



## THE JOURNEY TO GREATER SPIRITUAL PASSION, SUSTAINABILITY AND RELEVANCE.

### A HISTORY OF GRACE

Last year The Gideons in South Africa was 70 years old. This milestone is a wonderful testimony of God's work in and through this ministry. It also testifies too much grace to have had sufficient men and women power and other resources to ensure that almost 50 million Testaments have been placed and distributed. But the work isn't finished yet.

### MINISTRY AT A CROSSROAD

The Gideons has however, reached a crossroad especially when considering three realities:

- Since 40 years ago in 1981, the total number of members of 2 600 is currently the lowest, and the declining trend is getting more pronounced.
- Currently an average of 480 Testaments per Gideon per year is placed and distributed in South Africa. This is almost four times more than the average of any other national association of a Gideons country in the world. This indicates an unsustainable situation especially if the number of members declines further.
- The Gideons currently has less than 5% people of a different colour which indicates that the ministry represents only a small group of Christians from Protestant and evangelical churches even after 70 years. The vast majority of potential members are unaware of the opportunity to serve in the Gideons or have never been invited.

These realities are a clarion call to answer the following question: How will we get the ministry on the growth path again as in the 80s and 90s? At the end of 2 000 there were more than 5 000 members.

But is it necessary to chase the numbers? And do we have to drag race demographics into this at all cost? It is God's mission and won't He provide?

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From the time when the various cabinets of the Gideons and Gideons' Wives put heads together from July to October 2021 to think about and formulate the Refocus Strategy, these and several other questions were considered. After some time, there was a conviction that God offers us the opportunity to now, in times like these, take leadership with the same promise given to Gideon: "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!" (Judges 6:12). This means decisions are made which are in the best interest of the ministry.

### **WHAT IS REFOCUS ACTUALLY ABOUT?**

The Refocus Strategy is actually a spiritual journey in which we search for God's will for the ministry in the year 2021 and beyond. What does God expect us to do to build the ministry spiritually so that passion and energy will be characteristic to ensure sustainability and to make the ministry relevant to all societies in our country? How do we ensure that more Christians who represent all cultures, become part of this wonderful platform from where the Word of God is distributed?

### **WHAT DOES IT PRACTICALLY ENTAIL? WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?**

Refocus is a growth strategy which aims to have 4 000 members in December 2023. As part of the Refocus Strategy five focus areas have been identified which will be used as levers to achieve this goal:

- **Ministry Culture:** Several surveys held among members have indicated that the culture of the ministry is experienced as being too rigid and formal. This manifests particularly in camps where the environment is experienced as being unfriendly, not receptive and unaccommodating. New members, including inactive existing members, will not comfortably integrate with and become actively involved in a camp where the culture is not receptive.

To change culture requires hard work of leaders on all levels in the ministry. There could be some "visible" changes such as to alter the terminology used, for example to change the new identity of the "Auxiliary" to "Gideons' Wives". The most important cultural changes are the spiritual or "invisible" changes required. This involves on the one hand the re-discovery of each active and inactive member's calling in the ministry. It also involves an attitude of compassionate hearts with which we deal with each other and new members.

- **Recruitment:** Camps for whom it is possible, are expected to recruit 5 married couples over the next two years in prayerful dependence of God. The focus is purposefully on the recruitment of a Gideon and his wife because it re-emphasises the family culture and should improve the balance between the number of men and woman in the ministry. It has been proven that when both the man and his wife are involved in the ministry, there is a greater measure of compassion and active participation.

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In addition, the challenge for each camp is to recruit members outside the traditional sources of recruitment such as the main stream churches. The challenge is to specifically look for God's will in the calling of men and women of a different colour to become part of the ministry.

- **Welcoming:** There should be a focus to integrate and involve new members in a proper way in both their camps and in the broader organisation. This includes a new joint application form for married couples, a fast and effective recruitment process, a new members' webinar which will be offered on a quarterly basis and the mentorship and accompaniment of new members by the camp, the National Service Centre and Members' programme.

- **Camp monthly meetings:** There are several camps that do not hold monthly camp meetings or dinners or that do not have meaningful activities anymore. A new format was therefore developed that will be launched early in 2022. Camps will then have the option to hold camp get-togethers. The name will be symbolic of an opportunity with the emphasis on being together, spiritual growth and communication in an informal and family-oriented style. There are already camps who meet in this way and they experience it as very enriching.

- **Internal and external communication:** Much work is being done on a new app which will place the ministry "at the finger tips" of members. In addition to access to relevant information, members could order Bibles, report placings and testimonies, upload videos and photos and easily report where necessary by means of the app.

It was also noted that many people are unaware of The Gideons and that there are high levels of ignorance. Marketing and external communication are therefore very important to grow the ministry. It will be done professionally but authentically – true to the core values of the ministry but relevant to an audience with a short attention span who live and communicate online.

### **WHAT WILL NOT CHANGE?**

The Gideons' reason for its existence, core values and spiritual goals will definitely not change. The nature of the ministry as a not-for-profit organisation and functioning as part of the international enterprise will not be affected. The relevance of the ministry is not defined by its size; the Word of God for the lost makes the ministry relevant for today.

### **BECOME PART OF REFOCUS**

The Refocus strategy is therefore not merely a chase to increase member numbers. It acknowledges both the internal culture and the context in which the ministry in South Africa operates. It seriously takes into consideration the reality that there are enough

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called hearts, willing hands and convinced mouths to make the ministry sustainable. The focus is therefore on two responsibilities placed on each member:

- To share the Gospel of redemption with the lost;
- To tell others who have been called by God to service, of the opportunity offered by The Gideons.

As camp and individual member, please consider becoming part of Refocus and the growth of the ministry. May God lead this ministry and may his will be done for us and through us.

Glory to God alone.

**Leon van der Merwe**

Executive director





# REFOCUS STRATEGY



**TARGET: 4 000 members** by December 2023  
Five couples per camp over two years



## Ministry culture

- Visible renewal
- “... be transformed by the renewal of your mind ...” (Romans 12:2)



## Recruitment

- Couples, people of colour
- New recruitment sources



## Monthly camp get together

- New format “get together”
- Informal, spiritual focus



## Welcoming

- One application for couples
- Mentorship and guidance



## Marketing & communication

- Gideons smart App
- External awareness

### Ministry characterised by:

- Spiritual passion
- Sustainability
- Relevance

### Ministry anchored in:

- Inspired, infallible Word of God
- Core values & spiritual goals
- International ministry

Get involved and tell someone about the opportunity to serve