

PASTORS ATTEND GROWTH CONFERENCE

Five pastors of the Cape Church attended a conference on church growth presented by the **Willow Creek** Association - Southern Africa in Parow, Cape Town on 14–16 February 2002. The overall theme was Building Prevailing Churches to Reach the Unchurched. The main speaker was Bill Hybels, founder and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, USA. The conference dealt with topics such as evangelism, leadership, reaching the next generation, cultural relevance while maintaining doctrinal integrity. CCN gratefully acknowledges receipt of two responses to this conference.

Pastor R Lutz felt inspired by the conference. In the St. Andrew's newsletter of March/ April 2002, he writes: "The Willow Creek Church has developed from an average size congregation to a church of more than 17,000 members. This is not a charismatic church. Several factors contributed to their success in outreach. They developed a strategy to reach people who were either un-churched or disappointed with their congregation. The strategy responds to the new individualism in the USA and focuses on the individual Christian who should be trained to reach out to his neighbour. But they also emphasize the community of believers (Acts 2: 42-47). This conference was very interesting. They have developed and presented an attractive style of worshipping. We cannot copy their experience. But we need a vision for the future and have to find ways to be relevant as a church for our congregants as well as outsiders. Our task is to make disciples among all nations (Matthew 28: 16-20)."

Pastor A Becker told CCN he found the conference "a learning experience" and agreed that "Bill Hybels and his co-workers said many positive things". On the other hand, "there was not all that much that was new to me. In fact, our own church has long ago recognised many of its weaknesses. I think of the "CAT" report. Putting all these good insights into practice, is, of course, the hurdle." Pastor Becker went on to list a few points of relevance: People should not just want. Instead we ought to be a "servant community" where people share life's problems between Sundays. Sermons should not be followed by silence, rather pastors should receive appropriate feedback. Further, people should be doing things for which they are gifted. Finally, we often have a too self-centered attitude. "We need to instil evangelistic values in people around us." In conclusion, he asked the question how the power language Bill Paul's statement: Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles ..." (1 Cor. 1: 22-25).

