

By God's grace, Tim, Taryn, Ashley and I returned recently from a very productive time of ministry in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Tim had meetings in Pretoria and near Durban. I was invited to speak at the **Christians For Truth Conference** at KwaSizabantu Mission. The message was on *Muslims and the Gospel* and during the afternoon panel discussion the delegates expressed much interest in the subject of how to reach their Muslim neighbours for Christ. I also had many intensive discussions with missionaries involved in witnessing to Muslims and with Christians from Muslim backgrounds. I also recorded 14 radio programmes including sermons and devotionals, for Radio Kwezi.

On Sunday, I was invited to preach at three services at Jivannadi Mission – a mission to Hindus. During the week, Tim, Taryn, Ashley and I taught at the Jivannadi Christian school. Tim and Taryn had services in Chatsworth, and assisted a local pastors fraternal in strategies to establish Christian Action groups in their communities.

We were also able to deliver large quantities of World Missionary Press Gospel booklets, New King James Bibles, along with books and CD's to be donated to colleges and mission libraries.

Rev. Bill Bathman's new devotional book on the Gospel of Matthew: ***How'd You Hurt Your Hand?***, arrived just in time for me to hand copies to leaders of both Jivannadi and KwaSizabantu Mission. I was also invited to present lectures on the Reformation to a teacher training college and to a Bible school.

Recently, our team met with the members of the committed Christian radio station, Good News Community Radio (GNCR). Over the last 11 years we have frequently been guests of GNCR and involved in many of their programmes. Over the last several years, GNCR has been fighting a desperate court battle to stay on air. However, on 30 June they were forced by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) to “*vacate the 98FM frequency.*”

GNCR has been one of the longest running community radio stations in South Africa, broadcasting since 1995. In spite of its excellent service quality and a community petition of over 100,000 signatures, ICASA has adamantly refused to favourably consider their application for a 4 year broadcasting license.

During their time on air, GNCR had been dogged, often daily, by events involving electricity cable theft and the resultant power cuts, with electricity poles cut down and wires burned clean at night. The station's staff noted that the power cuts were neither accidental nor coincidental. The timing of these incidents was mind-boggling – they would consistently occur just before court cases, especially when GNCR needed to mobilise their listeners.

As far back as 1998, an ICASA official intimated to a senior Christian community radio station leader that there would eventually be no Christian community radio stations allowed in South Africa. Over 10,000 Christians marched to Parliament in Cape Town to protest these plans to silence Christian community radio stations in South Africa. The ANC-led government backed off and reassured marchers that they would respect freedom of religion on the airwaves.

The former radio station manager of GNCR had brought this matter to the attention of other interested media leaders and consequently faced the threat of litigation when the details were published. This was to play a significant role in the way things turned out when GNCR appeared before ICASA to present their application at the hearing in Durban for a 4 year licence. The official implicated in the published report was then also one of the members of the panel grilling GNCR on the substance of their application, and his involvement thus influenced the refusal of their licence.

GNCR found itself outmaneuvered in a political and legal battle, which seemed to confirm a hidden agenda embarked upon by the Authority to replace predominantly Christian community-of-interest radio stations with secular geographic community stations. The blatant conflict of interests of having the same person that had brought a defamation case against the station manager of GNCR sitting on the committee that reviewed their license application, did not seem to matter to the Authority or the courts.

The main reason cited by ICASA for rejecting the license application of veteran Christian station GNCR with its 11 year track record of award winning educational and community programmes, was that it was *“not racially representative of the community.”* It can be verified however, that the main population groups including Zulu, Indian, and White were represented on the board

and staff. It is glaringly inconsistent that, despite the fact that Izwi Lomzansi has a board that is entirely black in the same broadcasting area, this secular station has been awarded the frequency (98 FM) that GNCR occupied for 11 years. It therefore appears that a non-racial, multi-lingual radio station broadcasting in five languages, 24 hours a day, is not as *“racially representative”*

as a station that consists entirely of secular Zulus and which, to date, has not broadcast a single programme, despite having been instructed by ICASA to do so by 1 July 2006.

The initial GNCR submission, which was rejected as *“not representative enough”*, included 27,000 signatures from members of the community in support compared to the secular Zulu station which had only 500 signatures on their submission. Observers reported to us that many of the letters in support of the secular station were written on the same paper, and in the same handwriting. *“It*

*seemed to me that only 6 people wrote all their submissions. It was fraudulent,”* commented one.

ICASA instructed GNCR to close down on 30 June so that the secular station could take over. In the two and a half months that have since elapsed, the other station has yet to use the 98 FM frequency which GNCR was forced to surrender after 11 years of faithful, excellent service to both Christian as well as non-Christian communities.

The members of GNCR related the political, legal, media and spiritual battles that they have been involved in. They expressed frustration that the Association of Christian Broadcasters, of which they were founding members, has so far failed to provide meaningful support to the nine Christian radio stations that have been rejected by ICASA or closed down. They mentioned how the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF), which is the national union body for community radios, has its national offices in COSATU buildings. (COSATU is in alliance with the South African Communist Party.) Several volunteers associated with GNCR expressed their opinion that local members of the South African Communist Party had been strongly supporting the station that was awarded the licence.

Everyone at GNCR was concerned about the dangerous repercussions for religious broadcasters arising from the legal precedent set in the ICASA/GNCR case. Furthermore, it is clear that geographic community radio stations will always have preference over community-of-interest stations. This would substantiate the insinuation by the official who, years ago, stated that Christian community radio stations would be gradually eradicated in South Africa.

To read more about GNCR, please click:

[ICASA Targets Gospel Radio](#)

[GNCR to Close](#)

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