

Greg and Sarah Akers

2023 ZEMA Annual Report

2023 marked the first full year that Sarah and I were a part of the ZEMA body. We are now approaching our last few months of probation. To say that the last two years has passed swiftly is certainly an understatement. It has passed quickly, but also with much joy and learning.

As probationary missionaries, we had two goals: To learn the isiXhosa language, and to learn the Xhosa culture. Our progress has been steady, and I continue to have Xhosa classes twice a week, and this supplements the regular interaction I have with Xhosa folk in our various classes/services. While I desire to be further down the road in this journey, I am encouraged by my instructors and mentors that I am doing well.

We continue to find great joy in being mentored by Luaan and Susanne Goosen who show exceptional wisdom and joy and love both in their ministries and in their personal lives. I continue to travel with Luaan to our various classes. We teach together in Mdantsane. I teach a ZEBS class alongside our ministry partners in Qonce and a *This We Believe* class alongside a ministry partner in Makhanda. I occasionally travel with Luaan to other Bible classes as well, and am enjoying learning so much from him especially in our (sometimes long) car drives.

We continue to build relationships with people in the area, though we recognise that this is hampered by a weakness in speaking the language. We look forward to this changing as we grow in our understanding of and speaking isiXhosa.

I am very grateful to be able to say that our financial concerns of our first year with ZEMA have largely gone away. Our income has only slightly improved, but our understanding of our finances and seeing the ebb-and-flow of giving through the years has really encouraged us. We feel *more* secure than we did last year; though we are reminded that we must continue to have a healthy dependence on the Lord and not our supporters.

We were grateful for the opportunity this year to spend a month at Sunbury Christian Camp assisting John and Janice Lewin. We were able to see what goes into the work there. John and Janice are doing a wonderful job, and we also were able to take some rest while we were there.

Largely speaking, this past year has been one of tremendous joy in the work. However, this joy was dampened as we approached the graduation season. While many of the classes were joyful occasions as people celebrated not just the receiving of certificates but also the spiritual growth, one graduating class was a heartsore experience as virtually all of the students - after four years of faithful teaching - after being asked, openly acknowledged that they had not accepted the gospel message. When Jesus was questioned about His fellowship with sinners, He answered that He had come as a doctor for the sick, not the healthy. I had never considered that there could be those who openly acknowledge with sadness their own sickness, and yet also openly reject the Healer. This made us question whether we should 'wipe the dust from our feet' of that town, or whether we should persevere in hope of change. It has also been a challenging class as the students have been gatekeepers, preventing others who would like to attend and grow, from coming to the class.

We have decided to continue with the class, in prayer, and with the anticipation that those who have heard the gospel will, in time, receive it, and also that the students who have graduated will cease to be gatekeepers holding the gates closed from others who are eager to join. Who knows but that this year we may see a large influx of new students with hearts receptive to the Gospel message and eager for the Gospel work.

Another challenge we have faced in this past year has been the opposition of 'church fraternal'. Groups of Church leaders have been exercising their influence to keep students away from our classes, and some of our classes have seen serious drops in numbers. Their motives behind targeting the ZEBS classes can only be surmised. They speak against the teachings of the 'outsiders', but this is simply a part of the spiritual battle for the hearts of the people. Our strategy to deal with this includes adding teachings which call people away

from fraternalism which are based on titles and to form groups that hold to truth that we get from Scripture; as well as targeted prayer.

A great joy for Sarah and I over this past year was to host our first team from overseas. A small group from Northbridge Church in Antioch, Illinois came to East London for ten days. They were a great blessing to us, and we believe they were also blessed by their time in the Eastern Cape. We took the team to various schools in the area to share the Gospel message with the children and teachers; they assisted in teaching in various Bible classes; they attended Church services; and participated in door-to-door evangelism. As our home space is quite limited, they were hosted by local Baptist Church families which gave them further opportunities to get to know the South African context. After an exhausting but fulfilling eight days, they also visited the Addo Elephant Park for two nights of adventure.

On the family front, we continue to be grateful for the place the Lord has put us. We have developed good friendships with a number of Church families that are an encouragement and support to us. Rayah will be starting a new school this year, and Olivia will be starting attending a playschool two days a week. Unfortunately this presents a transport problem, as their classes are in opposite directions with our home in the centre, and we currently only have one vehicle. We find ourselves more strongly considering the need for a second vehicle.



Images from the various Easter Services at different groups across the Eastern Cape



Arriving for a month's stay at Sunbury

Meeting familiar faces at the ZEBS Teacher's Conference



Different services in the Eastern Cape





Sarah was invited to speak at a Women's Conference in Johannesburg



A This We Believe graduation in Makhanda



A visiting team from Northbridge Church



ZEBS graduation in Mthatha



Annual *African Pastor's Conference* in Qonce

