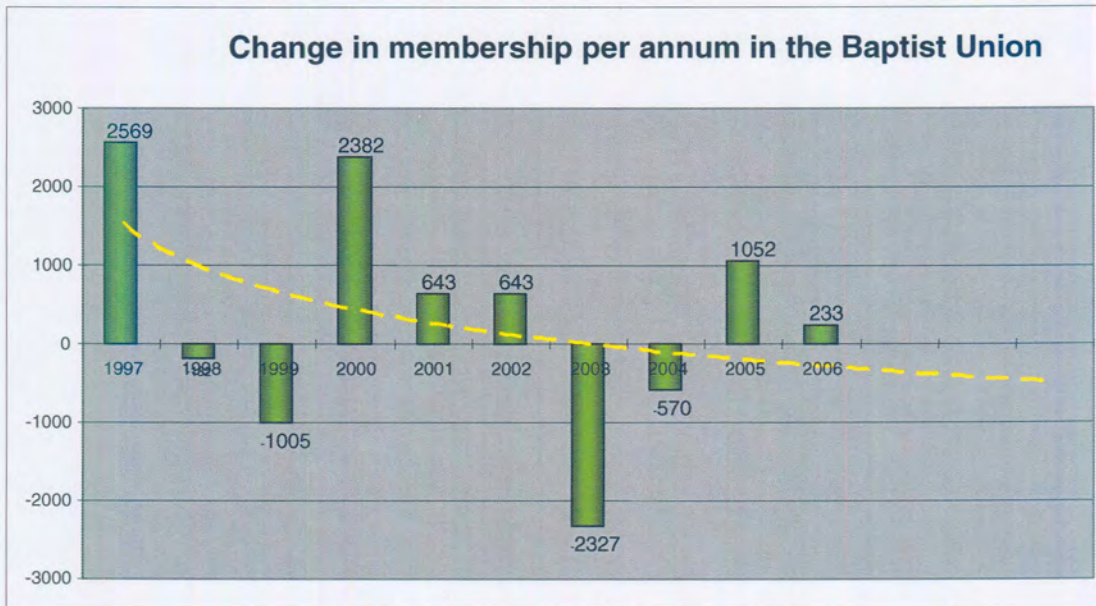
As per the figures in the chart above, there was a time in the BUSA that numbers were growing steadily – in the early 1990’s. Then there was a major drop in the year before the first free and democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 and it seems a conscious effort was made to increase membership in the churches of the BUSA – only for two years though. Since 1996, there has been a steady decline in the average membership per church. This is not a good indication for the BUSA in the future especially if the population in the country is increasing. One does not always measure success by numbers but if a church or any organization is growing, numbers do represent growth – it is certainly true in this case.



As one considers the chart above, it is concerning that a church would actually decrease ever. If one were to consider that members are putting their gifts into practice and sharing their Christianity with others, the church should be “attracting mankind to the availability of His life-changing grace” (Aldrich, 1981:25). There should be no reason why numbers should be on the decline – ever! One needs to also consider that members may have immigrated to other countries or moved to other denominations – these figures would be hard to discover – surely there would be others coming to South Africa. Essentially, it could be assumed that these figures could balance one another out.

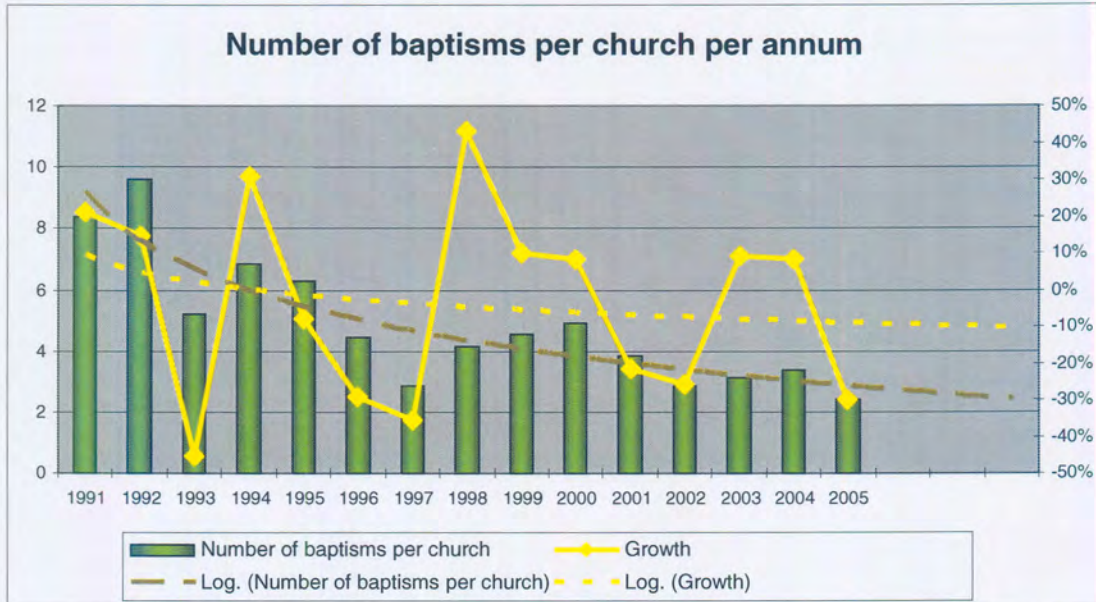
As the chart below indicates, there is a slight increase in numbers of people joining the BUSA, however, these numbers are so miniscule that there are not worth really mentioning. If one considers an increase of 233 persons in 2006, out of 50 270 members in the BUSA, this is less than 0,5%. According to Stats SA, the overall growth rate for 2005-2006 was 1,06% (according to “*Mid-year population estimates 2007*” from Statistics South Africa – available online from www.statssa.gov.za). These figures put things into perspective as they show the “negative” portion in the growth of the members of the BUSA. The BUSA will need a radical agenda which will change this situation in order to ensure the Word of God goes out and that people will be committed

to the cause of evangelism and discipleship – which will be discussed in the next chapter.

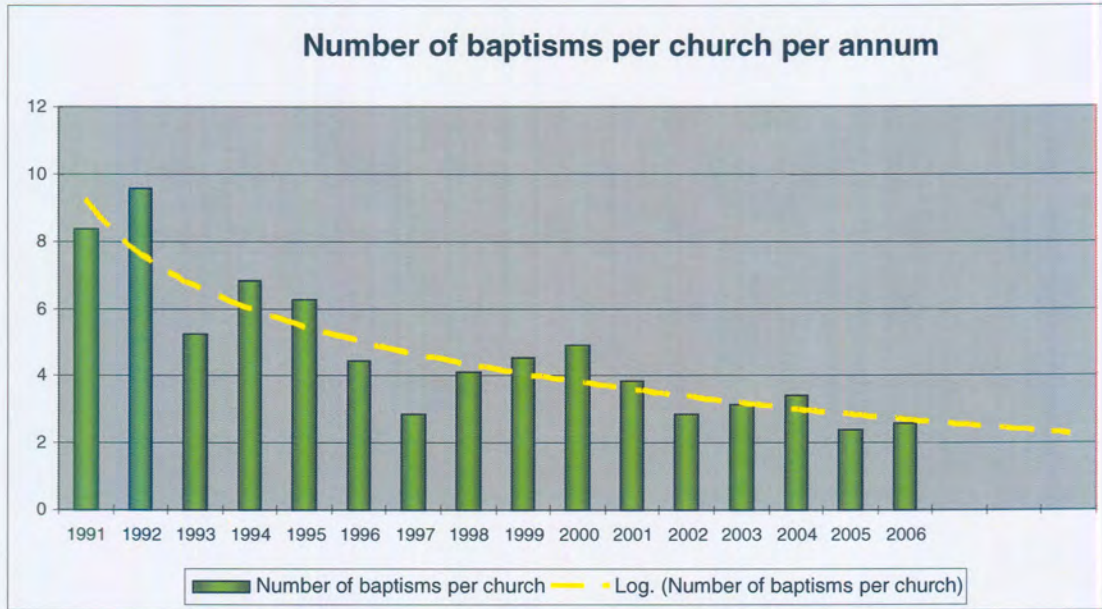


The number of baptisms could represent the rate of evangelism that is happening in the BUSA. The report is of approximately 2 500 baptisms per year. If this is true and one assumes that the BUSA are seeing some 2 500 converts every year, then the problem

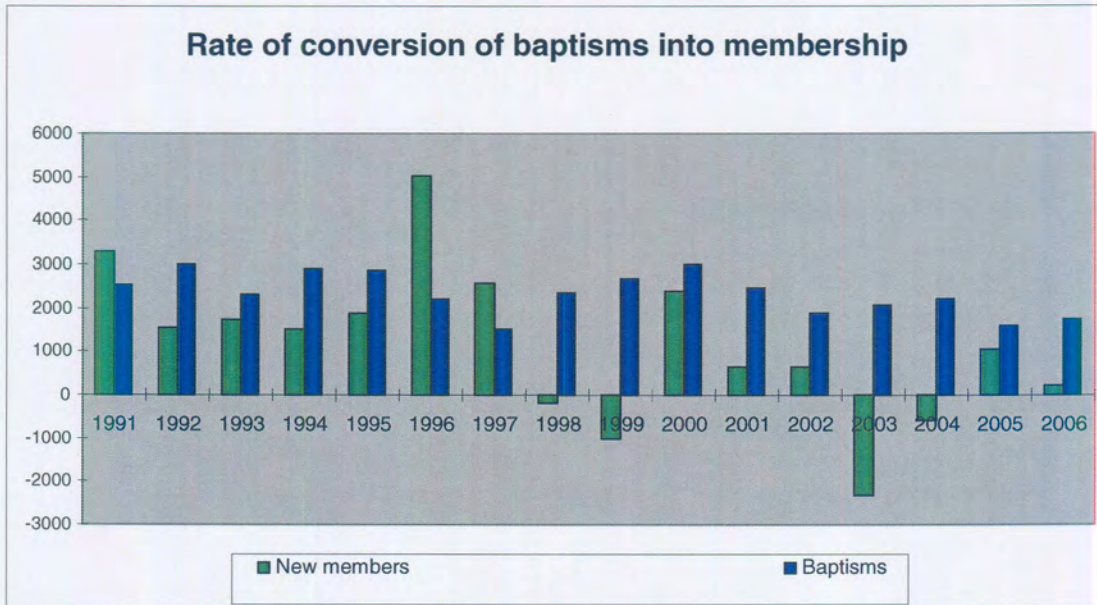
of the growth or addition of church membership per annum is even worse than was anticipated initially. The reason this is of concern is that it would seem that there are 2 500 new people coming into the church, however, overall there is a much smaller growth in numbers of the BUSA.



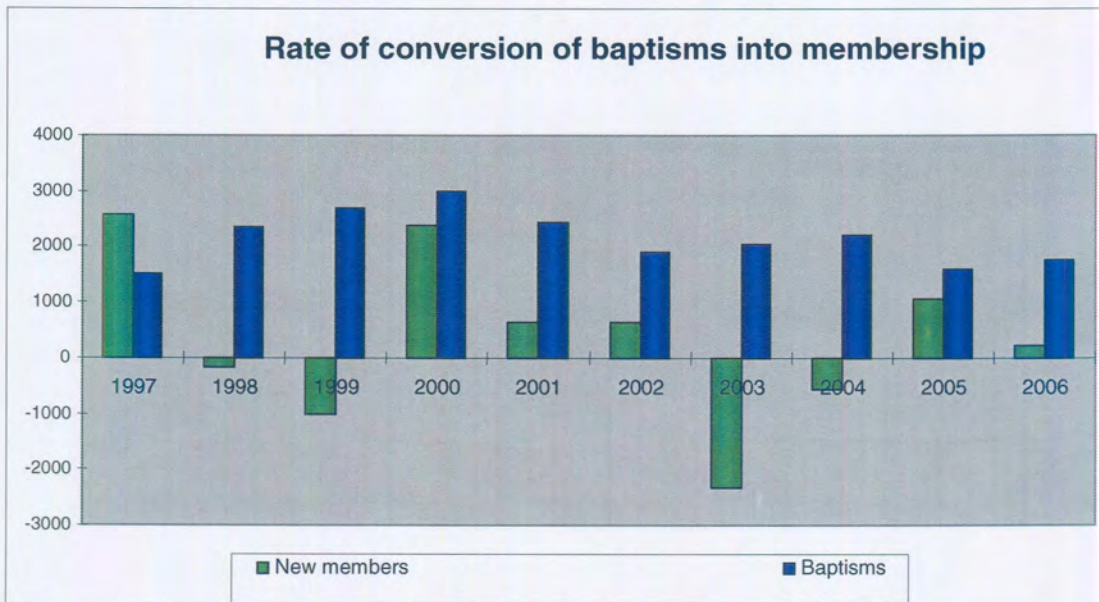
If one considers the graph above and the graph below, one realizes that even the baptisms per church per annum are decreasing at a rapid rate. This does not show a bright future with reference to the growth in the BUSA unless, as mentioned before, radical measures are taken to begin to put a strategy into place which will allow churches to become “missional churches” and get each member of the congregation to see the plan purposed from the Bible – as mentioned in Chapter 1. The trend is a downward one which should be a concerning one for the BUSA. If one connects conversions and baptisms, the growth pattern is non-existent and of major concern. The BUSA will need to be active in setting a policy into place which will educate and empower members in the local congregations to be more “missional” and endeavour to understand their gifting and put them into practice. This must be treated as a matter of urgency.

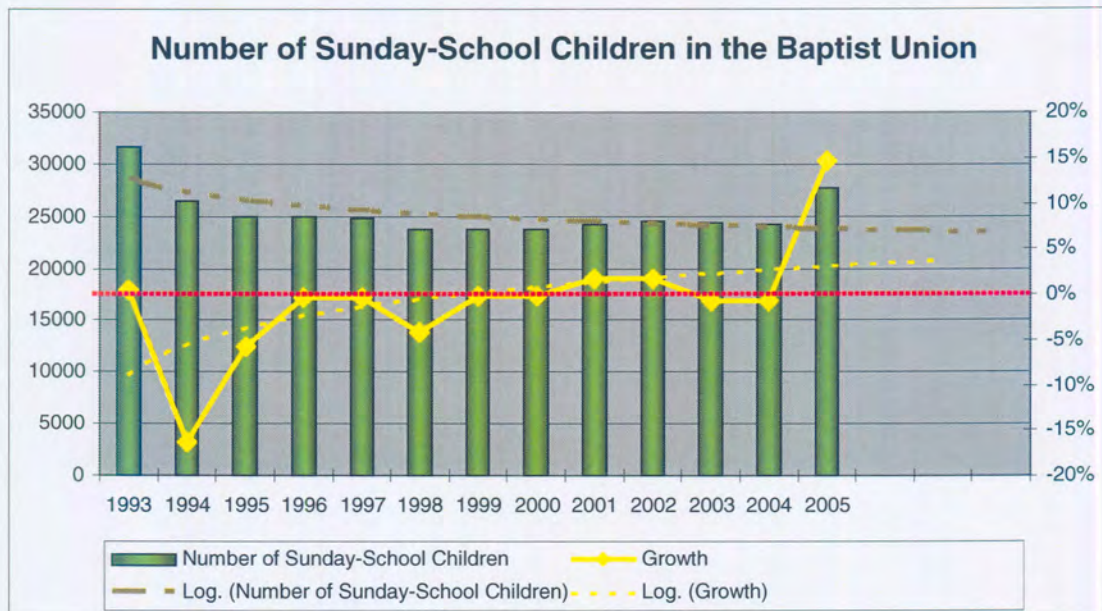


After evaluating the figures of how many people remain in the church after they have been baptized, one sees from the graph below that there is a major shortfall in the rate of people who stay on in the church and become members and actively participate in the church. Not since 1997 have there been more people joining the BUSA than people being baptized. This begins to show us that the problem may lay in discipleship. It would be a major tragedy if people are converting to Christianity, becoming aware of their need for baptism, becoming baptized, and then leaving the church or not getting involved in the local congregation. It will not help if there is an intention in reaching all the peoples of the earth with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ if people are leaving the church after they have been baptized. If they are going to other churches or denominations, this would not be a major problem. However, this does not seem to be the case as figures would have balanced out if other Christians from other denominations joined the BUSA. The problem seems to be one of lack of discipleship and perseverance in mentoring people after baptism – as the two graphs below point out.

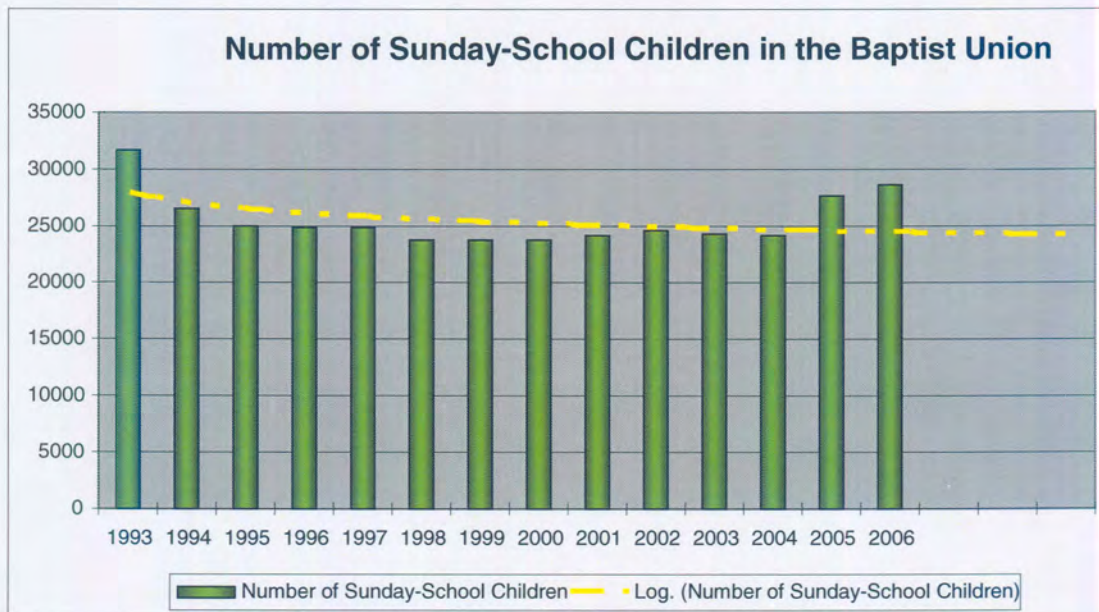


As mentioned above, not since 1997 have there been more members taken into fellowship in the local congregation than have been baptized. It is imperative that the church in our day study the Scriptures and obey the teachings of Jesus Christ. The laity is to discover the task of the church and put it into practice.

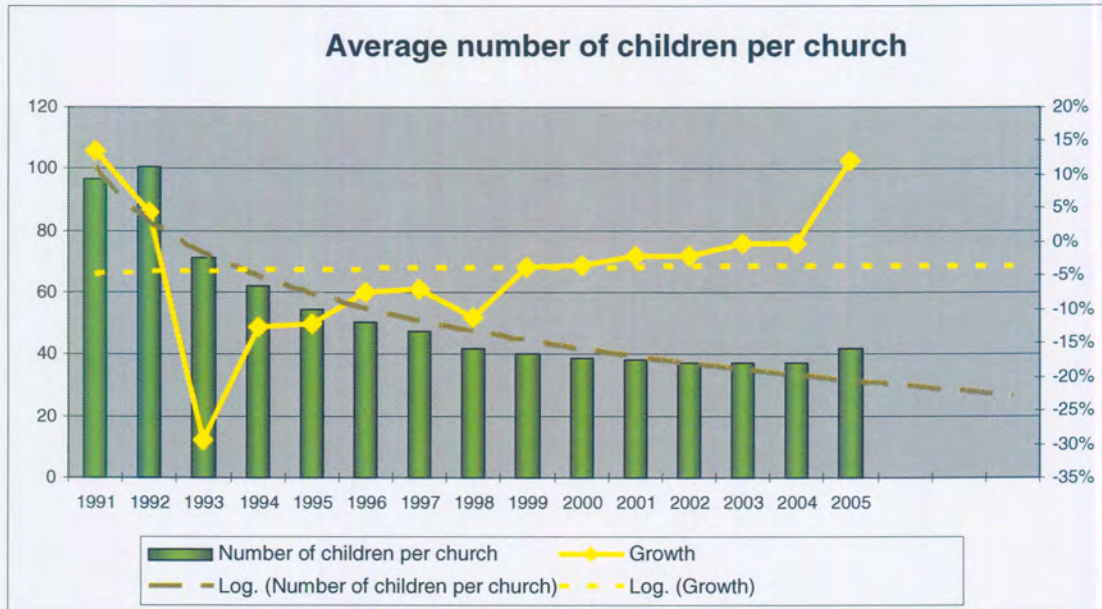




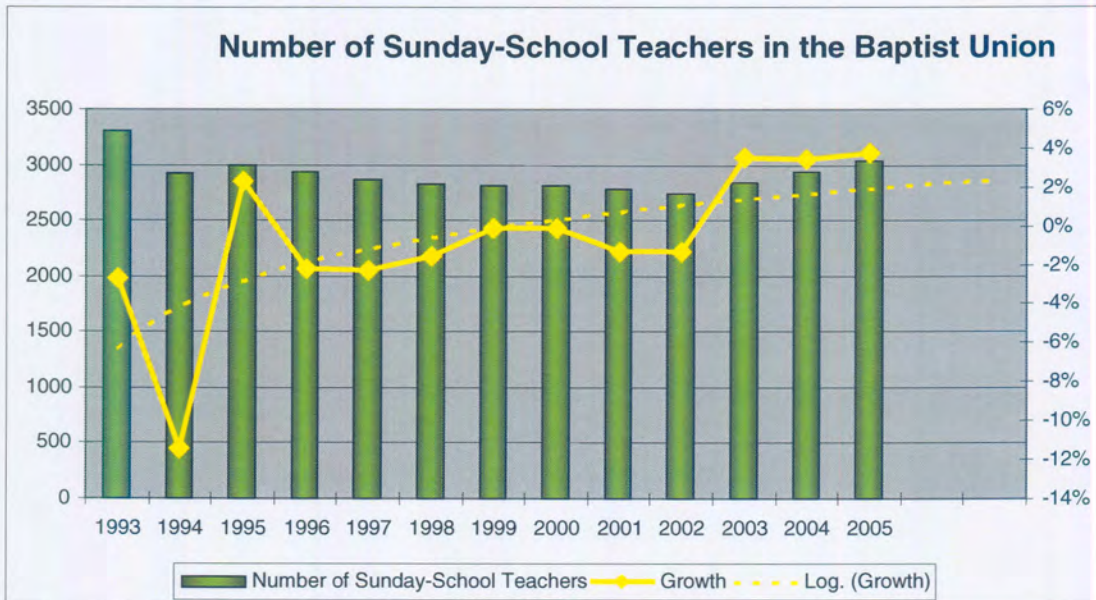
From the graph above and below, we understand that there has been a steady growth in the number of children in the BUSA. One needs to be cautious not to lose these children in the future as members of the church. Plans and strategies will need to be implemented – including discipleship arrangements – in order to keep these children in the church. Mentors to these children will need to realize that these children are not the church of the future but rather the present church and need to keep them involved in the church. These children will need to be educated from the Scriptures in all the different facets of theological education. 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 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 grow up to be effective leaders who will train others to do the same.



From the graph above, we see that more than half of the people in the BUSA are children. There has been a pleasant increase in the number of children more recently. From the graph below, we understand that there has been a radical increase in the number of children per church. Whatever programmes are currently in operation, these need to be continued as the growth has been good. It is the follow up to keep these children in the church that is crucial in order for there to be a sustainable growth for the future of the church. This process may be an emotional one that affects the whole church as adults will need to get involved in order to model and develop an ideal paradigm that children will be able to follow in order for them to remain and grow in the local congregation. In this process, there will constantly need to be the understanding of why this is being done as well as the set goals that are in mind – these would be to keep the children in the church in order for them to grow up, develop and mature in the church. The objective and history of the church must regularly be revisited and examined – for the sake of growth.

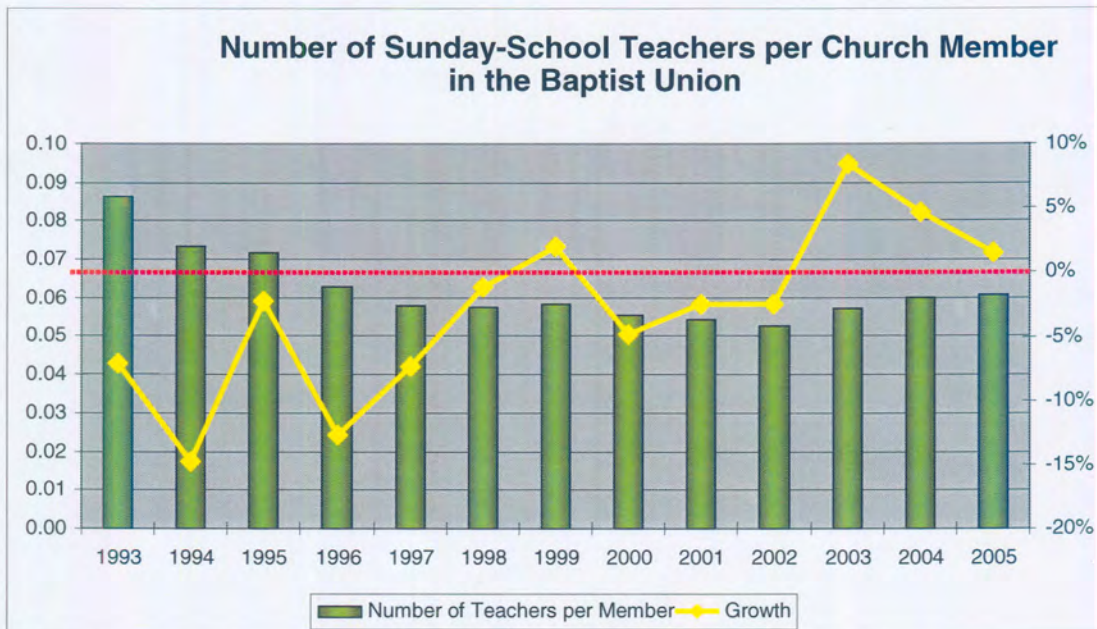
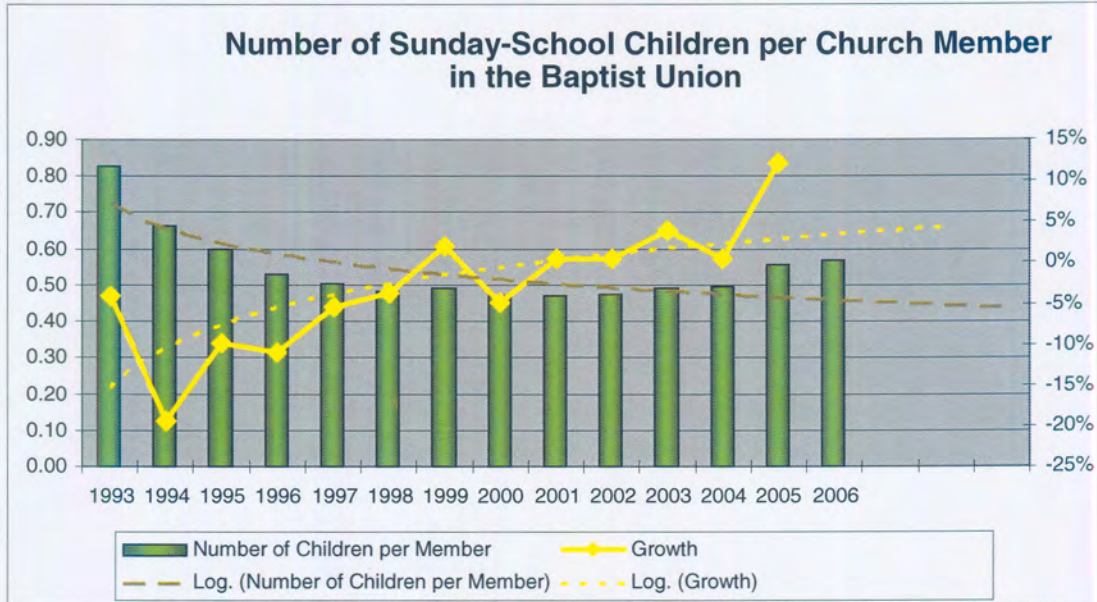


There are a fair number of Sunday-School teachers in the BUSA – as seen by the graph below. There seems to have been a steady growth over the years in the number of teachers that are teaching.



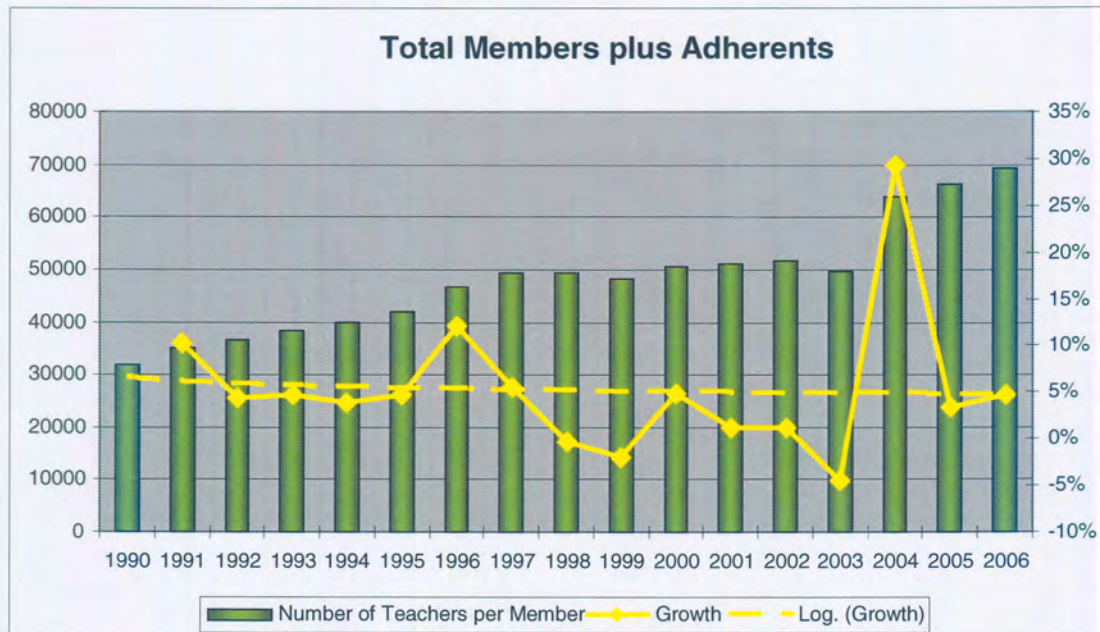
Although there is a steady growth in the number of teachers in the denomination, the ratio of scholars to teachers is rising. This could imply that we are losing teachers faster than we are losing children. From the graph below we see that the number of children per member has dropped from 0.8 to 0.5. This further suggests that we are gaining

church members who are post-family age, or we have churches that do not cater for children. This raises an alarm and a serious rethinking in the planning for the future.



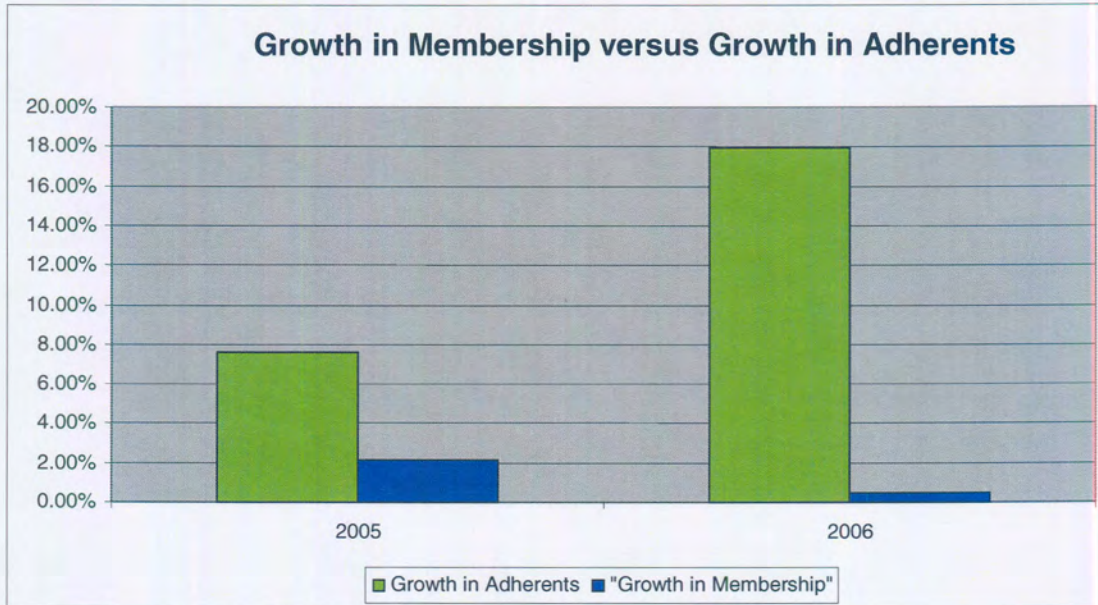
Eight percent of all church members used to be involved in teaching children, as seen in the graph above – although this was in 1990. As we can see, in 2002 that ratio has dropped to five percent. We can deduce, therefore, that fewer and fewer people are

committing themselves to reaching children. Planning in the future will need to take this into account.

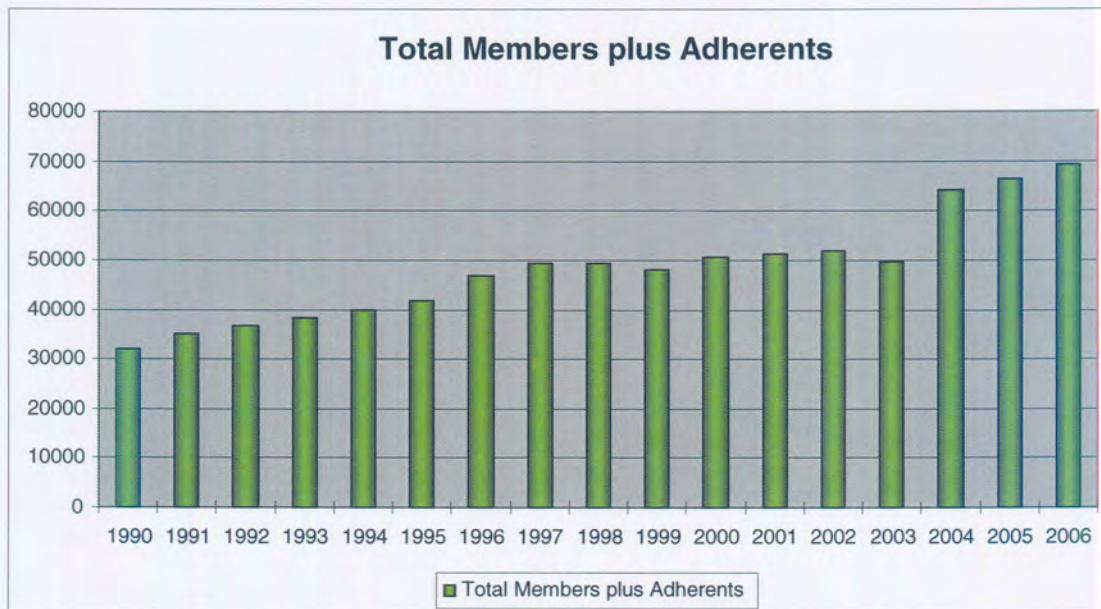


In the BUSA, not all people who attend the local congregations are members of the church. Many people are simply “adherents”. From the graph below, we see that there is a fair growth in adherents as opposed to church members. This should raise an alarm in the denomination and question what the problem is why people are more comfortable in remaining adherents rather than becoming members. From all of the above statistics, it would make sense to suggest that adherents do not have to take on the responsibility of doing tasks in the local congregation, never mind the world. Again, there will be serious thinking that will need to be done when planning ahead. If this trend continues, the BUSA will be made up of “church-goers” rather than “disciple-makers”. More emphasis will need to be placed on adherents becoming aware of responsibility toward God and the local congregation. This responsibility should lead to further vision and desire to minister to non-believers. If there is no responsibility, as an adherent, the trend will cripple the church and when difficulties are faced, there will be no people to deal with the difficulties. Without going into detail, adherents will need to

be educated on their role in the local church and be empowered to participate in the programmes and lives of the people in the church.



Without wanting to just make a difference on paper with figures, it would be wonderful if the adherents represented in the graph below would be members – not just members, but active participants in the affairs of God and the local congregation. This would make a major difference in the BUSA.



Suggestions as a way forward will be made in the next chapter, however, it should be noted that unless the BUSA takes a serious look and active consideration with reference to its members, and non-members (also known as adherents), the church will not have a decent effect in the world in which it exists – as Christ intended it to have. It is interesting to note that although the BUSA has approximately 50 000 members, unless the figures above are considered in planning for the future, the church will become less and less active and have a minimal impact in the society.

1. IS THE BUSA A MISSIONS-MINDED CHURCH?

Although the figures shown from the research seem to be quite concerning with regards to the future of the BUSA, to follow are some of the activities that are managed by the Baptist Missions Department (BMD) of the BUSA. These do not include the activities and programmes facilitated by the 645 local congregations of the BUSA. To follow are some of the events that are/have recently – 2007 and 2008 – taken place:

There are many missionaries serving across the world through various agencies sent out by the local congregations who have sent out from their own “flock”. The BUSA continues to be active in Africa, such as Malawi and Mozambique. Much work is also being done in Morocco as well as Mauritius. There have also been people training at a theological seminary in Zambia. A couple has recently been sent out to Angola and there are wonderful reports that come from a couple in India.

The BMD has also forged a good relationship with the Northern Baptist Association of Zambia (NBAZ). A team of ten pastors and leaders preached through the Book of Joshua in June 2008. They covered about 5 different Satellite Centers including equipping about 200 pastors and leaders. The hunger for God’s Word is evident in Africa, and the BUSA need to take every opportunity to minister to those who are not able to attend theological colleges etc.

New opportunities are being made available in Africa. Through various missions’ trips across the South African borders, partnerships are beginning to develop with Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as well as Ethiopia.

Early in January 2008, representatives from the BUSA attended Baptist Convention meetings in Zimbabwe. This has opened the door for the BMD to get involved with Trans Africa Training (TAT) as well as other ministry opportunities.

Church planting continues to be one of the thrusts of the BUSA. But the focus has also been on discipleship. Part of the criticism has been that the Union has not always planted viable churches, but work is being done in this department presently. The BUSA have also been helping churches to develop their “mission’s involvement” and also have material available to be used by local churches.

Another effective ministry of the BUSA is Deeds of Love Ministries (DOLM). It was initiated in 1995 as a catalyst and facilitator of development and relief. DOLM aims to sensitize the churches and civil society to the social problems facing local communities, and to empower them to reverse the effects of poverty. DOLM is currently involved with leaders' skills development, job creation assistance and training in all HIV/AIDS matters, many social services which could bring relief and social aid.

The slogan that is being publicized by the BUSA is:

"Each one reach and disciple one; Each one plant and nurture one; Each one send and support one; Together impacting this generation for Christ!"

The current goals of the BUSA are:

"Doubling local church membership; Doubling of BU member churches; Doubling the number of children and youth being reached; 300 churches with Youth / Young Adult ministries; Doubling number of Children's Workers / Teachers; 300 churches 'Missions involved'".

In planning for the future, as a Christian denomination, the BUSA needs to be relevant and ask whether the church – and in this case, the BUSA – are working towards a goal of reaching all peoples of the earth with the Good News of Jesus Christ. The apostles were very aware of the importance of the local congregation in God's strategy of bringing the message of salvation "to the ends of the earth". In planning, it is to be remembered that the Church is different from any other organization or institution. The Church derives its nature from Christ. This is crucial in the planning process as it is in Christ that the Church originates and is

sustained and will come to maturity (Eph 1:4; 4:11, 13). This relational aspect of the Church to the Lord can easily be overlooked or even only theoretically ascribed to. This may be one of the reasons why the above figures are prevalent in the BUSA. It is crucial that the BUSA plan with this relational virtue at hand in order for the Church to fulfill its task of reaching out with the Gospel.

As the BUSA plans to rediscover the role of the laity in the mission of the Church, both locally and universally, people will be encouraged to plan their lives around biblical values and commands. If the above statistics are true, people (more especially the majority of the adherents) have become “spectators” rather than “participators” in the local congregations in the BUSA. If people are genuinely “born again” according to Jn 3:3, Jesus will be acknowledged in their lives and the task which He has given to the Church of making disciples of all nations becomes a priority which in turn shapes the lifestyle of church members individually, so that corporately the Church seriously undertakes its responsibility to reach other people so that they too may come into a relationship with the Lord and so participate in the reconciliation with God achieved through Christ for all people everywhere who respond to Him as Saviour and Lord of their lives (2 Cor 5:18, 19).

In considering the nature of the Church, it must be stated that the Church is part of the Kingdom of God which exists before Christ comes back to earth, for a second time. This is imperative to understand in the forward planning of the BUSA or else it will become “inward focused” rather than “outward focused” and easily become selfish in its outlook. The sovereignty of God extends to the whole universe and not solely to a limited number of people or any specific denomination. The BUSA will constantly need to remind itself that it is not an end in itself but that its very existence is for the purpose of bringing the Good News of how humanity may enter the Kingdom of God, according to Col 1:12, 13).

When a person has come into a relationship with Christ, the person will join with others and so be part of a local congregation. Such congregations of people would be “expressions” of what the Kingdom of God is like. This they do by living lives, based on Kingdom principles, before a watching world.

The nature of the local congregation is therefore that group of believers, disciples of Christ, who worship and adore their Lord together (λειτουργία), who study the Word of God all together (κήρυγμα) who meet together for fellowship and prayer (κοινωνία), who serve and care for one another (διακονία), and who reach out as individuals, and together, to neighbours and so be salt and light in their immediate communities. From within these people, some will be sent to other parts of the world to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with other peoples of the world (Ac 2:36-42; 13:1-3).

In the following chapter we identify some points for the church to observe where they are in the process of growth and maturity.