

Contributions* by Reverend Johannes Jacobus Ulster² to the development of the Moravian Mission Station, Elim, 1965-1974

Maynard J van Breda
University of South Africa
vbredmj@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

The Reverend Johannes Jacobus Ulster (1922-2012) was called by the provincial board of the Moravian Church in South Africa to serve the mission station Elim from the start of January 1965 as its first indigenous minister of religion and “Voorstaander” or mayor. This was his maiden appointment as an executive head of a congregation in his church. The period that immediately preceded Ulster’s term of service in Elim was characterised by increasing conflict and tension between his predecessors and members of the local community over various management, social and educational matters. These states of affairs threatened the stability of the mission settlement to large extent. Within the context of the local mission community as well as the broader Moravian Church, this article, which is a historic literature review, attempts to illuminate the significant transformation introduced by Ulster in the management and leadership approach of Elim. It considers his meaningful contributions in ameliorating the quality of the spiritual lives of the local congregation in line with the worldwide motto of the Moravian Mission: “Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him”. Furthermore, the article explores Ulster’s contribution in promoting the social wellbeing of the local community through initiating the establishment of sustainable secular, socio-cultural and various community development projects locally as well as in the surrounding district. The article concludes that Reverend Ulster made an immense contribution to the stabilisation of the spiritual welfare and socio-educational infrastructure of the community. This continues to be valued as a ‘golden period’ in the rich history of the rural mission settlement.

Keywords: Elim; Moravian Church; Mission Station; Indigenous; Elim Home; Elim Moravian Primary School; Community Upliftment.

-
- * The author would like to sincerely thank the following people: Angela Dunn, Hennie Ulster and Jenny Bridgeman, the children of Bishop Ulster, for granting him permission to document the highlighted aspects of their father’s term of service in Elim. Reverend G Cloete, the archivist of the Moravian Church and his assistant, Reverend J Hanson for providing me with very useful historical material about the term of service of Reverend Ulster in Elim. Reverend G Cunningham, the current minister at Elim Mission Station, who kindly allowed me access to the minutes of the Church and Overseers’ Council meetings of the Ulster era in Elim. Amanda Cloete of the Elim Heritage Centre for providing valuable information from the Elimiet, a local newsletter that was started by Reverend Ulster in Elim in 1965.
- 2 Throughout the article, reference has been made to Reverend Ulster, since it was his official title as the minister and head of the mission station Elim during his period of service. At a synodical meeting of the Moravian Church in 1984, he was elected as a bishop in the Church and has been, since then, known as Bishop JJ Ulster.

Introduction

A surprise announcement made during the Easter morning service in 1964 in the church at the Elim Moravian mission station simultaneously elicited great astonishment and interest among the local congregants.³ It was reported that the provincial board of the church had decided to end the term of service of the local minister, Kurt Bonk, who had headed the congregation from 1962.⁴ The question uppermost in the minds of the entire community at the time was: Who would be appointed as a replacement minister in Elim, a rural Strandveld settlement of about 2500 inhabitants situated approximately 35 km from Bredasdorp in the Western Cape Province.⁵ Unlike during the preceding 140 years, for the first time in its existence, the responsibility to manage the mission village and render spiritual service and welfare care was entrusted to a South African born minister. Indeed, this handover of management not only signalled a “winds of change effect” but in many ways was a watershed in the history of Elim. Since its origin in 1824, German missionaries had been assigned to lead and serve the village spiritually and manage its day to day secular operations.⁶ The designated indigenous minister who accepted the call to serve the rural settlement was the Reverend Johannes Jacobus Ulster. He was a forty-two year old ordained minister, born into a family of clergyman, educationalists and musicians of note who have made outstanding contributions particularly in their careers, not only within the sphere of the Moravian Church in South Africa alone, but to a considerable degree, in the broader South African context.⁷ Daniël Ulster, a younger brother of Reverend JJ Ulster, was not only the first person of colour who obtained the degree B. Mus from the University of Cape Town, but was also the first permitted to play the organ in the City Hall of Cape Town and conduct the Cape Town symphonic orchestra.

A thorough analysis of the primary roles and responsibilities of Moravian ministers serving mission settlements, and more so in the case of Elim, suggests that heading a mission station is inevitably a multi-dimensional charge.⁸ As

3 Announcements, Elim Moravian Church, Easter Sunday, 15 April 1964.

4 JJ Ulster, *Daar is maar één Elim* (Genadendal Press, 1974), p. 47.

5 Z Cook, “Working together for the community pays R1 million dividend for Elim residents”, *Cape Argus*, 23 November 2001, p. 1.

6 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie vir die Morawiese Sendingstasie Elim 1964-1974* (BA Hons dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 1991), p. 12.

7 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 4.

8 HP Hallbeck, *Evangeliese Broederkerk in SA: Ordeninge van Elim Sendingstasie, 1824* (Genadendal Press, 1824 [A copy of this document can be found in the Heritage Centre in Elim]), p. 1.

is the case in virtually all faith denominations, two of the primary tasks of a minister serving a congregation such as Elim, are the proclamation of the Word of God and the assumption of ex-officio leadership in spiritual activities of the community.⁹ Managing the external and more secular elements pertaining to the civil infrastructural aspects of the mission station constitutes an equally critical obligation of the minister. Therefore, these pivotal responsibilities require the head of the mission station to perform a threefold function. Firstly, to serve as the spiritual herdsman of the congregation, secondly to serve as the manager of the local school and superintendent of the Elim Home¹⁰ for physically and cognitively challenged children as well as, thirdly, overseeing the daily operation of the secular matters of the village.

This article, which is based on a previously unpublished work of the author completed in 1991.¹¹ It will highlight the significant contribution made by Reverend JJ Ulster regarding the upliftment and development of the community of Elim.¹²

Image 1: Reverend (Bishop) JJ Ulster



Source: Reverend (Bishop) JJ Ulster, 23 July 1990.

9 HP Hallbeck, *Evangeliese Broederkerk in SA...*, p. 2.

10 H Bamfort, "Disabled children's home under threat, Elim Home cares for kids their families have rejected", *Saturday Weekend Argus*, 12 June 2004, p. 25.

11 The author, in his capacity as a born and raised Elimer who spent his childhood and early adolescent years at the mission station during the Ulster era, has an immediate and immensely proud association with the village and the broad Moravian Church in South Africa. See the author's BA Honours (History) (South African Cultural History Museum, Cape Town), dissertation of limited scope, entitled *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster: Geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie vir die Morawiese Sendingstasie Elim (1965-1974) – Reverend JJ Ulster: Spiritual shepherd with an new vision for the Moravian Mission Station Elim (1965-1974)*.

12 This study is dedicated to the late Bishop, Reverend Dr JJ Ulster as an expression of sincere appreciation for the significant and exemplary contribution of pastoral and "mayoral" service he rendered unselfishly to the development of the mission village of Elim and its outer stations.

Image 2: The arrival of Reverend Ulster and his family in Elim - 10 January 1965



Source: Jenny Bridgeman (daughter of Reverend Bishop JJ Ulster).

Viewing the Moravian Church and the Elim Moravian mission station

The movement, referred to as the Bohemian or Moravian brothers, later known as the Moravian Church, was started by John Huss in the late fourteenth century. Huss vehemently objected to some of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church and wanted to return the church in Bohemia and Moravia to the simpler practices of early Christianity.¹³ Gaining royal support and a certain level of independence for a period, this movement was eventually subjected to the authority of Rome. Huss was eventually tried and burned at the stake. However, the reformation spirit did not die with him. The Moravian Church, or *Unitas Fratrum* (Unity of Brethren) as it has officially been known since 1457, came into being as followers of Huss gathered in the village of Kunevald, about 100 miles east of Prague, in eastern Bohemia. Reportedly, it was here where the early seeds of the modern day Moravian Church were sown. This was 60 years before Martin Luther hammered the

¹³ J Mulder, "Elim: More than a mission station", *Saturday Argus*, 11 December 2010, p. 6.

renowned articles to the Castel Church in Wittenburg and 100 years prior to the establishment of the Anglican Church.¹⁴

In the early 18th century, Count Zinzendorf became involved with the pietistic movement and allowed the Bohemian brothers to settle on his lands in the Lausitz area of Germany, just north of Bohemia. Permission was granted by Zinzendorf¹⁵ to the brothers to establish the town of Herrnhut (the Lord's protection). Very soon the Bohemian brothers were convinced that they should send missionaries out into the world to spread the gospel of Christ to all parts of the globe. In this way, the Moravian Church became one of the first active missionary societies worldwide. From 1732 to 1737 missionaries were sent to the West Indies, Greenland and to the Cape.¹⁶

This Church distinguished itself as one of the pioneer denominations in South Africa to engage in missionary work among the indigenous *Khoi San* people since 1737.¹⁷ Today the Church still has an appreciable presence in the country.¹⁸ In the early 1820's, the management of the Moravian Mission based at Genadendal, the first Moravian mission station in South Africa, realised the need to expand its missionary endeavours in the Cape. During this period, the evangelistic and educational work that was conducted by Moravian missionaries in the 18th and early 19th centuries in the Western Cape at Genadendal and Mamre respectively, began to flourish vigorously. This soon resulted in a rapid increase in the numbers of the inhabitants of these two mission stations. In 1824, a farm in the Strandveld (presently known as the Overberg District) region of the Western Cape was unexpectedly placed on the market. Upon inspection of the farm by clergymen of the Moravian Mission led by Hans Peter Hallbeck, its setting was found extremely suitable to establish a new mission station. An offer to purchase the farm, then known as Vogelstruiskraal, was accepted by the previous owner Johannes Petrus van Schonke.¹⁹ Thus, on the 12th of May 1824, the Moravian Mission became the new owner of Vogelstruiskraal.²⁰ Soon after becoming Moravian property, a set of rules and regulations was drafted by Hallbeck and his colleagues whereby

14 H du Preez, R van Oers, J Roos & L Verhoef (eds.), *The challenge of Genadendal* (IOS Press, 2009), pp. 11-13.

15 KT August, *The quest for being public church: The South African challenge to the Moravian Church in context 1737-2004* (DTh thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2003) [Printed by Moravian Printing Works, 2005], p. 2.

16 KT August, *The quest for being public church...*, p. 3.

17 J Loos, "Genadendal's welcome to visitors still as welcome as it was in slave era", *Cape Argus*, 4 January 2006, p. 10.

18 A Lewis and EM Lemmer, "Christian missionary endeavour in education in South Africa (1737-1955)", *Journal of Christian Scholarship*, 1st and 2nd quarter, 2004, p. 59.

19 JJ Ulster, *Daar is maar één Elim...*, p. 9.

20 JJ Ulster, *Elimiet*, 1, May 1974. A monthly community newsletter started by JJ Ulster in Elim, 1965.

the farm would be managed.²¹ On Ascension Day, Thursday, 12 May 1825, precisely a year after its establishment, the name of the mission station was changed to Elim²² – a place of cooling waters and palm trees and, in a biblical context, the village where the Israelites rested after crossing the Red Sea.²³

Since its founding in 1824,²⁴ the mission station of Elim has therefore belonged entirely to the Moravian Church in South Africa, unlike its counterparts Genadendal and Mamre, which are presently controlled by the state. The “Kerkraad” (Church council) is responsible for spiritual matters and the “Opsienersraad” (similar to a supervisory body) deals with matters that can be considered of a more temporal nature. Besides being the head of the church, the local minister is mayor or “Voorstander”. The post office and police station are leased at a nominal rental from the state.²⁵ However, of significant historical note concerning the mission settlement is the fact that its residents, the majority of whom are of slave descent,²⁶ erected a monument in 1938 which symbolises the liberation of slaves in the Cape and is the only such monument in South Africa.²⁷ In 1998, the Elim community celebrated the opening of an exhibition of the Slave Route Project as one of the steps to become part of the World Wide Slave Route project, set in motion by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and the World Tourism Organisation.²⁸

Reverend Johannes Jacobus Ulster the person

John Ulster²⁹ was born at Somerset West near Cape Town on 26 April 1922 as the eldest child of his parents Hendrik Simon and Dorothea Hester Ulster. A large part of his childhood was spent at Genadendal where his father initially occupied a position as a teacher until his appointment as a lecturer at the local teacher training college, specialising in subjects including teaching didactics and writing. John entered formal schooling during the late 1920s at the primary school at Clarkson, a Moravian mission station in the Eastern

21 JJ Ulster, *Daar is maar één Elim...*, p. 7.

22 JJ Ulster, *Daar is maar één Elim...*, p. 10.

23 M van Bart, “Historiese watermeul op Elim maal weer”, *Die Burger*, 1 November, 1997, p. 11.

24 JJ Ulster, *Daar is maar één Elim...*, p. 9.

25 M Mouton, “An oasis in the desert: Elim”, *Village Life*, December 2006, p. 27.

26 M Gosling, “Confronting South Africa’s hidden history”, *Cape Times*, 7 September, p. 13.

27 J Mulder, “Elim: More than a mission station”, *Saturday Argus*, 11 December 2010, p. 6.

28 M Gosling, “Confronting South Africa’s hidden history”, *The Cape Times*, 7 September, p. 13.

29 Reverend JJ Ulster, commonly also referred to as John Ulster.

Cape; the school was headed by his father. The young Ulster completed standards two to four at Genadendal during the early 1930s, followed by standards five and six back at Clarkson, with his father as his class teacher and school principal.³⁰

After completing his school career, John enrolled at the Dower Memorial College where he qualified as a teacher in 1940. Whilst being a full-time student, he lectured music to fellow senior students at the college.³¹ This training was followed by an intensive course in the methodology of music teaching at Battswood Training College in Wynberg, Cape Town in 1941. His teaching career commenced in 1942 as a music and art teacher at the Methodist Primary School in Retreat, Cape Town. Noted for his great passion and directional leadership, particularly in Moravian youth and Sunday school circles, John was encouraged by the management of the church to accept a teaching post at Mamre in April 1947 – a Moravian mission station north west of Cape Town. At the time, Reverend W Winckler, a German theologian and missionary, was working in Mamre and offered bible study classes to indigenous Moravians who aspired to enter active and fulltime ministry. This was John's initial exposure to theological training, with a view to preparing the way for him and other eligible candidates, including D Beukes and JH Kronenberg, to be trained as ordained ministers of the Moravian Church in South Africa.

In 1952, the theological seminary of the Moravian Church in South Africa was established in Fairview, Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, under the directorship of Bishop B Krüger. In answering the call to continue his theological training, John decided to resume his studies at this newly established theological training centre. Here, John was one of the first students to complete his training in the 1950s under the leadership and guidance of Bishop Krüger. John, like his contemporaries who qualified at Fairview, was held in high esteem for having served the Moravian Church fervently in various roles with a particular focus on promoting the missionary work that had been initiated by their predecessors. From the Fairview theological centre “came people who developed into dedicated servants of the Church and its congregations”.³²

30 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 2.

31 JJ Ulster (First indigenous minister, Elim), interview, MJ van Breda (Senior lecturer, Unisa, College of Education), 23 July 1990.

32 B Krüger and PW Schaberg, *The pear tree bears fruit* (Genadendal, 1980), p. 128.

In 1953, after completing his formal theological training in Port Elizabeth, John was appointed as the principal of Berea Primary School, a nearby out-station of Genadendal. Following a brief stint in this capacity, he was called by the board of the church to relinquish his post as principal in 1956, in favour of a position as the first superintendent of the newly found Herrnhut House for boys who attended Emil Weder High School in Genadendal.³³ In their roles as supervisors and caregivers, John, faithfully supported by his spouse Florence, took care of male high school learners who boarded at Herrnhut House and numbered up to one hundred and forty at times. These learners hailed from all parts of South Africa, including South West Africa, presently known as Namibia.³⁴

During his term of service as superintendent at Herrnhut House, John was ordained as an assistant clergyman, followed by his ordination as a fully-fledged minister and his spouse as an acolyte of the Moravian Church at Genadendal in October 1959. As is customary in the Moravian Church, the minister and his spouse are publically introduced as Reverend and “Juffrou” [freely translated as “mam”] at the ordination ceremony and may officially begin to minister and serve in the Moravian Church in these roles.

Shortly after his ordination, Reverend Ulster travelled abroad to pursue a comprehensive course in ecumenical studies at the Institute of Ecumenical Studies under the auspices of the University of Geneva in Bossey, Switzerland. Following his theological training in Switzerland, Ulster also spent time studying at the Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in the United States of America. In his own words, Ulster described the significance of this international training for himself as:³⁵

... ’n geestelik verrykende belewenis wat my aanleg en begrip vir interkerklike verhoudinge aansienlik verbreed het – a spiritually enriching experience that broadened my aptitude for and understanding of inter-denominational relations greatly [Freely translated as...].

His ecumenical training thoroughly equipped Ulster in contributing meaningfully to the ecumenical movement in South Africa, initially in his role as chairman of the Western Cape Council of Churches and eventually in his capacity as executive member of the South African Council of Churches. In December 1964, Ulster’s term as superintendent of the Herrnhut House

33 I Balie, *Die geskiedenis van genadendal: 1738-1988* (Kaaipstad, Perskor, 1988), p. 218.

34 B Krüger and PW Schaberg, *The pear tree bears fruit...*, p. 133.

35 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met ’n nuwe visie...*, p. 9.

ended and coincided with his acceptance of the call to commence his term as minister in Elim in January 1965.³⁶ This fresh challenge, which differed significantly from his role as superintendent of Herrnhut House, proved to be a continuation of a journey of dedicated and tireless labour rendered by him until his retirement, when his work indeed continued in favour of enriching others' spiritual lives and contributing to the improvement of socio-economic conditions of communities he had served throughout his life.

Ulster as first indigenous spiritual leader of Elim

The period prior to the Ulster era was characterised by intense contestation and deeply rooted divisions among the inhabitants of the small community of Elim mission village.³⁷ As these tensions and divisions grew in magnitude they started to impact on the overall stability and the quality of the spiritual lives of members of this community. This resulted in the provincial board of the Moravian Church in South Africa intervening by, as mentioned, calling a new head to Elim.³⁸ This decision was widely welcomed and extremely well received by the community. Upon their arrival at Elim on 10 January 1965 at 17h30, the Ulster family was warmly welcomed with overwhelming joy and appreciation by the inhabitants there.³⁹

Some of the most pressing issues that required Reverend Ulster's immediate attention in Elim were the needs to restore the brotherly and sisterly unity among the members of the community, improve the quality of their spiritual lives and revive the congregation's call for mission work. During the term of service of Reverend GT Tietzen, a former missionary who worked in Elim, the mission station had distinguished itself as one of the most prominent Moravian congregations in strengthening the mission calling of the church. However, the term of service of Tietzen was interrupted when he was called to perform mission work in the Moravian Church in Tanzania.⁴⁰ Since mission remained an issue that Reverend Ulster always considered a very high priority, he employed various measures to promote this function of the Moravian Church in South Africa. In keeping with the motive of the international Moravian Church, Ulster embraced, as his personal frame of reference, the

36 JJ Ulster, interview, M van Breda, 23 July 1990.

37 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 13.

38 Elim Church Council, Elim, Minutes, minute 2 April 1964, p. 465.

39 JJ Ulster, *Elimiet*, 1, 1965, p. 3.

40 JJ Ulster, interview, M van Breda, 6 May 1990.

promotion of salvation of his fellow men and women by making the gospel of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, known to them.⁴¹

He fervently encouraged members of the congregation to engage actively in spiritual societies of the local church including the Sisters, Brothers, Youth and Welfare. Reverend Ulster took the initiative to present training programmes to empower members of the congregation with skills in leadership and in conducting fellowship and prayer meetings. For the very first time in the existence of the mission village, serving members of the church and overseeing councils were afforded opportunities to participate in important decision making in critical matters regarding church and secular affairs of the village.⁴² Not only did this engender a sense of purpose among members of the community, but it also gave them a feeling of belonging.⁴³

In view of the employment opportunities that have been extremely limited throughout the entire history of Elim, many inhabitants secured jobs outside the village.⁴⁴ As a consequence, they were not able to participate in all spiritual and community events. However, unlike in the pre-1965 period,⁴⁵ special efforts were made by Reverend Ulster, enthusiastically supported by members of the church council, to pay visits to workers who spent extended periods away from the mission station due to their employment circumstances.⁴⁶ Special church services were conducted to afford “out of town workers” opportunities to benefit from spiritual fellowship and devotion in nearby towns, including Hawston and Gansbaai as well as on Dyer Island off the coast of Hermanus. Provision was even made to serve Holy Communion to them when major church festivals were celebrated.

Senior members of the community, who were always held in very high regard by Reverend Ulster, faithfully accompanied by his wife, “Juffrou” Ulster, regularly received home visits from the pastoral couple.⁴⁷ These visits were greatly appreciated by seniors as these not merely served as opportunities for spiritual fellowship but also provided them with a safe space to express their concerns. Therefore, in this way, the regular contact between the pastoral

41 A Smith, “Elim: Where the sun shines on history, tradition and craft”, *Cape Argus*, 29 March 2005, p. 7.

42 JT van Breda (Late father of the author and church council member during the Ulster era), interview, MJ van Breda (Senior lecturer, Unisa, College of Education), 18 June 1990.

43 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 19.

44 The author's personal knowledge and obituaries.

45 JT van Breda, interview, M van Breda, 3 July 1990.

46 JJ Ulster, interview, M van Breda, 23 May 1990.

47 C Afrika (Surviving member of Elim Church Council during the Ulster era), interview, MJ van Breda (Senior lecturer, Unisa), 4 April 2015.

couple and seniors who were often bedridden and not able to attend church services, addressed both the older people's spiritual and emotional needs. Over and above the home visitation by the Ulster couple, "Juffrou" Ulster, joined by female members of the church council, held regular prayer meetings on weekday afternoons in the homes of congregants who were no longer fit enough to make their way to church services on Sunday mornings and other religious events.

In 1965, the first local monthly newsletter, the *Elimiet*, was introduced by Reverend Ulster to serve as means of communication between the church office and the congregation. In an article written and published by him in the *Elimiet* in 1974, he stated that the rationale of the *Elimiet* was to reconcile the divided community that he had inherited, sharing short uplifting spiritual messages as well as making urgent announcements.⁴⁸

Traditionally, a close partnership between church and school is a striking feature of Moravian mission settlements, and this is still largely true in the case of Elim.⁴⁹ Regardless of changing social conditions, the influence of the interactive relationship between these two significant constructs continues to influence the spiritual and social development and functioning of children and adolescents raised and nurtured in Elim and similar rural Moravian settlements. Thus, it may be concluded that the pietistic influence of the church alongside formal education obtained at the local school may, in unique ways, have a meaningful impact on the identity development of Moravians, particularly evident among those who hail from mission settlements.

Born and nurtured within the realms of truly indigenous Moravian ecclesiastical and missionary educational traditions, Reverend Ulster demonstrated an advanced understanding of the central role of the church and the profound influence which formal education played in accomplishing his leadership aims as religious minister and manager in Elim. This was clearly evident in his vehement promotion of traditional Moravian mission-based education offered through formal schooling in close partnership with the church.⁵⁰

48 JJ Ulster, *Elimiet*, 1, 1975, p. 2.

49 JJ Ulster, *Elimiet*, 3, 1966, p. 5.

50 The author's personal knowledge and obituaries.

Image 3: Elim Moravian Church building



Source: Available at <http://tinyurl.com/Elim-Moravian-Church>, accessed, 5 July 2016.

Manager of the primary school

As mentioned earlier, the period between 1960 and 1964 was characterised by escalating tensions among Elim inhabitants, essentially due to intense disagreements and conflicts among inhabitants over the construction of a much needed school building as well as other burning issues.⁵¹ Reasons offered for the resistance to extend the school building included a substantial shortfall of funding required to erect more classrooms and the fact that challenges, other than school accommodation, required much greater priority. This was the view of a section of the community, in spite of a rapid increase in learner numbers, particularly since the start of the 1960s.⁵² In order to avert a potential education crisis in Elim, one of the immediate issues which demanded the courageous, strategic and conciliatory leadership of Reverend Ulster was to create a safe space within which issues concerning the school building and further urgent challenges facing Elim at the time, could be addressed. This was successfully achieved through on-going, consultative and enlightening meetings which were skilfully conducted by him in a spirit of mutual respect

⁵¹ Elim Church Council, Elim, Minutes, minute 30 January 1963, p. 434.

⁵² JJ Ulster, *Daar is maar één Elim...*, p. 22.

and understanding between him and the community members concerned.⁵³ In order to avert a potential disruption in the education system in Elim, reportedly one of the immediate challenges Ulster had to address in Elim was to convince the local community of the dire need to extend the existing school infrastructure. Amid vehement opposition against the enlargement of the existing school building, Ulster succeeded in obtaining the 'buy in' of a great part of the community in favour of erecting a brand new school building.

A change in the mind-set amongst the local parent community soon paved the way for an attitudinal change and a spirit of unprecedented cooperation in addressing the school accommodation issue. With the support of the local church council, vigorous fundraising efforts were initiated in favour of raising a substantial deposit in a record period of time. A special bank account was opened to deposit funds that were eagerly raised by the local community, as well as monetary donations received from elsewhere.⁵⁴ Fundraising efforts that were embarked upon included, amongst others, bazaars, sport events, social outings and monetary collecting lists. These and further fund-generating initiatives enabled the construction of a new school to commence in 1965. Well-to-do community members and the local burial society made generous financial contributions to the school building trust fund on a voluntary basis.⁵⁵ Moreover, many locals, who embraced and supported Ulster's vision of extending the school infrastructure as a fruitful investment for the future of Elim, unselfishly and diligently volunteered their services as semi- and unskilled labourers by assisting the contractor in the completion of the new school complex.⁵⁶ The first section of the building, consisting of five classrooms, an administrative section and ablution facilities, was completed at the beginning of September, 1965. The stone-laying of this section was conducted by Bishop PW Schaberg on 25 September 1965: a former German minister and Superintendent of the Moravian Church in South Africa.⁵⁷ This special honour was bestowed on Schaberg in acknowledgement of his immense contribution in improving the quality of mission education within the broader sphere of the Moravian Church in South Africa.⁵⁸

53 JT van Breda, interview, MJ van Breda, 23 May June 1990.

54 JJ Ulster, *Elimiet*, 1965, 1, p. 3.

55 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 34.

56 JT van Breda, interview, MJ van Breda, 23 May 1990.

57 JJ Ulster, *Daar is maar één Elim...*, p. 27.

58 JJ Ulster, *Daar is maar één Elim...*, pp. 32-33.

After a substantial part of the initial debt had been covered, the construction of the second phase of the school building project commenced in 1969. On the recommendation of Reverend Ulster, who manifestly valued the importance of reading and early childhood development, a school library was included in this section as well as four additional well-resourced classrooms. Simultaneously and with minimal expenditure, the previously used classrooms were converted into a venue that presently continues to serve as a community centre used for civic meetings, church bazaars, celebratory events and the like. Although it remained one of Ulster's ideals to extend the existing school building with the possibility of including an additional academic grade, no further attempts have been made in this regard after his term of service. Nevertheless, for his servant leadership and dedicated labour invested into improving the physical infrastructure of the school building and the quality of mission education in Elim, he unequivocally deserves immense credit and sincerest appreciation. The significant increase in the number of learners from Elim Moravian Primary School who furthered their school and academic careers, particularly since the 1960 and 1970s, is indeed, largely attributable to his encouragement and inspiration.⁵⁹

A further aspect related to formal education during the Ulster era which certainly warrants reporting is the introduction of a school uniform for learners of Elim Moravian Primary School in 1972. This initiative, another first for Elim, changed the face of the learner community completely. Despite the mixed feelings which this initiative initially elicited, primarily due to perceived financial implications it may have brought to bear on parents, the presentable blue tops with their thin white strips on the collar and sleeve ribbings created an attractive and standardised view of learners during assemblies. More importantly, this contributed greatly to cultivating a sense of identity and belonging, whilst stimulating immense pride among learners and teachers as well. Thanks to the intervention of Reverend Ulster, who entered into negotiations with the manufacturer of the uniforms, affordable deals were offered to parents enabling them to purchase the tops for their children at reasonable costs.

In promoting the cultural development of the learners and the youth of Elim, Reverend Ulster encouraged their participation in school choral competitions and the local brass band. Being a distinguished musician himself, he played a leading role in organising, staging and directing the performance of a

⁵⁹ JT van Breda, interview, MJ van Breda, 18 June 1990.

children's operetta titled "Princess Rosalind" which offered young learners the opportunity to entertain their parents and teachers through musical comedy.⁶⁰ Ulster personally provided the music for the performance through impressive piano accompaniment. This occasion was indeed a completely unusual and unforgettable experience for the learners, their parents and teachers of Elim Moravian Primary School alike. Furthermore, he played a key role in organising an extremely successful Moravian brass band festival staged by the Western Cape region in Elim in 1969.⁶¹

The screening of films for children in the community hall one afternoon during the week and for the youth and adults on a Friday night was introduced under Reverend Ulster's direction, as an additional form of recreation for the community. For this purpose, a local inhabitant, Mr Johnny Veroni, ably assisted by Reverend Ulster's son Hennie, received special training in operating the film projector; they were responsible for screening films for educational and relaxation purposes.⁶²

Following in-depth and on-going negotiations with the Department of Education and the management of the church, a remedial class, better known as the "adaptation class", was introduced in Elim in 1971. The need for introducing this type of educational facility was identified by Reverend Ulster in conjunction with the management of the day school. This was yet another initiative that was conceptualised and facilitated by Ulster and stands out as another first in the educational history of the mission station. With valuable input and guidance received from the Department of Education (known as the Department of Coloured Affairs at the time), learners who presented with barriers to learning were identified and supported through adapted teaching and learning strategies in a remedial learning setting. On-going learning support, caringly offered in an enabling environment by "Juffrou" Ulster, a qualified primary school teacher, empowered many of the so-called "adaptation class learners" to be eventually reintegrated into the mainstream school system.

As the minister of Elim, he was also the school manager responsible for serving the outstations of Spanjaardskloof, Houtkloof and Sondagkloof. Through his great enthusiasm for education and as a prominent figure in the Welfare Committee of the Moravian Church, he convinced the congregants

60 H Ulster (Son of JJ Ulster), telephonic interview, MJ van Breda, 5 August 2015.

61 JJ Ulster, interview, M van Breda, 23 July 1990.

62 H Ulster, interview, M van Breda, 5 August 2015.

there to assist in building hostels at Houtkloof and Sondagkloof to satisfy the accommodation needs of young learners. Under his leadership, the primary school at Spanjaardskloof was also extended. He negotiated with the Mayor, Piet van der Bijl, MP and owner of the farm Fairfield where he ministered to the staff, to erect a primary school on the farm. Upon the completion of its building, this school accommodated over 50 young learners and secured employment for 2 teachers. In doing so, Ulster, single-handedly, succeeded in securing state subsidies, which financially supported the provision of education by the Moravian Church.⁶³

Image 4: Elim Moravian Primary School



Source: Photograph by MJ van Breda, 10 July 2016.

Superintendent of the Elim Children's Home

Through a substantial financial donation made by a German welfare organisation, “Brot für die Welt”,⁶⁴ (bread for the world) the Elim Home was established by Reverend K Bonk in 1963 as a basic care facility under the auspices of the Moravian Church in South Africa. This institution was the only one of its kind in the country during the 1960's for children of indigenous origin.⁶⁵ From the start, this facility could accommodate between 50 and 60 inhabitants of whom the overwhelming majority presented with high

63 JJ Ulster, *Elimiet*, 1, 1965, p. 4.

64 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 39.

65 H Bamford, “Disabled children's home under threat”, *Saturday Weekend Argus*, 12 June 2005, p. 25.

intensity needs, rendering them virtually dependent on fulltime supervision and care. Due to an increase in the learner total of the Elim Home, along with the escalation of their care and support needs, provision soon had to be made for additional accommodation and specialised support services.

The construction of a new building complex for the Elim Home began in 1963 and was completed in 1966. Reverend Ulster's appointment as the superintendent of the Elim Home in 1965 witnessed a remarkable improvement in the level and quality of professional services rendered by the staff in addressing the support needs of the learners. According to Reverend G Cloete, the current archivist of the Moravian Church in South Africa, Ulster was delegated by the church to undergo basic training in Germany in caregiving, treatment and accommodation of children with cognitive challenges.⁶⁶ This happened at a time when specialised education services were solely available at local institutions that catered only for the learning and psychosocial needs of White learners. Through his intervention, a professionally trained nurse, Sister Aenna Vogelsang, was recruited in 1966 from a German welfare organisation "Dienste in Übersee" (serving overseas) by the provincial board of the Church and employed as the first matron of the Elim Home.⁶⁷ Her responsibilities were essentially twofold: firstly to take care of the overall management of the institution and secondly to empower local young women with entry level knowledge and basic skills in child care and nursing. Initially, these young women were employed as child minders and cleaning staff supervised by sister Aenna, as she was affectionately known to everyone in the village. However, for a considerable number of them, the introductory training received at the Elim Home served as a platform in securing advanced nursing employment opportunities. Although this was initially a slow process, the experience gained by many young women in this way proved to be of great value in shaping their future career paths. At present, a considerable number of them are employed as qualified nursing assistants, while others are working as professionally trained nurses in major provincial hospitals such as Groote Schuur and Tygerberg as well as in various Community Health Centres in Cape Town.⁶⁸

Over and above offering much needed employment opportunities for semi-schooled local males and females, the Elim Home serves as a safe haven for

66 G Cloete (Archivist, Moravian Church), interview, MJ van Breda, 11 April 2016.

67 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 39.

68 A Cloete (Manager, Elim Cultural Heritage Centre), interview, MJ van Breda, 4 April 2015.

profoundly challenged young children nationwide. Therefore, this institution can rightfully be considered a vital link between the relatively closed community of the mission settlement and the external world.

Under the superintendence of Ulster, a new therapeutic section was established at the Elim Home in 1974. Ever since the inception of this centre, the Evangelic Mission Service (EMS) of the Moravian Church in Germany has delegated young students to the Elim Home to perform internship services on a rotational basis as physiotherapists and occupational therapists. Through this, an unofficial exchange programme was instituted, whereby opportunities are created for local care givers at the Home to be invited by EMS to visit similar care centres in Germany. There they observe those centres' functioning, in turn making them even more committed to their tasks and responsibilities at Elim Home, upon their return.⁶⁹ Another spinoff is that the Elim Home is placed on the world tourist map as many visitors from Europe who have heard of the mission settlement, regularly pay visits to historic Elim.

Image 5: Elim Children's Home



Source: Photograph by MJ van Breda, 10 July 2016.

Ulster and the Elim Council of Overseers

According to Article 2 of the Ordinances whereby Elim is managed, the overall governance of the settlement rests with the chief minister or any

⁶⁹ A Cloete (Manager, Elim Cultural Heritage Centre), interview, MJ van Breda (Senior lecturer, Unisa, College of Education), 4 April 2015.

other official appointed by the Board of the church.⁷⁰ The manager of the mission station, whose role is largely comparable to that of a mayor of a town or city, plays a pivotal role in regulating and supervising all civil and practical affairs of the mission station. Typically, in the case of Elim, the most prominent of these practical enterprises include mixed agriculture, education, health and vegetable gardening, amongst others, all of which are practiced on a relatively small scale. In addition to the church council which supports the minister in attending to the spiritual service of the mission station, the Council of Overseers functions under the chairmanship of the head minister to coordinate the management of civil and more secular aspects of the village.

Assuming the role of manager of a mission station was not merely a somewhat foreign experience for the Reverend, but simultaneously may have been a challenging assignment. As referred to earlier, Elim was indeed confronted with several civil challenges during the early 1960's which increasingly impacted the overall wellbeing of the community. If he had ignored these issues, they might have resulted in escalating spiritual deterioration and civil chaos within the settlement.

Newly established civil structures

In addressing the practical challenges of the time, Ulster envisaged that a drastic transformation in the management style of Elim could positively influence the communal dynamics. Therefore, in consultation with the authorities of the Moravian Church and the local Council of Overseers as representatives of the community, a management restructuring was embarked upon. Members of the Council of Overseers were trained and skilled in management approaches in order to assume leadership of newly established commissions. These newly established civil structures that were directly responsible for dealing with those matters pertaining to, amongst others, agriculture, gardening, building, veld-fires, health, library and the village, and instituted in the Ulster era, currently still deal with matters pertaining to the scope of their practices. A memorable event in 1966 occurred when the veld-fire commission had to deal with a fierce veld fire that erupted in what is known as "die heer se bos" (the minister's forest) situated near the church and parsonage. The observable spirit of great team work was a living testimony of the organised manner in which the potentially devastating fire was effectively

⁷⁰ PH Hallbeck, "Evangeliese Broederkerk in SA. Ordening van Elim...", 1824, p. 2.

brought under control and eventually put out. At the time of this incident, inhabitants in great numbers volunteered their services as fire fighters and the sound cooperation that was observable in the community again was well accepted and extremely promising.⁷¹

Through Reverend Ulster's initiative, the civil management of the mission station that was decentralised not only proved to be extremely beneficial for the development of leadership skills among the inhabitants, but also stimulated a sense of empowerment in them: that they were and are capable of coordinating events and taking on leadership roles. By virtue of his responsibility as overall manager of the mission station, Ulster automatically assumed ex-officio chairmanship of these new democratically elected commissions. Through educating and mentoring the members of each of these committees and by exposing them to opportunities of leadership and independent decision-making, a new sense of purpose and identity began to awaken in many Elimers. Not surprisingly, the revised model of civil management that was introduced in Elim by Reverend Ulster was eventually used to benchmark similar management restructuring in other rural Moravian settlements. It is fair to conclude that through his ground breaking initiative that was field-tested in Elim, participatory and democratic management of communities by communities was vigorously promoted in other Moravian Mission stations with great success.⁷²

Early well-being lifestyle efforts

Encouraging healthy lifestyles among young and old was a major priority for Reverend Ulster too. For this reason, the health commission referred to earlier, comprising him, four committee members and one member of the Council of Overseers that was established in 1966, was mandated to supervise and make recommendations with regard to health related issues, including sanitation, water supply and the provision of state health services to the local community amongst others.⁷³ The existing local health care clinic that had been operating in Elim for a number of years prior to Reverend Ulster's arrival, was financially supported partly by the Moravian Church and partly by the local community. In ensuring that this vital institution stayed on par

71 JJ Ulster, *Elimiet*, 1, 1966, p. 4.

72 JT van Breda, interview, M van Breda, 23 May 1990.

73 JJ Ulster, "Elim Sendingstasie: Regulasies insake Gesondheidskommissie", *Elim Morawiese Sendingstasie: Gesondheidskommissie*, p. 1.

in terms of modern health care provision, he, in consultation with the Elim health commission successfully engaged the Divisional Council of Bredasdorp in obtaining a full state subsidy for its daily operation and maintenance. Moreover, in his capacity as the chairperson of the Welfare Commission of the Moravian Church in South Africa at that time, Reverend Ulster further played a great part in securing free medical treatment for pensioners of Elim and surrounding settlements.⁷⁴ This move was widely welcomed and brought about immense financial relief for already cash strapped pensioners for whom it was a real challenge to make ends meet.⁷⁵

Owing to isolated occurrences of alcohol use as well as drug use that gradually found their way to Elim during the early 1970's, the impact of these substances started taking their toll on certain individuals and even on family lives in some cases. In order to become more knowledgeable and suitably skilled in combating the spread of these evils, Reverend Ulster attended an International Conference on alcohol and drug abuse from 4th to 8th November 1974 in the Heerengracht Hotel in Cape Town. His attendance of this event afforded Ulster the opportunity of first hand exposure in gaining a better understanding of local and international insights and perspectives on addressing the said evils that were slowly but surely emerging in Elim and the surrounding outer stations.

In March 1974, he attended a Welfare conference on tuberculosis in Johannesburg.⁷⁶ This resulted in his becoming actively involved in the fight against tuberculosis. Thanks to his initiative an active branch of the South African National Tuberculosis Association (SANTA) was established in Elim. He encouraged good cooperation between branches of this association in neighbouring villages too. Soon, Ulster was elected as the chairman of the Board of SANTA in the extended District, which includes villages such as Elim, Bredasdorp, Napier, Klipdale, Cape Agulhas and Waenhuiskrans.⁷⁷ Due to outstanding services rendered by Ulster in curbing the spread of the condition in the local district, he was elected as the first so-called "person of colour" to serve on the National Executive Board of SANTA.⁷⁸

74 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 50.

75 JT van Breda, interview, MJ van Breda, 18 June 1990.

76 JJ Ulster, *Elimiet*, 2, December 1974, p. 7.

77 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 50.

78 MJ van Breda, *Eerwaarde JJ Ulster geestelike herder met 'n nuwe visie...*, p. 51.

Skills development initiatives in agriculture

During 21 to 25 October 1967, an agricultural week was initiated and organised by Reverend Ulster in consultation with Mr Böhlinger, the owner of the farm Karwyderskraal in the nearby Hermanus district where the event took place.⁷⁹ This occasion was attended by 18 farmers from Elim as well as neighbouring farming settlements and was used for presenting lectures and conducting information sharing on basic farming and gardening skills and planning.⁸⁰ To be exposed to the use of scientific farming machinery that was gradually becoming popular at the time, particularly captured the imagination of upcoming farmers of Elim. It inspired them to implement the new skills and approaches to their craft which they had acquired from the agricultural week at Karwyderskraal. In addition, contemporary techniques in flower arrangement were also demonstrated at this occasion.⁸¹

Community memories

Mrs C Afrika, a 76 year old lady who is one of only two surviving church council members of the Ulster era, recalls the meaningful pastoral role which Reverend and “Juffrou” Ulster played in Elim. Mrs Afrika recalls the sincere interest which they had always shown in all the members of the congregation through paying regular home visits. She further recalls the exemplariness, fairness, honesty and care with which the Ulster pastoral couple treated them as church council members at all times. Afrika remembers several other contributory aspects of Reverend Ulster’s term of service in Elim:⁸²

Reverend Ulster made many sacrifices and was known to always go the extra mile for our community. For example, he assumed a leading role in fund-raising initiatives when we built a new school. Also thanks to Reverend Ulster, a tennis club known as the Elimhuide was established of which he was the founder and a member and a player. He encouraged many young people in the local community to join the club. Competitive tennis matches were played against teams from neighbouring villages, including Bredasdorp, Papiessvlei and Genadendal on a regular basis.

Mrs S Cloete, another a member who served on the church council during

79 Elimiet, 4, October 1967, p. 3.

80 Jaarlikse Gedenkwaardighede van Elim, 1967, p. 4.

81 Elimiet, 4, October 1967, p. 4.

82 C Afrika, (Surviving member of Church Council during the Ulster era in Elim), interview, M van Breda, 5 April 2015.

the Ulster era, expressed her appreciation for the impression made upon her by the Ulster pastoral couple, as follows:⁸³

Reverend and “Juffrou” Ulster was a very well-liked pastoral couple in Elim. They were always humble, fair and always sincere in rendering their spiritual service. Reverend Ulster’s interest in children and young people was particularly clear. He believed in the future of young children and thereby extended the public library services extensively. He also went out of his way to help me in those days to get my handicapped son enrolled at a school for children with learning difficulties in Worcester for which I will always be thankful to him.

Acknowledgement for years of community upliftment

In December 2015, Stellenbosch University awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (D Phil), *Honoris Causa* on Ulster. This prestigious honour was bestowed on him, firstly, in recognition of his “eminent contributions to the Moravian Church in South Africa, and secondly, for his role as community leader in civil society as well as his contribution in rendering voluntary upliftment service to the poor and people affected by HIV/AIDS”.⁸⁴

No doubt, Ulster’s substantial contributions in favour of spiritual and community upliftment services in various settings throughout his entire life made him a worthy recipient of the recognition Stellenbosch University honoured him with before he passed away in January 2012.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ulster as the first indigenous spiritual leader and head of Elim could be considered as a leader with a fresh vision for the mission settlement. During his term of service, Elim had experienced significant changes which positively impacted the lives of the local community and the broader district.

As reflected on in the article, through his people’s-centred style of interpersonal engagement and democratic approach to leadership, which differed noticeably from that of many of his predecessors, Ulster contributed

⁸³ S Cloete (surviving member of Elim Church Council during the Ulster era), interview, MJ van Breda, 4 April 2015.

⁸⁴ W Muller, “US se jongste eregraduandi”, *Matieland*, 2006, p. 30.

significantly in ameliorating the quality of the spiritual and social wellbeing of his congregation. In this respect, he is well remembered for adopting the perspective that members of the local community were capable of taking co-responsibility of managing the mission settlement and its outstations. Ulster prioritised the development of individuals, firstly, through providing management and leadership training in spiritual and civil affairs and secondly, by offering ongoing mentoring and support to those who were entrusted with the responsibility to lead newly established committees. On a personal level, the involvement of community members in managing the settlement instilled a sense of purpose and identity in them. However, on a much broader level, the transformed manner in which Elim was managed since 1965, served as a noteworthy model for other Moravian Mission Stations when similar changes in their management structures were introduced since the early 1970's.

Being a fairly young person and a relatively inexperienced clergyman, Reverend Ulster's call to Elim as the chief pastor of a congregation, proverbially speaking, may have seemed to him as thrown in at the deep end. Be that as it may, it can be conceded that the Ulster era, as it is fondly recalled by many individuals with strong Elim ties, undoubtedly continues to be heralded and appreciated as a 'golden period' in the impressive history of this unique village. Numerous senior citizens, particularly those who served in collaboration with the Ulster pastoral couple in promoting the interest and wellbeing of the community, up till today, value their unselfish spiritual and community servitude.⁸⁵

Notwithstanding crippling socio-economic challenges that Elim experienced as a previously disadvantaged community during the 1960-1970 period, Ulster's meaningful contribution to its development, brought about a metamorphosis in the functioning of the settlement. On the one hand, his influence as dedicated pastoral herdsman introduced a spiritual revival among the congregants which had a positive effect in defusing tension that had previously threatened to destabilise the community. On the other hand, Ulster can certainly be considered a stalwart in improving the social welfare of the local community as well as setting the scene for future developments.

In view of the overall spiritual and social stability and progress that Elim experienced through Ulster's efficient leadership, as highlighted throughout this article, it could be argued that the embodiment of the international

⁸⁵ C Afrika, interview, M van Breda, 5 April 2015.

motto of the Moravian Mission, namely “Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him” has been foregrounded solidly in this mission settlement. This particular motto is considered quintessential to the development and strengthening of faith among Moravians worldwide.⁸⁶

Finally, it may be fair to conclude that the successes achieved and valuable experiences gained by Ulster during his term of service in Elim, prepared him well for the continued spiritual and welfare services he rendered thereafter. This was aptly captured by Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his funeral tribute to Ulster as the - enhancement of the spiritual, educational and welfare conditions of communities which benefited from the voluntary services rendered by this great, yet immensely humble leader and servant of God, long after his departure from Elim in December 1974, virtually until he passed away on 13 January 2012.⁸⁷ To Ulster’s advantage, he seems to have had an advanced understanding of the science of what constitutes servant leadership and to stimulate people’s belief that they are capable of moving far beyond of where they thought they were.⁸⁸

86 Anon., *The Moravian Church* (Moravian Church of Canada, available at <http://www.Moravian.ca/index>. Html. accessed, 17 June 2016).

87 Tribute paid by emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the funeral of Bishop JJ Ulster, Genadendal, 21 January, 2012.

88 H Ulster, telephonic interview, MJ van Breda, 5 August 2015.