CHAPTER 2

Indian Pentecostal churches

before the 1960s

In this chapter, we consider specifically the rise and development of the Pentecostal denominations which emerged during the urbanisation of the Indian community, the Bethesda group of churches, the Apostolic Faith Mission; and the Assemblies of God.

Bethesda is discussed at much greater length because it is by far the largest - its present membership is in excess of 35 000 and the AFM, the second largest, has about 3 500 members.

BETHESDA

Beginnings in Pietermaritzburg

J A Rowlands, a miller from Bristol, and E Theophilus, a local Indian trader, were jointly responsible for the beginnings of what was to become Bethesda, the largest Christian movement among Indian South Africans.

Both J A Rowlands and his wife, Edith Hartland, the parents of John Francis Rowlands, under whose leadership Bethesda was to be established, were from Bristol, England. They were both educated at a Quaker school and J A Rowlands, a successful businessman, was also a devout evangelist.1

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1 *Natal Advertiser* 7 May 1932. *Western Daily Press* 5 December 1939. These cuttings were kept by J F Rowlands.
He strongly emphasised ‘holiness’ principles and laid great stress upon a devout Christian lifestyle, the study of the Scriptures, prayer, evangelism and charity. He once wrote, ‘Practical Christianity is the keynote ... in God’s name, let each strive to purify our Empire, and eventually the whole world’. There is no record of either J A Rowlands or his son having had any formal theological training.

J A Rowlands’ approach to Christian living greatly influenced his son, J F Rowlands, and through him Bethesda’s spirituality and theology.

J A Rowlands arrived in South Africa in 1922. His original intention was to visit, not to settle, but when he, an astute businessman, saw the economic opportunities that Natal in the 1920s offered, he decided to stay. His decision was to have far-reaching consequences for Christianity among Indian South Africans.

He established the Natal Trading and Milling Company in Church Street, Pietermaritzburg, opposite the Market Square. Then he developed a stud farm at Wiganthorpe on the outskirts of the city where he set up residence.

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2 Information gleaned from J F Rowlands’ description of his father.
3 The Journal of the Bishop’s Knoll Hospital, Bristol in Oosthuizen, G C Moving to the Waters, XII (hereafter MWa).
4 J F Rowlands openly acknowledged the influence his father had on his thinking (Moving Waters (henceforth MW) December 1943; sermon entitled ‘Thanks Dad’). Concerning the acquisition of theological education, J F Rowlands was suspicious of formal theological training and discouraged his early Indian workers in this regard. The writer once heard him say that ‘what the church needs is knee-logy not theology’, meaning that prayer was more needful than theology. Part of this caution was because of the effect that theological liberalism would have on piety; part of the fear was probably because of the general revivalistic propensity to prefer mission and the pursuit of devout life-style to intellectual enquiry. The balance had, in any case, not been widely achieved in the established churches with which these groups had become disenchanted.
5 Oosthuizen MWa, XV. He appears to have come at first to recuperate from recent illness (MWa, XIV) and to bring some financial assistance to his brother, Thomas Livesly Rowlands, who had already settled in Natal and was farming at ‘Pentire’ near Nicholson’s Nek (information from Herbert Theophilus, son of Ebenezer Theophilus).
6 MW July 1936, 105.
Before moving to Pietermaritzburg, the family had been the guests of T L Rowlands, and Walter and Amy Stead, J A Rowlands’ sister, who owned adjacent farms. The Steads were their first contact with Pentecostalism. Walter Stead, who was the Protector of Indian Immigrants at the time, gave J A Rowlands first-hand information concerning the Indians in Natal. When he settled in Pietermaritzburg he was able to enter into the lives and struggles of those people themselves.

Ebenezer Theophilus, who has been given less prominence in the Bethesda tradition, although his contribution was as important as J A Rowlands', owned a fruit stall in the market opposite Rowlands’ Milling Company. A chance meeting led to a lasting friendship between them.

Theophilus, formerly an Anglican, had joined the Methodist Church when he moved from Durban to Pietermaritzburg. He was especially drawn to J A Rowlands because of Rowlands’ commitment to ‘holiness theology’, his strong emphasis on abstinence from smoking and drinking and rejection of ‘worldliness’. Christianity directly affected everyday life and commitment to God and had tangible effects in a person’s life and attitude. The churches he knew, including his own, adopted a far too formalised form of Christianity.

As the Methodist Indian circuit was then without a minister, Theophilus invited J A Rowlands to preach. The dynamic Rowlands soon began to play a leading role in that circuit with Theophilus as his confidant and loyal supporter. According to an extract of the December 1924 minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, Pietermaritzburg Indian Circuit, under the superintendency of the Reverend A Eben Griffen, J A Rowlands had held the position of chairman. In the same records Theophilus’ name appears in the prayer, visitation and social committees. Mrs Rowlands was one of the two women who ran the Women’s Works Committee and J Hensman, who helped pioneer early Bethesda, served on the church management committee.

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7 J F Rowlands was barely thirteen at this time. The Steads were active Pentecostal members and feature prominently in the history of both the Assemblies of God and the Pentecostal Holiness Churches in South Africa. Oosthuizen (MWa XV), refers to Walter Stead’s post as Protector of Indian immigrants.

8 Oral information from interviews with Herbert Theophilus and J H Hensman. (Documented oral information hereafter referred to as OI.)

9 A copy of these minutes in E Theophilus’s scrapbook. J A Rowlands introduced a system of committees to do the work of the circuit in the absence of a minister and was supported by the Boshoff Street white
J A Rowlands soon saw the need for a full-time circuit minister and sent a request for an appointment to be made to the Methodist Church Synod which gathered in Greytown in February 1925. His request was granted and Reverend A J Choonoo was shortly afterwards transferred from the Durban Lorne Street. However, clashes between A J Choonoo and J A Rowlands over the administration of the church led to Rowlands' withdrawal from the congregation.

In an attempt to effect a reconciliation, Theophilus arranged a meeting at his house in July 1925. At the meeting J A Rowlands asked A J Choonoo whether he had 'received the Holy Spirit since he had believed' and this offended Choonoo who promptly walked out.¹⁰

Although this marked the end of J A Rowlands' active participation in Indian Methodist work, he kept some links with that church until 1928.¹¹

When J A Rowlands left the Methodist circuit, a small group of Indian Methodists joined him. These included Ebenezer Theophilus and J Hensman. The two main issues that drew these dissenters together were their commitment to holiness principles and their desire to evangelise Indian people living in Pietermaritzburg.

Ebenezer Theophilus offered the group his fruit shop at the front of his home at 519 Longmarket Square, in which to hold their services.¹² He also provided at his own expense the centre's first pieces of furniture.¹³ His stall in the market square now became his only means of livelihood.

At a meeting held on 17 July 1925 in Theophilus's home 'The United Pentecostal Mission of Natal' (UPM) was established. J A Rowlands served as superintendent of the new congregation and also sometimes preached at the small white congregation of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Pietermaritzburg.¹⁴

¹⁰ OI J H Hensman.
¹¹ Natal Witness 7 June 1926.
¹³ MW October 1973, 153.
¹⁴ MWa, 15.
Theophilus shared the pastoral responsibilities of the new UPM with J A Rowlands and played a vital role in its consolidation. Two other early Indian co-workers deserve special mention: John Rufus and Joseph Hensman, both school teachers. John Rufus, a former Baptist, is reported to have had a 'wonderful ministry with the scholars' at the Railway school where he was employed. Many of the mission's early conversions were the result of Rufus's efforts. John Hensman assisted, amongst other things, with the musical accompaniment during services and with 'home visitations', a practice of visiting members regularly in their homes, providing spiritual and material assistance where necessary. He also bought the congregation its first organ.

The years 1925 and 1926 saw further developments in Pietermaritzburg which help in understanding the religious inheritance of Bethesda.

In December 1925, A B Arnot, a young assistant of A H Cooper, who headed a thriving Pentecostal congregation in Durban at the time, undertook a pioneering mission as a Full Gospel Church pastor to the Pietermaritzburg area. A small congregation was formed and met for their services in the one-room dwelling of Mrs Thomas, who supported Arnot's work financially. Members of the Assemblies of God who had had no place to worship also attended these meetings.

In due course the growing congregation moved out of the room into a disused cinema. A series of widely advertised evangelistic 'campaigns', which the Rowlands and Stead families attended, were held in it. John A Rowlands began to take a direct interest in Arnot's work, and thus began his association with the Full Gospel Church. These campaigns had far-reaching consequences for Pentecostalism in South Africa at large: the two sons of J A Rowlands, John Francis and Alec, together with John Stead, who was to become a leader in the Pentecostal Holiness Church, made commitments to Christ at Arnot's meetings.

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15 J H Hensman maintained that 'Mr Theophilus was the key figure in starting the work .... Mr J A Rowlands gave him financial and moral support' (J H Hensman's letter to A Thompson, J F Rowlands' successor, December 1980). J H Hensman's information is a most helpful source to give perspective on this early period, the bulk of the available written information being from J F Rowlands' records and writings.

16 *MW* April 1942; September 1973, 138.

17 *OI* A B Arnot.
Arnot baptised J F Rowlands. At that time attempts were made to form a union between the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Full Gospel Church in South Africa. One of the conditions of union was that the Full Gospel Church would adopt the Apostolic Faith Mission’s mode of baptism by immersing three times, so Arnot baptised J F Rowlands in this manner. However, plans for that union failed and soon afterwards, the Full Gospel Church discontinued this practice.  

Early in 1926 Pastor Haller, an itinerant evangelist, who baptised the other members of the Rowlands family, strongly criticised Arnot for not being a true Pentecostal. In his view, gifts of the spirit, especially speaking in tongues, were ‘not in evidence’ in his church. To meet this ‘need’ he held separate prayer meetings on the Stead’s farm. Here the pursuit of the gifts of prophecy and tongue speaking received special attention.

Haller’s group took a special interest in the doctrine of the ‘secret rapture’ which claims that the ‘true believers’ will at Christ’s appearing suddenly be taken away and that the ‘unprepared and unholy’ who were left behind would undergo with the rest of the world, a period of terrible ‘tribulation’ before Christ’s second coming to establish a millenial rule. Believing that the ‘rapture’ was imminent, they sent Arnot strict instructions to preach this doctrine, maintaining that his duty as a pastor was to give priority to warning Christians about their fate rather than attempting to convert non-Christians. In their view when true believers ‘disappeared’, the unconverted would see their mistake and be converted. These instructions to Arnot came as a result of ‘prophecies’ received at their prayer meetings. When Arnot refused their demands, the group, including the Rowlands and Stead families, withdrew from fellowship with Arnot’s congregation.

They withdrew not only because Arnot disagreed with their doctrinal position, but also because they believed that they had been given a prophecy which had named the date of the secret rapture. The date came and went. Later they realised their mistake and, recalls Arnot, ‘were honest enough to come back into the church’.  

For a while after these meetings, Arnot lived with the Rowlands family. When he embarked on a series of tent meetings he often slept in the tent itself as a security measure and the young J F Rowlands accompanied him. A strong friendship developed and Rowlands, who was then seventeen, became Arnot’s treasurer and ‘live-wire’ in his Sunday School. J A Rowlands financially supported Arnot’s work. (OI A B Arnot; J H Hensman).

OI A B Arnot.
As a result of this eschatological controversy and criticism for not supporting the practice of glossalalia in his service, Arnot left the Full Gospel Church and Pentecostalism at the end of 1926 and joined the Baptist Church.

This event deeply influenced J F Rowlands who preferred not to mention this incident and pleaded consistently for moderation in the Pentecostal experience. He denounced ‘spiritual cranks’ and gave to Indian Pentecostalism a sense of caution towards spiritual enthusiasm, which was not found in many other Pentecostal Churches.20

J A Rowlands, restored to fellowship with the Full Gospel congregation, henceforth concentrated his efforts on the work of the United Pentecostal Mission.

In 1926 not only eschatology divided the church; despite the close fellowship that had existed among people of both white and Indian groups in Arnot’s initially small congregation and the easy mixing that had occurred between the Indian members and white preachers of the United Pentecostal Mission, the white and Indian congregations polarised on racial lines. The attitudes of whites at this time quickly put an end to such ‘mixed’ brotherliness. A B Arnot explains, ‘Those were other days, other ways ... when “apartheid” was very much the thing ... it was considered to be advisable to start a special Indian work in an Indian area.’21 A H Cooper in particular, who showed similar tendencies in his approach in Durban, encouraged separation of the races after seeing Indians attending Arnot’s church in a white residential area. Thus while individuals could mix, congregations were encouraged to maintain separate racial identities.22

20 Bethesda’s approach to Pentecostal theology and, more particularly, J F Rowlands’ interpretation of Pentecostalism, will be dealt with more fully in chapter 7.

21 This is how A B Arnot described white attitudes to racial integration in the 1920s. However, by the 1980s the ‘other ways’ had been preserved intact. The implications of this racial exclusiveness preserved in the constitution of the mainline Pentecostal denominations for the Indian Pentecostal churches will be dealt with in chapter 5.

22 OI A B Arnot. At least three elderly Indian members of Bethesda narrated how they felt excluded when they attended his church.
On Easter Monday 1926, E Theophilus arranged a church picnic on the banks of the Umsindusi River, at which the Mission’s first baptismal service took place. As J F Rowlands had done a short while earlier, Theophilus too accepted re-baptism by total immersion from Arnot. A year later J A Rowlands baptised Mrs Theophilus, her daughter Grace, Gilbert Theophilus, Mary Emma, P Moses and J H Hensmen, all of whom had been former Methodist members and now formed an important part of the new congregation.23

In the middle of 1927, Ebenezer Theophilus impressed upon J A Rowlands the need for his son John Francis, who was heading the Sunday school at Arnot’s church, to join the mission. So Arnot lost the help of his seventeen-year-old friend and supporter, for J F Rowlands now threw in his lot with the Indian congregation at 519 Longmarket Street.

This young congregation embarked on an evangelisation campaign so forthright that several Hindus protested sharply: for example, at the time of the annual Hindu fire-walking festival, this congregation erected a sign that proclaimed ‘Salvation from Eternal Hell fire-walking is only found in Jesus Christ’ and, according to J F Rowlands, produced ‘an angry reaction from Hindus who even threatened to burn the Church’.24

‘Stones of both kinds were thrown’, wrote J F Rowlands: physical threats as well as sharp criticisms, even from some of the pulpits of the ‘established’ churches. The new congregation was dubbed a ‘Mushroom Church’ and a ‘Jazz Band Church’, the former a reference to the stir its initial years were making; the latter, to the lively upbeat singing at the services, accompanied by guitars and other instruments, not just the traditional use of organ or piano. Although the years 1925 to 1931 were ‘hard and difficult’, the ‘faithful few held fast against fierce opposition and persecution’.25

23 These ex-Methodists formed part of the nucleus of the Mission. This site, near the ‘Drift’, was the venue for all the baptismal services of both the Pietermaritzburg and Durban congregations until 1931, when Bethesda in Durban started using a site on the Umgeni River.

24 OJ H Hensman, 3. This is one of the examples of over-zealous evangelism without inter-religious sensitivity which will be discussed more fully in chapter 6.

25 MW June 1973, 91; also July 1973, 106 and OJ J F Rowlands (MW Novem-
Early in 1928, after finishing his schooling at Hilton College at the age of 18, J F Rowlands was given charge of the Mission’s Sunday school. John Rufus obtained permission for him to convene a Sunday school at the Railway School for Indians where he was a teacher. Later J F Rowlands wrote, ‘Some of the most faithful members of the church accepted Christ as their personal Saviour when they were pupils at this school.’

Almost every member of this young congregation took part in distributing Christian pamphlets and in open-air preaching. An open-air service was held every Friday evening at the corner of Church and Retief Streets to which the Hindus reacted by holding a meeting at exactly the same time on the opposite corner of the street as a protest against Christian ‘proselytism’. Together with Kothe, a white evangelist, and his wife, open-air services were also held at Pentrich, Plessislaer, Edenvale and the Coronation brickyard - Indian residential areas on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg.

In 1928 the Rowlands family suffered a sudden financial crisis. On 6 May their seven-storey Natal Milling Company was razed by fire and they were reduced to an ‘almost penniless position’.

Rather than rebuild the business J A Rowlands now gave himself up almost totally to the work of the Mission and formally became its ‘pastor’. J F Rowlands frequently recalled how decisive his family’s financial loss was for his own ministry. It also greatly influenced his Indian co-workers. One of the first of Bethesda’s Indian pastors remarked:

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26 OI J H Hensman; MW July 1973, 106.
27 OI J H Hensman. Although the initial years saw slow results there was always a faithful band of members at the services and who continued these outreach programmes. Hensman disagrees with J F Rowlands’ account in MWa, 17 that ‘preaching was performed initially in a hall about full of empty benches’. It appears this exaggeration is due largely to the fact the rapid growth of the church after 1931 served to obscure, in J F Rowlands’ mind, the slow growth of the church between the years 1926 to 1931.
28 OI J F Rowlands. The Natal Witness 7 May 1928 in bold headlines reported ‘City’s biggest grain store gutted’.

21
We took him in and learned to love him. If he could make such a sacrifice and take the loss of wealth [the result of the fire] so bravely why could we not sacrifice for God?29

This minister became so convinced of the need to emulate the Rowlands family's example that he left his secular work and joined the ministry.

In 1927 Stephen Jeffries, a visiting evangelist, held revival campaigns countrywide. His meetings brought new life to many Pentecostal churches especially those under A H Cooper's superintendency in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. J F who had had a small press while still in his teens was able to edit and print Stephen Jeffries' *Revival News* free of charge. He also founded the Pietermaritzburg Tract Distributing Society which distributed 'millions of tracts'. Particularly noteworthy was the *Revival Hymn Book* which appeared in 1929. The press was later sold 'as no Full Gospel pastor was allowed to have any other business'.30 The experience he acquired during this time was vital for the later production of Bethesda's well-known monthly bulletin, *Moving Waters*, the first issue of which appeared in January 1940.31

J F Rowlands' responsibilities increased from 1928 till 1931. Theophilus was never made a pastor but continued his important supportive work as missionary.

The young Rowlands brought great innovations and renewed zeal into the work of the Mission.32 In May 1931 J F Rowlands preached a sermon in which

29 OI J Vallen. Vallen described his own decision to join the ministry as 'stepping out in faith'. This meant resigning his job and becoming a full-time evangelist without any guarantee of a fixed or adequate stipend.

30 *MW* November 1973, 171.

31 *Moving Waters (MW)*, appeared each month after January 1940 without fail under J F Rowlands editorship. It remains a key source of information on the history of Bethesda.

32 Advertisements and articles in the local press at the time give a fair idea of the indefatigable and innovative work of J F Rowlands: 'Evangelistic and divine healing services .... Boys' Bible classes, prayer and praise meetings. All nationalities welcome. No collection' (*Natal Witness* 7 February 1931); 'Wednesday: Prayer and testimony. Everybody welcome. No collections' (*Natal Witness* 14 February 1931); or the report, 'An excellent programme of songs, recitals and instrumental music was given by the Indian children, assisted by their European friends' (*The Natal Witness* 7 February 1931).
he urged the church to fast and pray for the ‘fire of the Holy Spirit’ and complained that ‘modern society was rather in the supper room than in the upper room, and generally nowadays there was more fire in the kitchen than in religion’.33

In August 1931 a ‘breakthrough’ was made at last when a bold ‘step of faith’ was taken and the Hindu Young Men’s Association (HYMA) Hall in the lower Church Street was hired for three weeks. A ‘Revival and Healing Campaign’ was advertised and every member of the mission was given some responsibility at these meetings.34 E Theophilus, John Rufus, J H Hensman and other Indians members were responsible to a large extent for the new members who attended. J A Rowlands shared the preaching responsibilities with his son in this campaign.

It is important to note that because J F Rowlands was a preacher of natural ability, he and not E Theophilus was the natural successor to J A Rowlands.35 Another factor that possibly influenced his succession was the fact that a white preacher had the psychological advantage of being considered ‘more learned’ and superior to an Indian preacher.36 Whatever the abilities and racial advantages that J F had, he was a natural, innovative leader who had the full support of the fledgling mission.

The campaign in the HYMA Hall turned out to be ‘the greatest 22 days’ since the UPC were founded. J F Rowlands was later to recall that this campaign of 1931 ‘saw the beginning of a revival which has never abated and has now been in progress for 42 years ... it was part of the important foundation-laying for the eventual Bethesda Temple’.37

The local newspaper reported that ‘the services have been fraught with much blessing, scores of people of all nationalities found spiritual help .... A great

33 The Natal Witness 1 June 1931.
34 MW October 1973, 155; The Natal Witness 22 August 1931.
35 MW April 1942, 39.
36 In interviews with Indian pastors it emerged that this partiality to white pastors appears to have caused discontent only among a few Indians. E Theophilus and J H Hensman, for example, would isolate this partiality as an impediment to their own ministries. The majority appear not to have been bothered by white domination of church affairs at the time.
37 MW July 1973, 105-106; MWA, 19.
feature of these gatherings has been the way in which members of all races - Europeans, Indians, Natives and Coloured people - have responded to the appeal.  

Soon afterwards a large baptismal service was held in the Umsindusi River at Pentrich where a thousand people turned out to witness the baptism of many of the nearly 250 new converts during the campaign.  

The ‘fruit-shop’ suddenly became too small and had to be extended. A H Cooper officially opened the new extension in December 1932 and the Pentecostal Mission called its renovated building ‘Obededom Temple’.

The mission to Durban and the founding of Bethesda

The 1931 campaign brought unprecedented attention to this church which in turn encouraged its growth. J F Rowlands claimed to have had at the time two visions which prompted him to consider establishing a branch in Durban.  

He arrived in Durban on Friday, 9 October 1931. An Indian weekly recorded later the events of that day:

 Pastor J F Rowlands walked seeking the will of God; he felt the need for guidance, and stepped aside in a certain street to pray behind a little bush that was growing on a piece of vacant land. Two days later, on 17 October 1931, the first Gospel meeting was held at the Durban Corporation Barracks, and that was the beginning of Bethesda.

While this description, which was often repeated in the sermons of Bethesda’s pastors and in Moving Waters, was essentially true, it glossed over the roles played by others in the early days of Bethesda.

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41 *MW* December 1973.

42 *The Graphic* 10 October 1952. The date in this newspaper article is incorrect. The meeting took place on 10 October.
On this occasion, three young Indian men, D G Samuel, D M Gabriel and A J Williams, knew of Rowlands' plan to come to Durban and went to meet him. They introduced him to the Durban Corporation Barracks, situated slightly to the northeast of the city centre, which housed the Indian workers of the Durban City Council. It was a settlement of very poor people who were engaged in the menial tasks of road sweeping, refuse removal, gardening, general handy-work and office maintenance. As long as he was in the employ of the Corporation, the worker and his family were given very modest and inexpensive housing. An entire family was often housed in one or two rooms. A few hundred metres away railway workers were accommodated in similar facilities.

These three young men, who helped J F Rowlands gain access to various homes at these barracks, joined him in personal evangelisation the afternoon he arrived and the following day.\textsuperscript{43}  

Rowlands was not the first to evangelise Indians in these barracks: for example, in 1931, James Moonsamy of the Apostolic Faith Mission had conducted Christian services there. However, he lived there only for a short while. When he returned to his native Stanger on the Natal North Coast, no lasting results had been achieved.

The Seventh Day Adventists also had a few adherents: one of these, Mrs John, later joined Bethesda.\textsuperscript{44}

The group that eventually became the nucleus of Bethesda came mainly from the Baptist Church in Somtseu Road. The three men who had met J F Rowlands were active members of that church.

Samuel Manda, who also joined Bethesda later, recalls that on Sunday, 11 October, he was left alone to mind the Baptist Sunday school because his three friends had gone to meet 'a certain white man who had come to Durban'. But when the three took it upon themselves to invite J F Rowlands to preach in that Baptist church in the absence of an incumbent minister, the elders of the church objected to a guest being invited without their consent. The small group then seceded and joined J F Rowlands' new congregation.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} MW December 1973.

\textsuperscript{44} OI Henry James of the Apostolic Faith Mission gave information concerning his father's attempts at mission in these barracks; OI Mrs John, a very old woman, was interviewed in Chatsworth in 1981.

\textsuperscript{45} OI Samuel Manda; MW August 1973, 121.
'Bethesda Temple', as J F Rowlands called the new church in the barracks, was formally inaugurated on 11 October 1931. A small group of people, who had been contacted through the home visits the previous day, attended its first service. J F Rowlands presented a simple sermon entitled 'Supposing' based on Luke 2. J F reported that each of the three young men who had met him was 'converted' at that service.

The real position seems to have been that they, who had been members of the Baptist Church, now made a commitment to a 'life of holiness'.

Both J F Rowlands and his Indian co-workers conducted several home-services in the barracks, and Sunday services were conducted in a wood-and-iron structure which was called the 'Drama Hall', the small hall in which the barracks dwellers had held their public meetings. J F Rowlands himself recalled the following persons among those who were at Bethesda's first meeting: A J Williams, Peniel Jacob, George Ramiah, S A Israel, Samuel Manda, R Abel and V R Enoch.

All of these in due course became leaders or elders in Bethesda. V R Enoch was among the first Indian pastors of the church and R Abel was for a period confidant and personal assistant to the young J F Rowlands. The former function he fulfilled until his death in 1972. At the first service of Bethesda he was a mere lad of 14.

J F Rowlands took charge of the Durban work while J A Rowlands led the Pietermaritzburg congregation. In Durban J F promoted a policy of expansion in which he marshalled his band of young Indian friends into a zealous Christian 'commando' for evangelism. Public worship became the occasion when members were continually inspired with burning religious zeal to 'serve God and do his will'.

Progress in Durban was fast: just three weeks after the first meeting a small group of converts travelled to Pietermaritzburg for a baptismal service in the Umsindusi River.

With rapid growth of the congregation two questions arose: What was J F Rowland's ministerial status? What ecclesiastical affiliation should the young congregation have? He had been strongly urged by some to found a new denomination. His stand was that his 'idea of Pentecost was not to estab-

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47 MW March 1974, 39.
49 OI V R Enoch; J Vallen.
lish a new church but to join a true Pentecostal denomination already in existence in the country.'

The motivation behind the need for affiliation was more complex: unless his congregation belonged to a church registered with the government, it would get no official recognition. Land for building churches, concessions for church activity and marriage officers’ licences depended on such recognition.

J F Rowlands had little choice. His strong revivalistic stance made affiliation to any of the ‘established’ churches difficult, particularly since many Baptists, as well as Anglicans and Methodists, joined him for the type of worship they missed in their own churches. Such losses of members had evoked denunciations of Bethesda from the pulpits of these churches.

Besides the Apostolic Faith Mission - with which he had no contact and which had only a few Indian members in Stanger and the Natal North Coast, and comprised mainly Afrikaans-speaking white people - the choice even among Pentecostal or Holiness churches was limited. However, since Obededom Temple had already established strong ties with the Full Gospel Church and A H Cooper had maintained a strong supportive presence both in the development of the Mission in Pietermaritzburg and in Durban, J F Rowlands sought Full Gospel affiliation. Expediency and a lack of alternatives guided the decision. This point needs to be stressed since it has vital implications for an understanding of the unique character of Bethesda worship and its doctrinal emphasis vis-à-vis the rest of the Full Gospel Church. It also helps to clarify the institutionalisation of ‘Bethesdaland’ (the group of churches of which Obededom Temple and Bethesda are a part) that occurred during the seventies and especially after J F Rowlands’ death in 1980. What was initially an act of expediency later became more formal as the jurisdiction of the white headquarters was increasingly felt, especially after J F Rowlands’ death.

After formal application for affiliation, J F Rowlands was ordained as a minister of the Full Gospel Church at a service at Kroonstad in the Orange Free State on 13 November 1931. He was twenty-two years old at the time. In

50 MW December 1973, 193; OI J F Rowlands.
51 MWa, 19; Royappen, Theophilus, Lee and Carr are among the family names of those who were formerly Anglicans or Methodists who joined Bethesda.
52 J H Hensman represented the Mission at the Annual Full Gospel Church conference in 1927.
53 MW December 1973, 192.
Durban the congregation had meanwhile outgrown the wood-and-iron hall in the Magazine Barracks. As an interim measure, Sunday evening services were held in the Royal Picture Palace, the biggest cinema available to Indians in Durban. The response to the first meeting at this cinema on 21 February 1932 was so overwhelming that a similar meeting was planned for the following Sunday. On this second occasion the response was even better and the congregation continued to use this venue for some time.\textsuperscript{54}

The first baptismal service in Durban was held on 20 March 1932 in the Umgeni River; the event culminated in a large service at the cinema at which J F Rowlands preached his much-loved and often-repeated sermon ‘the Rose of Sharon’. J A Rowlands, who had spent the day with the Durban congregation, shared the platform with his son for the last time.\textsuperscript{55}

Shortly afterwards Rowlands Senior contracted cerebral malaria and died on 28 April 1932.\textsuperscript{56} His death necessitated a return trip to Bristol for his widow, Edith Hartland Rowlands, and their two sons. During J F Rowlands’ short absence from Bethesda, a white couple, C E Mayoss and his wife, who were new members of Bethesda, took charge.\textsuperscript{56}

**Obededom in Pietermaritzburg**

For a number of years after the death of J A Rowlands, Obededom Temple followed a separate course from the Durban congregation. J A’s brother, T L Rowlands from Ladysmith, was invited to take over the leadership of Obededom Temple. The separate course that the Pietermaritzburg congregation took for the next 24 years was largely due to his policy of ‘fellowship with autonomy over own affairs’ towards Bethesda. Yet all along close relations were preserved, especially after 1953 when both churches held joint council meetings using both venues alternately.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} MW December 1973, 192.
\textsuperscript{55} MW January 1974, 1.
\textsuperscript{56} Minutes of the Board meeting held in May 1932. This meeting, which was held to organise Bethesda, elected its first working committee. J F Rowlands was elected chairman. Other officers included C E Mayoss (secretary and treasurer) and Samuel John (deputy secretary and treasurer). Others on the committee, elected by secret ballot, were Gabriel Thomas; Joseph, Jacob, Yesudas and Abel Prakasim; Bob (surname omitted); Mrs Patrick and Mrs Mayoss (organist).
\textsuperscript{57} MWa 22, 140.
During the next few years strong evangelistic endeavours promoted new congregations at 'mission stations' in other parts of Pietermaritzburg and the surrounding districts. The Mizpah Temple was erected at Plessislaer, the Carmel Temple at Raisethorpe, and the Bethany Temple at Pentrich. These were led from the start by laymen since no trained full-time workers were available. But even if such workers had been available the low income of the members of these branches could not have supported them. These endeavours were missions by Indians to Indians but everything was still under the jurisdiction of the white leader who effectively served to endorse the enterprise in the minds of the Indians. Hence even after T L Rowlands retired, other white ministers were appointed to take his place. The first was O Berntz Lanz, whose appointment, although he had only recently become a member, was warmly received.\(^58\)

Pastor Fourie succeeded him, then Messrs Lundell and Brice, as elders, took charge until 1959 when in April Arthur Naidoo became the elder-in-charge.\(^59\)

By the time Arthur Naidoo had become the first Indian pastor of Obededom, it was already under the general leadership of J F Rowlands. On 19 April 1955 the Pietermaritzburg churches decided to affiliate to Bethesda which, in view of their history, was the most natural and obvious step.\(^60\)

Obededom's separate course was partly due to some financial intrigue. The land at 468 Longmarket Street on which Obededom Temple was erected had been acquired through the efforts of E Theophilus who had taken it upon himself to approach A W Baker of the Baptist Church to assist the Mission financially. Baker paid for the land and was on the Board of Trustees that controlled its ownership and use. The other two members of this Board were T L Rowlands and Baker's daughter. The deliberate exclusion of Indians from the board did not go unnoticed - J H Hensman, whose pioneering role has already been mentioned, points out that 'Pastor T L Rowlands did not want any non-Europeans on the Board, although we had a very capable man in John Rufus'.\(^61\)

When A W Baker died and the mission lost contact with his daughter, T L Rowlands assumed sole control of the property and finance of the church. Unilaterally T L Rowlands sold the property for 2 000 pounds to an American who had come to South Africa at his invitation, and this man in turn donated it to the Full Gospel Church. Thus the 'central government' of the Full Gospel Church acquired a great measure of direct control over Obededom.

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\(^{58}\) Bethesda Temple Church Council (BTCC) minutes 1 June 1956; 3 December 1956.

\(^{59}\) BTCC minutes 7 March 1958.

\(^{60}\) MW March 1956, 35.

\(^{61}\) OI J H Hensman; H Theophilus.
which created a cautiousness towards amalgamation with the Durban congregation and delayed the union until 1955.

While Obededom's leadership was in white hands evangelism was in the hands of the Indian layperson. Thus reports of Obededom's annual general meetings constantly mention such faithful services as those of David and James Frank in the Mooi River and Nottingham Road areas; the systematic and persistent home visitation of both Christian and non-Christian homes by members; and the distribution throughout the city of 23,000 evangelistic tracts by the congregation. In 1955 alone 200 new members were added. Moreover, Indian workers established mission stations in the following towns: Estcourt (Tabor Temple), Mooi River (Galatia Temple), Howick (Elah Temple), 'Municipality Farm' (Gethsemane Temple), Northdale (Ephesus Temple) and Allandale (Colosse Temple).

An analysis of the referendum which was held on 1 January 1961 to decide on the appointment of a full-time worker to take charge of Obededom reveals the following attitudes of the Indian members of Obededom 30 years after the establishment of the church: one third of those who voted recommended Arthur Naidoo, an Indian school teacher; 17 requested the appointment of a white pastor; only two stated specifically that he should be Indian; two that he should have knowledge of Indian languages; two that he should be acceptable to and work in harmony with all races; two that he should be a white man but have an Indian and a coloured elder and two that he should be white but under the guidance of J F Rowlands. While Arthur Naidoo got the job by a small margin of votes, it is obvious that several members of the Indian congregation preferred a white head. In any case Arthur Naidoo was acceptable because he too would function directly under J F Rowlands' jurisdiction.


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62 Obededom AGM reports 1955, 1956; MWA 142f. During this time, Manie Naidoo, the brother of Pastor Arthur Naidoo, undertook a mission to Ladysmith and established a Bethesda branch in Northern Natal.

63 Minutes of the Obededom meeting 19 January 1961.

64 The number of adult members grew from 316 in 1962 to 594 in 1969 and 782 in 1973 (Obededom AGM reports). These figures include memberships in the mission stations in Nottingham Road, Mooi River, Howick, and, from 1964, Escort.
The first decade of the life of this congregation featured several reports of healings and exorcisms. The Raisethorpe Assembly also embarked on the familiar pattern of establishing mission outposts in the homes of members. The few that gathered at these cottage-meetings became the nuclei of the new congregations which moved into garages or backyard structures before actually constructing their own church buildings. In this way the church at Raisethorpe established branches at Dalton, Harden Heights, Angus Farm, Crows Farm and Seven Oaks.

From 1970 onwards, Dennis Charles, the pastor of Ephesus Temple in Northdale, began establishing similar outposts. Ephesus Temple acted as 'mother-church' for the congregations in Greytown, Seven Oaks and Dalton.

By 1972, the work of Ephesus Temple under Dennis Charles had extended to Greytown, Seven Oaks, Holley Bros., Windy Hill, Albert Falls, Clan Syndicate and McKenzie.

Expansion in Durban

In the meantime the Durban congregation had grown even more rapidly than its Pietermaritzburg counterpart. A new phase of its work began in 1933 when J F Rowlands who had returned from Bristol to settle permanently in Durban was later joined by his mother and brother. Both fulfilled important functions in the church's development. Alec Rowlands, who was later also ordained, acted as personal assistant to his elder brother. Edith Hartland, the mother, was not only the driving force behind the sons, neither of whom married, but she also led the women in the church until her death in 1955.

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67 The adult membership of Ephesus Temple and its outposts grew from 671 in 1969 to 802 in 1971 (Ephesus Temple AGM reports).
69 Alec Rowlands, a quiet unassuming man, remained throughout his life behind the scenes while the dynamic J F Rowlands led the church. J F Rowlands often acknowledged the invaluable aid of his brother. G C Oosthuizen, in conversation with the author, aptly described the relationship thus: 'If J F Rowlands was Peter, then Alec Rowlands fits the role of the quiet Andrew.'
J F Rowlands achieved a level of identification with the Indian congregation unprecedented for a white man in South Africa. For a time, while his brother and mother were still in Bristol, he was the guest of an Indian family, the Warners. Then he moved into a small room with his Indian co-worker, Frank Victor, where he shared lodging and meals with his Indian helpers. Indian families regularly took him his meals and appear to have enjoyed being able to do something for him.  

By 1932 the growing congregation had moved into their own worship hall, also a converted shop, in Grey Street, Durban, and in 1933 they embarked on the first of many ‘evangelistic campaigns’. These ‘campaigns’ comprised a series of special consecutive meetings lasting from a few days to several weeks. The preparation and advertisements usually created intense anticipation among the members, all of whom participated fully in the meetings and their preparation.

There was always enthusiastic congregational singing of contemporary and traditional evangelical hymns and choruses, song items accompanied by an orchestra, and rousing preaching. Sermons were normally simple in structure, with frequent repetition of key words or clichés, and delivered in a colourful and compelling style with a strong ethical emphasis. A ‘Bethesdascope’, which comprised slide shows with pictures which were often taken by J F Rowlands himself on his many overseas trips, usually followed. During the slide presentation J F Rowlands’ narration reiterated points made in the preceding sermon. Together with other audio-visual aids, the Bethesdascope was a regular and much-loved feature of the campaigns.

The first campaign started on 1 October 1933, to celebrate the second year of the founding of the church in Durban. This was also the first of many ‘Back-to-the-Bible’ campaigns. The theme is significant because it indicates the basic stance of this young congregation vis-à-vis the traditional Christian Churches: a stance which called for a return to ‘biblical precepts on holiness’ and the charismatic church of the apostolic era.

J F Rowlands used novel means to attract people to Bethesda. The advertisements for this campaign included a ‘float’ dubbed ‘The Palestine Parade’ in which two members dressed as ‘Mary’ and ‘Joseph’ led a donkey through the city to announce the meetings.

70 OJ Vallen, F Victor.
71 This shop was owned by a Hindu, Mr Narain, who ‘went out of his way’ to assist Pastor Rowlands and his young congregation.
72 MW January 1976.
The campaign, which was initially scheduled for two weeks, continued for over 100 nights as a result of the overwhelming response it received. The fiftieth service, which was held in the Durban Town Hall, featured the famed ‘Rose of Sharon’ sermon on a stage decorated with 2000 red roses. Each night J F Rowlands played his ukelele, rendered solos and preached inspiringly. This flair for ‘showmanship’ had a great impact on the Indian mind. Many of Bethesda’s later stalwarts were converted during these services.73

Bethesda thus moved from obscurity to prominence by 1935. Furthermore, the sensational reporting of the conversion of David Pillay, a Hindu fire-walker, had increased the awareness of Bethesda in the Indian community at large. A local newspaper advertisement invited people to listen to D Pillay’s testimony of conversion at the church hall.74 Hundreds turned out to witness his baptism on 15 July 1934 and a local morning newspaper carried the story:

> Receiving at the age of 16 a serious wound, he went through many ordeals in the hope of relief. On one occasion his flesh was pierced with a thousand poisonous thorns; at another time over three thousand needles were thrust into him. After undergoing the fire-walking ordeal he resolved to fast to death, but was dissuaded by an Indian youth who introduced him to Mr Rowlands ... [he concluded his address by declaring that] the moment he was anointed and prayed for by the Pastor [Rowlands] and Pastor Victor, he was healed.75

Such sensational events created a kind of ‘aura’ around Bethesda in the minds of many of its members. Another ‘aura-creating event’ was the acquisition of the land on which the first church was erected. The very site on which Rowlands had prayed on his arrival in Durban five years earlier was now inadvertently offered to him by the Durban Corporation. Also, after the new church was opened on 6 September 193676 people realised that the pulpit of the church had been unintentionally placed directly over the spot where he had prayed, so the building seemed to be God’s design and the pulpit itself created the feeling that that place was ‘holy ground’ because J F Rowlands had once

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73 *MW* February 1974, 21.
74 *The Natal Advertiser* 14 July 1934.
75 *The Natal Mercury* 18 July 1934.
76 *The Sunday Tribune* 15 August 1936.
prayed for guidance there. The history of Bethesda abounds with such reports of incidents involving miracles, healings, dreams, visions and providential happenings which have added to this sense of mystery.

**Evangelistic campaigns: the growth of Bethesda**

A review of some of the main Bethesda campaigns is necessary to understand how they became annual ‘focal points’ which attracted members who were scattered throughout the Natal coastal areas, and infused them with the necessary zeal to continue ‘their work for God’ in their district churches. These campaigns also served to maintain a sense of unified concern and commitment in the church.

At the tenth anniversary of the church’s founding J F Rowlands introduced a ‘365 day Harvesting programme’. This missionary endeavour resulted in over 200 additional members for the church. Again J F Rowlands did not shrink from the spectacular. This ‘Tenth Anniversary Campaign’ was conducted during the time when ‘black-out’ restrictions were imposed in Durban. On 12 October, at the very beginning of the service, the raid siren sounded and the service continued in ‘pitch darkness’.77

Reporting on this, the evening newspaper stated:

> Mr Rowlands called for every light in the temple to be put out and the congregation continued the service in darkness, which seemed to accentuate the fragrance from 3 000 red roses, which bedecked the altar and rostrum ... for an hour and a half the crowd listened with rapt attention to what was one of the most memorable sermons ever preached.78

This gave Bethesda’s members cause to distinguish themselves from other Christians. Their monthly bulletin reported: ‘Other churches closed their doors and the congregation struggled home ... but Bethesda carried on.’ Furthermore, ‘a flood of correspondence, special messages, telegrams and phone calls poured in during this campaign telling of numerous spiritual experiences and conversions’.79 Reports of members receiving visions were also recorded. On the closing night, that is, during the ‘black-out’ service, some even claimed to

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77 MW August 1974, 123; MWa, 29.
78 *The Daily News* 15 October 1941.
79 MW August 1974.
have seen ‘crosses in the dark and halos encircling the altar’. This led J F Rowlands to conclude that: ‘Truly we are living in the last days of prophetic Pentecostal blessing.’ He quoted Acts 2:7 in this regard.

An Indian weekly also responded with admiration:

The black-out provided a unique climax to Durban’s spiritual event of the year. The enthusiasm of the congregation in spirited singing in pitch darkness gave colour to the unforgettable scenes of victory and triumph in the heart of everyone that attended this meeting blacked-out in the material but gloriously ablaze in the spirit ....

It went on to describe every service as having inspired ‘both sinner and saint’. The services were ‘packed-out-to-not-even-standing room’ with the minor hall, passages and pavements full. Rowland’s sermon on the twelfth night of this ‘Tenth Anniversary Campaign’ was entitled ‘Plug into Pentecost’ in which he stated that in Bethesda, which had been dubbed a ‘mushroom church’, the revival flame has been constantly fanned by persecution, but there has been no looking back. Well smitten by both fanatics and formalists, Bethesda has had little difficulty in keeping her sane balance. Bethesda’s stability and solidarity is known throughout the world.

These special meetings rallied Bethesda members for spiritual support and encouragement during the crisis-filled war years. In addition short services were held twice daily at 6am and 9pm, and were backed by ‘chain-prayers’, ‘outreach programmes’ and increased pastoral visitations to members’ homes.

Bethesda’s twenty-first anniversary in 1952 was another ‘high point’ for its members. The anniversary campaign was preceded by eight days of ‘solemn assembly’ with three services per day. Hundreds gave themselves to ‘intercessory prayer and fasting’. Services were held simultaneously at all the branches which by 1952 included congregations at Inanda, Mount Edgecombe,

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80 Ibid.
81 The Leader 18 October 1941.
82 MW November 1941.
83 MW October 1952, 124.
Briardene, Congella, Fenniscowles, Rossburgh and Mayville. ‘Scores and scores’ were reported to have received the ‘gifts of the Spirit’. J F Rowlands reported that ‘there was no fanaticism and no fleshy demonstration .... Brave confessions, rarely heard in the twentieth century were heard daily in all the churches and mission halls ... men and women became reconciled to God and their brethren.’

Worship services in Bethesda always ended with a commitment to ‘do something for Christ’. Thus, these campaigns seemed to have roused members to ‘active service’ which led to the expansion of the church, increased lay-involvement and created a sense of general spiritual wellbeing among its members.

The campaign that followed these ‘solemn assembly’ meetings drew even larger crowds than before and introduced a renewed sense of revival. During two weeks of special services, the church hall proved to be too small. The main service, on 12 November, was held in the Durban City Hall. A civic orchestra, visitors and ministers from other churches, and five hundred written greetings (including foreign well-wishes) gave to the service the splendour that had come to be expected of these campaigns. J F Rowlands stressed in his sermon that ‘there must be no compromise with the world in any way .... God put the church into the world and ever since, the devil has never stopped trying to put the world into the church.’

The sermon ended with a call for greater involvement by all its members: ‘this is not the time to preen our feathers, not a time to relax or feel satisfied ... we must not stop to gaze at what has been accomplished, which is negligible, but to work for Jesus as we have never done before’. This led a keen observer to conclude in a review of that meeting, that: ‘Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, in Bethesda is no glib phrase, no theological cliche, no easy theme, but a way of life to which everyone accepted in full membership is expected to labour and to conform.

In its twenty-first year, the Bethesda congregation numbered 7 000. Four main branch churches and a number of ‘preaching stations’ had been established under six full-time pastors. The Sunday school which in 1932 numbered twenty now totalled 13 000. In the twelve years since its first appearance Moving Waters had gained a circulation of 10 000.

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid, 140 f.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid, p142.
88 *MW* December 1952, 151-153.
The next four years included further annual campaigns which fanned the zeal of revivalism, for example, the ‘Back-to-the-Bible’ campaign of 1953 in which over 2 000 people attended the final service alone.\textsuperscript{89} The aim of the campaign was the reaffirmation of the Pentecostal stance. The campaign ended with many signing a covenant in front of the congregation in which they pledged to ‘pray and work for continuous Holy Ghost Revival amongst all nationalities in Natal’.\textsuperscript{90}

These campaigns were followed a few months later by large baptismal services: at Sharon, Horeb and North coast branches, 282 were baptised and over 117 children consecrated; in 1953 these churches recorded a further 290 baptisms and 243 consecrations. At two large joint baptismal services on Easter Sunday and in August of 1953, Rowlands baptised 171 and 129 respectively. Within the Bethesda tradition of acceptance of adult not infant baptism, these numbers signify new adult members that is, in this case, mainly converts to Christianity not children of members.\textsuperscript{91}

In 1954, new congregations were founded in Wentworth (Lebanon Temple), Felixton (Patmos Temple), Cato Manor (Gethsemane Temple) and Cornubia (Jerusalem Temple). Bethesda also shared a campaign with Nicholas Bhengu of the Assemblies of God in which Africans and Indians, estranged in the 1949 riots, worshipped together. During 1954 Bethesda gained 815 members, until then, the most in a single year.\textsuperscript{92}

The Silver Jubilee celebrations in October 1956 were preceded by three large projects which meant ten months of intense activity.

The first was a ‘Bethesdascope’ held in the Durban City Hall on 29 January 1955. Dr Reim, who founded and was assisting in the Presbyterian Indian mission, attended this service and recorded his impressions:

\textit{The technique of this prophetic-drama-sermon was interesting in that it followed the way of the church in the middle ages, in arranging in their churches, statue groups representing Bible stories, so that people could be taught by visual}\n
\textsuperscript{89} \textsuperscript{90} \textsuperscript{91} \textsuperscript{92}
means ... the use of the projector as an auxiliary to preaching, and to the teaching of the Bible, is rightly coming into more general use.93

An open-air ‘Bethesdascope’ at the Hoy Park Sports Stadium followed in May that year. Slides were projected on a 20-foot-long screen; Tamil and Telegu choirs sang during the service; and 200 ushers and stewards under A A Kenneth helped control the crowd of 16 000 who attended, of whom 15 000 were Indians.94 The press carried advertisements and later reported that this was ‘one of the greatest evangelistic services ever held in Durban’.95

A letter to the editor of one of the newspapers described J F Rowlands as ‘Durban’s Billy Graham’,96 and a white visiting Full Gospel pastor reported that his visit to Hoy Park was ‘one of those rare occasions when he wanted to rejoice and weep at the same time .... [He] saw hundreds if not thousands of hands raised in response to the appeal.97 This appeal is a reference to the call at the end of each sermon for the audience to commit themselves to Christ and normally meant that individuals went forward and before the congregation were prayed for.

Thirdly, in that same month came the Back-to-the-Bible campaign. A large tent was pitched in a vacant field called ‘Cartwright’s Flats’ to accommodate the huge crowds. This ‘Canvas Cathedral’, as it was dubbed, caught the eye of the press: *The Sunday Tribune*, *Natal Mercury*, *The Daily News* and *The Leader* gave ‘generous and spontaneous publicity to the meetings’.98 *The Natal Mercury* pointed out that: ‘Since 1931 they [the meetings] were held indoors, but the local congregation has become so large that Pastor Rowlands has had to hire a huge tent - to hold the revival meetings.’99 Nearly 2 000 slides were shown in the illustrated sermons which took the congregation on a journey through India and Ceylon. Indian music and songs and an Indian orchestra completed the oriental atmosphere. 1955 eclipsed the previous year as

94 These figures from *MW* June 1955, 64; November 1955, 128.
95 *The Leader* 27 May 1955. Refer also to *MW* June 1955, 64 and *Golden City Post* 29 May 1955.
96 *MW* November 1955, 128.
97 Article by Pastor Maldwyn Oliver in *Revival News* reprinted in *MW* November 1955.
98 Ibid, 123.
Bethesda Temple’s ‘greatest year’ with 1,791 new members added to the church. This figure included the members of the Pietermaritzburg churches who formally joined Bethesda Temple that year. These churches had 936 members at the time. In 1955 ‘The Christian Caterers’ Fellowship’ for hotel workers was also formed; evangelism was undertaken in Blackburn, Burnside, Pine-town, Zululand, Merebank, Puntan’s Hill, Chaka’s Kraal and other centres in Natal, and baptismal services took place throughout all the Bethesda Temple outstations.

For the ‘Silver Jubilee Campaign’ a tent described as the ‘biggest Gospel tent in Africa’ was pitched. The congregation donated liberally towards the cost of the venture. Even this large tent, however, could not accommodate the 55,000 people who attended the 15 nights of meetings. This campaign was also accompanied by a non-stop chain prayer in the Prayer Tent, where F Victor and others continued in prayer while J F Rowlands preached, and where people who had responded to the ‘altar-call’ after the service were prayed for. Four thousand copies of John’s Gospel in six languages (Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, Zulu, English and Afrikaans) were distributed.

At the baptismal service in the Umbilo River, which took place in December of that year, a further 147 persons were baptised. These were quite rightly recognised as the ‘fruits’ of the campaign. By the end of 1956 Bethesda Temple had fifty branches throughout Natal and Zululand. In 1956 the increase in membership totalled 524 adults and 417 children.

For the next fifteen years tent campaigns were popular at Bethesda’s branch churches outside Durban especially since no large enough buildings were available for the increased numbers.

At the Annual General Meeting of 1957 J F Rowlands introduced a policy of decentralisation and a three-point-plan for the future of the church. Attention was to be given firstly to ‘real revival among older Christians’; secondly, to a restoration campaign aimed at ‘bringing home those who have wandered away’; and thirdly, to the establishment of a Bible college. That year also

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100 MW March 1956.
101 MW September 1956.
102 MW November 1956, 172.
103 MW January 1957.
104 MW February 1957, 19-20; Bethesda Temple AGM report 1956.
saw a boost for Bethesda Temple’s membership when C H Dwyer, a devout white farmer who had done missionary work in Zululand, Natal, affiliated his congregation to Bethesda Temple.  

A year later, in June 1958, the second of the two early Pietermaritzburg leaders, Ebenezer Theophilus, died at the age of 73. Although he was acclaimed as Bethesda’s ‘zealous missionary for the past 33 years’, his passing away received a coverage of only 16 lines in Moving Waters. The importance of the early Pietermaritzburg beginnings had by 1958 largely passed from memory as did the early pioneering Indian contribution.

On 13 December of that same year the new Bethesda church building, appearing very modern for its time, was opened by the Mayor of Durban. Acclaimed as a ‘wonder of faith’ the building, which had cost the then considerable sum of 20 000 pounds, had been raised by Bethesda members themselves with only very little help from friends abroad.

The next important campaign which was called ‘The Old Fashioned Gospel Campaign’ aimed at reaffirming the previous revival zeal. It was held in 1961, and received the expected acclaim by members and the press. By the early sixties the pace and direction for the onward march had been set. In 1964 Bethesda had 65 branches with a membership of 16 512.

By the late sixties the revival fervour had levelled off. The Easter baptism figures indicate a more settled growth rate through the sixties for although the number of buildings had increased, the conversion rates dropped. The baptisms included few new converts and increasingly were the children of members. The process of institutionalisation had begun.

106 MWa, 40.
107 MW July 1958.
108 Joan Goddard’s eyewitness account of the opening in MW January 1959, 1-2; also refer to MW December 1958, 158-159 and MW February 1959.
110 MW 50.
111 MWa February 1966, 12; January 1967, 1; September 1970, 86; March 1971, 34; August 1976, 91.
112 This process will be described more fully in chapter 5. For statistics of the numbers baptised at Easter between the years 1966 and 1971 refer to MW May 1966, 33; May 1967, 33; May 1968, 3; May 1970, 37; May 1971, 50.
J F Rowlands had already turned his attention to Bethesda’s consolidation. Thus for the first five years of the 70s he was preoccupied with the completion of the Bethesda Bible College campus in Chatsworth. This college was opened on 11 October 1975, the year of Bethesda’s Golden Jubilee.113

On 18 June of that year, Alec Rowlands, the quiet, unassuming brother and personal assistant of J F Rowlands, suddenly died. He, together with Pastor Frank Victor, had been among the chief influences on the charismatic J F Rowlands.

Just over five years later, in November 1980, J F Rowlands, the greatly beloved leader of Bethesda, also died. In spite of the severe illness which affected the last few years of his life he bravely fulfilled his duties until the very end having witnessed what he considered ‘his dream’, the graduation of Bethesda College’s own ministers.114

THE APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION (AFM)

In order to understand the spiritual complexion of the AFM’s Indian mission it is necessary, as in the case of Bethesda, first to inquire into the religious background of the leaders who exerted an influence on the church itself.

Charles Samuel Flewelling spearheaded the mission work of the Apostolic Faith Mission among Indians in Natal. His father, an Anglican, joined the Holiness Baptist Church in the USA. At the age of 17, C S Flewelling attended a Baptist holiness camp and had been ‘perplexed by the rowdiness of the proceedings’ there. Subsequently, he claimed to have had a vision depicting his father ‘in the circle of the saved’ and himself excluded. His perplexity gave way to fear about his own salvation and soon afterwards he joined his father in the Holiness Baptist Church.115

113 *MW* October 1975; November 1975.
114 From his address at the opening of Bethesda Bible College in 1975. The funeral service of Alec Rowlands was considered the largest ever held in Durban (*The Sunday Tribune* (Extra) 22 June 1975). J F Rowlands’ death brought even more mourners.
115 Again, in the absence of written sources, we have had to rely on the oral information available. Ida Flewelling, C S Flewelling’s wife, confirmed much of the information provided by the early Indian leaders regarding Flewelling.
The next stage of his ‘spiritual pilgrimage’ is marked by the coming of a Pentecostal preacher, Pastor Magoon, to Washburn, near his hometown, in the winter of 1910. His mother, Susan Valley Flewelling, whose health had deteriorated after a recent operation, was taken by snow-sled to Magoon’s healing services where she was ‘miraculously healed’. This incident made such an impact on him that throughout his life he maintained a strong emphasis on healing in his ministry.

In 1917 the well-known Pentecostal woman evangelist, Aimee McPherson, came to Washburn. The Flewellings and Moody Wright, who later married Charles Samuel’s sister and became his missionary companion to South Africa, were among the 100 Holiness Baptist members who together with their Pastor had their ‘Pentecostal experience’ at McPherson’s meetings. Soon afterwards, while C S Flewelling was ploughing a field for buckwheat, the plough handle snapped in his hand. He saw in this simple incident a divine message and a few months later decided to enter the ministry full time.116

Accompanied by Moody Wright, and their former Baptist minister, Edgar Grant, who had been turned out of his church because he had become a Pentecostal, C S Flewelling embarked on a programme of evangelisation between 1917 and 1920. The group used church buildings in winter and tents in summer for their evangelistic meetings. The result was the eventual establishment of the Easton Pentecostal Church directly opposite their former Holiness Baptist Church.

Two years later, in 1922, C S Flewelling claimed to have had a ‘message from God’ through ‘tongues and interpretation’, that he would be ‘the father of many persons’.117 Moody Wright, in the meantime, had been invited to go to South Africa and left in August 1927.

With a portable tent and few belongings, C S Flewelling continued his evangelistic crusading. On 27 September 1923, he married Ida Montieth, a member of the Methodist Church who had ‘strong Pentecostal leanings’. The couple made evangelistic journeys covering 2,000 miles at a time and wherever they held their crusades, they started little congregations.

116 OI Ida Flewelling. I am grateful to Dean Reddy for use of the valuable interview he conducted with Ida Flewelling and other information he gathered during his research into the AFM’s Indian section.

117 OI Ida Flewelling.
In April 1927, at a missionary meeting held in the Bethel Bible School, New Jersey, they were invited to come to South Africa as missionaries. Their decision was influenced by Ida Flewelling’s claim that she had had a vision of preaching to black people. Until then she had assumed that this had meant work among black Americans; now it pointed to Africa.

The Flewellings arrived in Cape Town on 16 April 1927, eight months after Moody Wright had joined the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa. Because of Wright’s involvement with the AFM, the Flewellings made Durban their ‘home base’ under its auspices and lived initially in the homes of two AFM families.

Until 1930 Moody Wright had been the AFM’s missionary on the Rand but later he became its missionary superintendent in Natal. After a short while, when Wright returned to the Transvaal, Flewelling succeeded him as missionary superintendent in Natal. This allowed greater contact with black communities especially in Zululand. He soon gained the confidence of some of the Zulu chiefs and was able to visit a few Zulu kraals.

It has already been mentioned that when the Pentecostal evangelist Stephen Jeffries visited South Africa, he caused a stir among Christians in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. With the assistance of A H Cooper of the Full Gospel Church in Durban, Jeffries conducted evangelistic services in a large tent pitched in Cartwright Flats, which drew crowds from all race groups. Some Indians travelled from as far as Stanger to these meetings and they took back with them ‘Pentecostal, revivalistic’ Christianity to areas which already had small groups of Baptist and Methodist Indian Christians.

Soon after Jeffries’ meetings, Flewelling held similar ‘healing services’ in the Inanda Hall, in the north of Durban. Mrs J Budge from Stanger, who was formerly a Dutch Reformed Church member, attended these services seeking healing. She testified to having been ‘miraculously healed’ and this convinced her that she should invite Flewelling to conduct similar meetings in Stanger. Flewelling held his first cottage-meeting in Stanger on 27 September 1930.

An extended series of meetings was then scheduled for the following month. The first of these was held behind the Hindu Sabha Hall on 18 October 1930.

118 * Ol Henry James; also useful information can be found in the *Golden Jubilee Brochure* (henceforth *GJB*).
Flewelling did not, as is sometimes claimed, begin the Apostolic Faith Mission among Indians. There was already in Stanger a group of Indian Pentecostals who had had contact with Jeffries' meetings. Flewelling contributed the much-needed leadership to this group.119

Many of those who later became pioneers of the Apostolic Faith Mission were either converted or were members of established churches who had had their 'Pentecostal experience' at Flewelling's services: for example, James Moonsamy and his wife, the parents of Henry James Moonsamy, who later became stalwarts of the mission, were deeply influenced by the healings that reportedly occurred at these services.

At one of the services a local gangster, Harry Jack, threatened to do the preacher bodily harm and to disrupt the meeting because 'these Christians ... were stealing Hindus away'.120 However, at the service he 'ended up by going down the aisle and weeping at the altar'. He described his conversion thus: 'Actually intending to kill Pastor Flewelling, I was miraculously saved, healed ... and filled with the Holy Ghost, all in one night.'121 Jack eventually became a pastor of the Kearsney congregation of the AFM.

The few months following Flewelling's services saw rapid growth. After one month, on 16 November 1930, twenty-one Indians were baptised at the Stanger beach. A further 108 were baptised the following year and on 20 December 1931 Flewelling left Durban to settle in Stanger. In 1933 the congregation used a small civic hall for worship but two years later it acquired its own building site. The church building, constructed entirely with the assistance of the congregation, was opened on 20 June 1937.122

James Moonsamy together with two others, Moses Samuel and M John, who had attended the 'Sabha Hall' meetings, prevailed upon Flewelling to hold similar meetings in the Darnall area, where they lived. Thus, on 31 December

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119 The widely held view which attributes the founding of the work to Flewelling is recorded in Oosthuizen Pentecostal Penetration, 88-96. The view offered here is supported by Pastor Williams who was converted at one of Flewelling’s services.

120 Oosthuizen's account of Harry Jack's conversions in Pentecostal Penetration, 89 was confirmed by Jack's widow, Mercy Jack, in an interview with her.

121 Ibid.

122 GJB, 6-7.
1930 the ‘Pentecostal message’ was also preached there. Again good initial results were recorded. In 1931, 61 were baptised. When a blind man reportedly received his sight, and when in July 1934 a staunch Hindu priest was converted, the church’s services received wider attention.123

Small extension congregations were then formed at Darnall under Moses Samuel and at Kearsney under Manikum Chetty. At Kearsney the congregation met in a tent for worship and were given permission by the Hulett’s sugar company to evangelise in the mill’s barracks. In Stanger, the congregation was under the leadership of Edwin Williams, a former Methodist.

Although in the first few years many Hindus became Christians, the nucleus of the Apostolic Faith Mission congregations were Christians from established churches, especially the Baptist and Methodist Churches. The Apostolic Faith Mission’s devout life style, the services which involved the entire congregation and the emphasis on divine healing were the chief attractions. Like Edwin Williams, a Hindi-speaking, Methodist immigrant from Mauritius, who had come over to the AFM with his entire family, many had become disillusioned with the staid religious expression of their own churches and preferred the spirituality of the AFM.124 The Langs are another example of an exodus of an entire family (not just parents and children but uncles and aunts and their children also) from Methodism to the Apostolic Faith Mission. The Manikum family in Kearsney went over from the Baptist Church and their daughter, Mercy, became Flewelling’s Telegu interpreter.

The years following 1931 witnessed the establishment of ‘outreach centres’ at Port Shepstone (24 March 1933), Doornkop (1 July 1933), Harding (June 1934), Seven Oaks (27 November 1937) and Verulam (1 July 1938).

The Kearsney congregation held its first baptismal service on 13 December 1931 when twelve converts from Hindiusm were baptised. In July 1934 the church witnessed the conversion of a Hindu priest. The Hindu statues which were removed from his former temple were ‘publicly destroyed’ and from 1 August 1934 Christian services were held in it.125

123 OI Ida Flewelling; GJB, 7.
124 These views were repeatedly stated during interviews with AFM Indian members who lived through the formative period of the establishing of these congregations, such as D F Williams, H James and the Manikum family.
125 GJB, 7.
Throughout the thirties the pastoral work of the congregations was largely in the hands of Indian laymen and evangelists. Unlike Bethesda, no Indian pastors were appointed until after 1940. These laymen, with little or no formal training, continued with ‘cottage-meetings’, ‘open-air’ services and ‘house-to-house’ visitations. Although Flewelling was the missionary superintendent of the AFM in Natal and still managed the Apostolic Faith Indian Mission, it is clear that a great deal of the pioneering of this church was done by Indian laypeople.

In 1940, Flewelling left Natal to supervise the mission work among African people in the Transvaal. Justus du Plessis, the former secretary-general of the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa, succeeded him as superintendent of the Indian Mission. He arrived in Stanger on Friday, 31 May 1940. His appointment confirmed the policy of differentiation between Indian and African missions which the AFM had instituted. Du Plessis was responsible for the ordaining of Samuel Manikum, his Telugu interpreter, and the first Indian minister of the Apostolic Faith Mission. In 1944, when he moved to Durban, he left Pastor Mankum in charge of the Stanger congregation.

The same year, the young Henry James entered the ministry in fulfilment of a vow he made a few years earlier ‘on his death bed’. In 1937, when he was only eleven, he contracted tuberculosis. After James had taken seriously ill, Flewelling was summoned and before praying for him, he asked him whether he would serve God on a full-time basis if he recovered. James did recover and as soon as he turned eighteen entered the full-time ministry of the AFM.

After the unsuccessful evangelistic attempts in Durban of James Moonsamy, Henry James’s father, an Afrikaner layman, Nortjie, undertook an evangelistic ‘outreach’ to Indians in the Clairwood and Overport districts in the early forties. He held services in the home of Mrs Muthusamy whose son later became an active member of the Apostolic Faith Mission. Later on a school in Overport permitted this congregation to hold its services in one of its classrooms. This church expanded in 1944 when J du Plessis, who was still

126 Ibid, 8, 36 for J du Plessis’s article ‘Memories of our ministry in Natal’.
127 OI Henry James.
128 Henry James took charge of the Darnall congregation for two years when D F Williams assumed leadership of the Overport congregation in 1949. James pastored the Overport congregation from 1952 to 1956. Then after Pastor Manikum had left the AFM he returned to Stanger for a further three years.
Based in Stanger, conducted a tent campaign in Overport and the converts joined this AFM congregation.\(^{129}\)

After this campaign Du Plessis decided to settle in Durban but was recalled from the Indian Mission in 1946 by the white ‘Mother Church’. At that time Indians were allowed to serve on civic councils and through Du Plessis’s help, an Indian, who until then did not know that he was eligible to serve on the council, was elected. Resistance to Du Plessis’s involvement in the election and to the evidence he gave before the Broome Commission came from certain white quarters of the Apostolic Faith Mission. J du Plessis was then recalled on the grounds of having involved himself in politics.\(^{130}\)

This meant that there was no longer any pastoral supervision of the whole Indian mission and some of the members dispersed. Henry James maintained that: ‘If Pastor Du Plessis was still here, our work would have been on par with Bethesda.’\(^{131}\) While this assessment may be exaggerated it underlines the benefits the continuous leadership of J F Rowlands gave Bethesda and which the AFM lacked.

The Clairwood mission under Nortjie also encountered problems. Nortjie had built a church in Jacobs at his own expense, and subsequently decided to study at a Bible school in Johannesburg. So without consulting anyone he unilaterally sold the church to recover his money. Thereupon, many of the members either lost interest or joined other denominations.\(^{132}\) Even though Albert Murugan, an Indian layman and a former Methodist, ‘held fort’ in Nortjie’s absence the congregation still remained small.

It was only when Henry James was transferred from the North Coast to Durban in 1959 that the Apostolic Faith Mission’s work in Durban was revitalised. The Overport assembly which in 1959 had had only 20 members now grew in size and in 1961 it moved into a building of its own: a house in Overport. Thereafter laymen assumed the responsibilities of leadership: S Muthusamy, Jimmy Murugan, M Chinnapen and L G Willie among others made pastoral visitations, did deputation work, and transported members to the services. Only in 1977 did this congregation receive its own pastor, when Tom Govender was appointed.\(^{133}\)

\(^{129}\) GJB, 31f.
\(^{130}\) OI Henry James.
\(^{131}\) OI Henry James.
\(^{132}\) GJB, 17.
\(^{133}\) OI M Chinnapen in GJB, 17.
The Clairwood congregation shared the building that Flewelling had built for the African members of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Horseshoe Road, Clairwood. When in 1961 Africans were removed from Clairwood to Lamontville in terms of the Group Areas Act, the Indian members were able to purchase the Clairwood building for themselves.

Based in Clairwood, Henry James pioneered the AFM in Merebank and Chatsworth. In 1962 the Merebank branch began its mission to Chatsworth. The stages of development of the individual congregations were typical of many of the Pentecostal churches: evangelistic ‘outreach’, cottage-meetings, temporary ‘makeshift’ housing (either backyard structures or tents), and finally church buildings.

Indian people who were uprooted from other parts of Durban under the Group Areas Act or through the expropriation of their land by the Department of Community Development were compelled to move to Chatsworth where the Durban Corporation established ‘sub-economic’ housing schemes. As a result of this uprooting, a handful of Apostolic Faith Mission members found themselves in Chatsworth. James organised these members into small communities and the first group met in the home of a Mrs Maistry. Then, as was typical of the Pentecostal ‘outreach’ programmes, a mission to the Hindus of the neighbourhood was undertaken by almost all who had formed the first ‘cell group’. Conversions followed, and a backyard structure was built to house the growing congregation. Land for ‘religious purposes’ was not easily available and the cost of purchasing the little that was available allowed for only cheap makeshift structures.

On 14 March 1965 a church building was officially opened in Merebank for a congregation of 50 members. From this ‘base’, ‘outreach’ posts were set up in Malagazi, Isipingo, Reunion, Lotus Park, Gravesend; Umzinto and Umkomas; and the Botanical Gardens Barracks. By 1980 membership of the Merebank church, its mission stations and branches totalled 1500.

In 1973 the Chatsworth branch of the AFM became autonomous and Vassie Pillay, who had been an active layman in the church, was appointed pastor. The vital spiritual ethos of this church encouraged lay leaders, many of whom later became pastors: for example, Aaron Govender in Darnall, Tom Govender in Overport, Dean C Reddy in Mount Edgecombe, Elijah Morgan (now in West Germany) and Abel David in Mariannhill. This Chatsworth branch grew in

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134 GJB, 14.
135 GJB, 19.
number in 1976, when an independent church the ‘Pentecostal Revival Centre’ joined it.

As we have seen in the Kearsney-Stanger area and in the Clairwood-Merebank-Chatsworth areas, the Apostolic Faith Mission drew its members almost totally from among the poor - the Mount Edgecombe branch is a further illustration of this. The Apostolic Faith Mission began its work there in 1945 through the efforts of three of its members who had moved to Mount Edgecombe to work in the sugar mill. Joseph and Daniel Narayansamy came from the Syembezi area near Darnall and settled in Westbrook and the Stable Barracks respectively; S Gideon Sookraj from Kearsney also moved into the Stable Barracks. There they were joined by Aaron Lazarus who was accommodated at the mill’s barracks. With very little education and no formal study of the Scriptures they ‘barely managed to edify one another through their own unique style of preaching’. They adopted a simple creed that strongly emphasised saving ‘through the sacrifice of Christ’ and ‘being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit’ so that one may receive from God forgiveness, healing and protection from evil.

The format of their services was simple: extempore prayers, singing, Bible reading and preaching. There was also enough scope for the entire assembly to participate in worship so people were allowed to lead the congregation in prayer, to give their ‘testimony’ or to exhort their fellow worshipers. The services allowed any individual to speak in tongues or interpret, to ‘prophesy’ or pray for a sick friend or family member. ‘Cottage meetings’ were held on various nights of the week in the homes of members. They also held all-night prayer meetings (the equivalent of Bethesda’s ‘tarry meetings’) which was often accompanied with fasting.137

For almost the first ten years these laymen took charge of the congregation. R G Francis, who had himself been an active layman in the church, was made pastor only in 1955. Since he could not be financially supported by the congregation, he continued in secular employment.138

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137 Ibid, 4.
138 Ibid, 10.
In 1953 M S Morgan, a member of this congregation who was converted after he was healed of tuberculosis, began evangelistic work in the areas surrounding Mount Edgecombe, namely Canelands, Verulam, Inanda, Avoca, Effingham, Hillhead, Flanders, Westbrooke, Cornubia, Sacchrine, Connexion, Mount Moreland, Malacca Road, Ottawa, Waterloo, La Lucia, Blackburn, Phoenix Barracks, Milkwood Kraal, Rydlevale and Duffs Road. These were settlements of very poor Indians who had either worked in the nearby mills or had travelled for work to the neighbouring towns or to Durban. On 2 April 1958, Morgan became the first full-time worker of the branch.

The growth of the Mount Edgecombe congregation created the need for a larger venue, so in 1965 a building was erected on the site donated by the sugar company.

After Pastor Morgan left the congregation in October 1966, C K Harry, a layman, led the congregation from 1966 until 1968. He was succeeded by Pastor C R Timothy until June 1971 and Pastor Paul Murugan from 1972 onwards.

In 1968 C K Harry moved from Mount Edgecombe to Buffelsdraai, the Indian location in Tongaat. A small group began to meet and to distribute evangelistic tracts. It was during the first of these tract distributions on 8 July that they met another member of the AFM, Mr Jackson, who offered them the verandah of his home for their services.139

The work of the AFM among Indians in Pietermaritzburg began only in 1964, almost forty years after Obededom was founded. On 6 June, John R Paul, a former Bethesda pastor, together with Messrs M P Naidoo, D Moodley, C Reddy and D Davar, resolved to start a ‘Pentecostal congregation’. They renovated a room that had formerly housed poultry and used it for their services. Four years later, after much difficulty, they acquired a building site and erected a tent on it for their worship services.

M P Naidoo and J R Paul led the congregation and largely through their efforts a building was erected on this site. On 18 December 1970, J R Paul died suddenly. He was succeeded by C R Timothy of Mount Edgecombe from 1971 to 1975 and then Pastor Paul Saul from 1976. During this time M P Naidoo gave the congregation much help and direction even though he himself remained a layman. His death on 16 October 1979 was described as ‘a great

139 C K Harry’s information in GJB.
loss and blow to the work'.\textsuperscript{140} According to Pastor Saul, the strength of the work lay in ‘fostering a sense of familyhood and love for one another, and in consistent home visitation’.\textsuperscript{141} The evangelistic outreach of this congregation resulted in an extension congregation at Richmond in Natal.

In 1966 three Apostolic Faith Mission families settled in the Dalton area because they were employed in the Dalton sugar mill. The families met regularly for prayer and fellowship. V Lazarus and S Nathaniel took on the leadership responsibilities of this group which soon became the nucleus of a new congregation.\textsuperscript{142}

In the sugar estates, the small houses were close to each other and this fostered the traditional communal arrangement which made it possible for the group to meet for daily fellowship and present a united witness in the mill’s chiefly Hindu community. Since the area around Dalton was sparsely populated and individual families were isolated from one another, Christians on the mill’s estate undertook regular evangelistic missions to these remote sugar and wattle farms. The original congregation of three families grew to 25. The local sugar company donated a piece of land to the congregation and a church was erected in December 1975.

In 1982 Henry James estimated the total Apostolic Faith Mission Indian membership to be around 3 000.\textsuperscript{143}

\section*{THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD}

The third of the ‘established’ Pentecostal churches which began a mission to South African Indians has two separate, autonomous bodies: one founded by Pastor F Langeland-Hansen and another by Pastor S Govender.

\subsection*{Bethshan Tabernacle}

Langeland-Hansen’s parents emigrated to South Africa from Norway in 1921 as missionaries of the Salvation Army and worked among Zulus in Natal. By

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{140} Refer to the \textit{GJB}, 22f.
\item \textsuperscript{141} \textit{OI} Paul Saul in \textit{GJB}, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{142} \textit{OI} S Nathaniel in \textit{GJB}.
\item \textsuperscript{143} \textit{OI} Henry James.
\end{itemize}
the mid-thirties they were converted to Pentecostalism. His father joined the Assemblies of God and pastored the ‘Little Green Church’ in Durban.\textsuperscript{144}

Soon an opportunity arose to found a separate mission to Indians. Six pupils from the Sunday school stopped attending this church and an attempt to trace them led him to Clare Estate, an Indian area on the western outskirts of Durban. He found that the parents of these children were far too poor to send them to Sunday school or to attend a church ten kilometres away from their neighbourhood. Pastor F Langeland-Hansen and his wife then started a Sunday school in the home of this family.

As in the case of Bethesda and the Apostolic Faith Mission, attendance at such house meetings grew rapidly. When the Sunday school grew to over thirty members, an old butcher’s shop in Sparks Road, Overport, was rented. The Bethshan Gospel Mission was founded on 10 August 1940 in this renovated shop with F Langeland-Hansen as its pastor. In view of the financial stresses of the war years and the poverty of the small congregation, he was forced to continue working part time in a pharmacy.

The initial years of the mission were very trying. Being the first Pentecostal church in the district ‘it was viewed with suspicion’.\textsuperscript{145} Hansen stressed divine healing and claimed to have witnessed instances of healing in his small congregation. He attributed the sudden growth of the church after the war to these healings.

During the 14 years of its stay in the renovated butcher’s shop, the congregation was joined by both coloured and Indian families.

Pastor Hansen’s contact with the coloured community led him to establish a ‘home of safety’ for orphaned and destitute coloured children which he still directs.\textsuperscript{146} The Bethshan mission is the only Pentecostal church among Indians to have an organised social-care programme of this kind. Pentecostal churches have generally played down their social responsibilities and have emphasised the ‘salvation of the soul’ as the chief aim of mission. While they do assist their

\textsuperscript{144} O I F Langeland-Hansen; David Nadasen; sermons of Pastor Hansen in which some historical and biographical detail emerge.

\textsuperscript{145} Letter giving a brief history of Bethshan from Langeland-Hansen to G C Oosthuizen dated 21 May 1973.

\textsuperscript{146} Mullan, C F ‘Early history: Assemblies of God’ (part 2) Fellowship No 5, 1978, 7.
the ‘salvation of the soul’ as the chief aim of mission. While they do assist their poor members, such aid is informal and seen as incidental to the main mission, and is generally confined to members.

In 1954 Bethshan Gospel Mission moved to its own church building in Overport. This building, and a large youth centre which was erected later, was paid for with funds raised entirely by the congregation.

Bethshan, like Bethesda, was for the greatest part of its existence under the leadership of one person. Only in 1978 was an Indian layman appointed as assistant pastor. Yet the care of the congregation was almost entirely in the hands of responsible lay Indian people. Thus, as J F Rowlands had done in Bethesda, Hansen supervised and helped only when laymen could not handle a problem.

When David Nadasen was appointed assistant pastor in 1978 he was given charge of a small extension congregation in Clare Estate. Bethshan also has a small branch in Reservoir Hills, an Indian area to the northwest of Durban, where a small group meets in a private garage. With only two branches, it is clear that Bethshan did not adopt the programme of expansion of Bethesda.

PENIEL INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The second church of the Assemblies of God among Indians began as an independent group led by Stephen Govender, a former Hindu who had been converted in the Bethel International Mission in 1949. This Pentecostal mission used to meet in the city centre, in the early fifties, and gradually lost its members to other Pentecostal churches in Durban.

In 1951 a few people began to meet in Stephen Govender’s home. He acted as the congregation’s ‘pastor’ while still maintaining his secular job. In 1953 a venue for the growing congregation was found in Gale Street, Durban. The congregation remained here for almost 14 years and adopted the name ‘Peniel International Assembly’. Many who joined other churches or founded independent Pentecostal groups later worked initially with Govender in Gale Street.

147 Pastor Hansen believed that this financial self-sufficiency proves ‘that a carefully organised church amongst the Indians can be self-supporting’. (Letter to G C Oosthuizen 21 May 1973).
148 OI Stephen Govender.
Moodley joined the Reformed Church in Africa, Vasie Pillay joined the Apostolic Faith Mission and Bobby Naidoo who left with Hammond joined the 'Apostolic Church of Scandanavia'.

In 1954 Peniel Assembly was formally incorporated into the Assemblies of God largely through the efforts of J C Williams, a white minister of the Assemblies of God. Since the Assemblies of God polity allows complete autonomy to each congregation within its ‘family’, Stephen Govender could remain at the helm and still enjoy the benefits that accrue to a registered church body.

By 1960, in spite of ‘many set-backs’, the group numbered 80 adults and 120 children. The most significant ‘set-back’ was the implementation of the Group Areas Act. During the 1950s Gale Street became a white industrial area, and Indians had to move from the city centre to the outlying areas.

From 1960 ‘cottage-meetings’ were held regularly in the home of one of the families who had moved to Merebank. In 1962 the numbers at these cottage-meetings increased when the Gale Street group held a tent campaign in Merebank. Those who were converted at the campaign joined the ‘cottage-meeting’ group and formed the beginnings of the Peniel Assembly at Merebank. The increase was timely, for soon afterwards, the Peniel Assembly in Gale Street had to be closed because all its members had left the city centre and many had joined other Pentecostal churches. This meant that the focal point had shifted from Gale Street to Merebank. Govender and his band of helpers, including Leslie Hammond, moved permanently to take charge of the congregation in Merebank.

When in 1967 the congregation in Merebank acquired a church building, the church had only 55 full members. But in the next few years an intensive programme of evangelism was undertaken and six years later the Merebank congregation of the Peniel Assembly numbered 250 adults and 150 children.

In 1967 this congregation introduced its evangelistic ‘outreach’ programme to Chatsworth. Members who had moved into Chatsworth formed the small groups which laid the basis for larger congregations later. Two separate congregations were founded in Unit 2 and Unit 5. Within one year the unit 5 congregation acquired its own church building.

149 Oosthuizen Pentecostal Penetration, 87f.
150 OI Stephen Govender.
SUMMARY

Some general features emerge in the historical development of these churches. By way of concluding this chapter they may be briefly stated:

* Pentecostal churches first took root among the lower socio-economic classes of Indians. The earliest congregations began in the poor labourer communal settlements in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and in towns on the Natal coast: for example, Bethesda had its beginnings in the Corporation and Railway barracks in Durban and the AFM congregations began in the sugar-mill barracks at Stanger, Kearsney, Mount Edgecombe and Dalton.

* The majority of early Indian Pentecostals were converts from Hinduism, yet the initial ‘nucleus’ of many of the early congregations of the thirties were mainly Christians from ‘established’ denominations, usually Baptist and Methodist, who found the Pentecostal life and worship more fulfilling.

* The affairs of the Church revolved around strong charismatic leaders such as Pastors J F Rowlands, F Langeland-Hansen and S Govender who ruled almost autocratically over the affairs of their churches. Thus, there has been little or no concern with polity, constitution or any fixed statement of belief.

* Throughout their history, Bethesda, the AFM ‘Indian section’ and Bethshan had white leaders. There has been no real rejection of white ‘missionary leadership’ as there has been elsewhere. The socio-political struggles of Indians, which are described in chapter 1, probably explain the appreciation of and dependence on these white leaders. In contrast to the prevailing antipathy towards Indians, these people had identified with them and cared for them. This contributed greatly to the feeling of acceptance and belonging that converts to Pentecostal churches felt.

Furthermore, the Indian members’ ‘deep respect’ for their white ‘gurus’ prevented them from disagreeing with or questioning their sometimes paternalistic attitudes. Reaction occurred only in recent years against the successors of the founders who had expected to assume leadership automatically because they were white.\footnote{This reaction is dealt with in chapter 6.}
Because of the low level of education of the early Indian converts and their ignorance of ecclesiastical matters, the direction of these churches was almost entirely in the hands of the white leaders, missionaries and visiting evangelists. Hence we find that in both the written and oral sources of information available to us persons such as J F Rowlands and F Langeland-Hansen loom larger than anyone else in their church's history.

Although the white leader gave direction, actual evangelism and expansion were mainly in the hands of Indian laypersons.

Although Indians, except in the case of Peniel, have not been at the helm, there has been no crisis concerning the indigenisation of leadership as there has been elsewhere. There has been, however, a leadership crisis of another kind which resulted in the proliferation of Indian Pentecostal churches, which is dealt with in chapter 4.

These churches have had four main emphases: healing, exorcism, evangelism and the pursuit of holiness. These have emerged partly as a result of the influence of missionaries and evangelists such as C S Flewelling, J A Rowlands, S Jeffries, A H Cooper, F Langeland-Hansen, J F Rowlands and J du Plessis.

All the early Indian Pentecostal churches were affiliated to one or other of the three largest Pentecostal denominations in South Africa, namely The Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa, The Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa (Bethesda) and The Assemblies of God in South Africa (Bethshan and Peniel). Hence none of these early groups took on the totally independent character that later groups did. In Bethesda's case, affiliation to the 'white headquarters' was an act of expediency and not the result of total identification with the theology or polity of the Full Gospel Church of God.  

Under the innovative leadership of J F Rowlands, Bethesda achieved a rate of growth much higher than that of any of the other Indian Pentecostal groups. Since this has been largely because of the methods of J F Rowlands, it has received a more detailed examination in the next chapter.

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152 Refer to chapter 7 in which Bethesda's Pentecostal approach is discussed.