

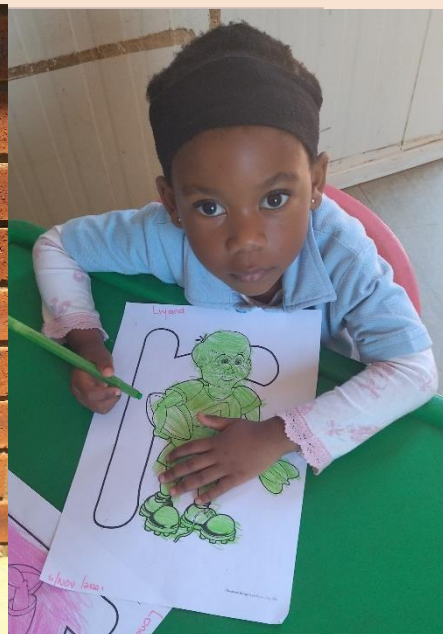


Brentwood Society  
Pietermaritzburg Metro Circuit 801  
Methodist Church of Southern Africa



*"We are the light of the world"*

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## From the Pastor's Desk

Where does one start to thank God for His providence to His mission in Tumbleweed, where we see lives being transformed on a weekly basis through the support of His people of Brentwood United Methodist Church (BUMC)?

What you have in your hand or electronic device is the Annual Report of the work at Brentwood Methodist Church (BMC) for the year 2020-2021. It is not just your ordinary annual report with stories of what has been done throughout the year. This one is special, because it gives us the figures of people whose lives have been transformed through the pre-school, wellness ministry and other works of mercy that we have been part of.

For us on our side, these figures do not mean much anymore, for we have the privilege of seeing things happening in the real sense. We see the hungry receiving food, children receiving first-class pre-school education, staff of the school feeding their families through salaries they earn through working for the church. We see the lonely being visited, communion served to the shut-ins by our assistant pastor, young people using the church for music and after-school classes etc.

We are still celebrating the new building and cannot wait to see the children moving to their classrooms.



All this could not and would never have happened, had it not been for the partnership and support we have received from BUMC.

I implore you to receive this report, not as ours, but yours too, for we are together in this ministry. We are grateful to Rev Allison Gosset for her gentle and pastoral support and wish her well in her new deliberations and future. We are also grateful to Ms Stephanie Smith for her gentle support. We welcome the Rev Shelby Slow and are excited to working with her going forward.

We continue to uphold in our prayers all the people of God at BUMC including the BUMC-SA Ministry. May God bless each and everyone of you and expand your territory.

Rev Prof R Simangaliso Kumalo  
Brentwood Methodist Church, South Africa

We are the light of the world!

“YOU are the Light of the World,” so said Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 5:14. He did not say you *have* the light, but you *are* the light. Light is not something that we possess; it is something that we are. It is our identity as Christians. A Christian cannot not be the light.

Light drives away darkness and allows people to see. We cannot see without it.

By telling us that we are the light of the world, Jesus is implying that the world is in darkness. It is groaning in the darkness of poverty, hunger, ignorance, disease, injustice and violence. We are to be the light of God to this dark world, for our light is the only hope for the world. We are to show love to the world and set an example of what the love of God is like.

Our light should be seen not only in words, but more especially in our deeds. Francis of Assisi wrote, “Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary use words.” What he meant is that it is our actions, more than our words, that preach the Gospel and that show the love of God.



Action speaks louder than words. It is these deeds that glorify God. We are not just to shine our light in our own little circles, but we are to shine it wherever we encounter darkness.

This report is a summary of our humble efforts of living up to Jesus’ command that we be the light of the world. During the period under review, the world was groaning in the darkness of the COVID-19 pandemic and its catastrophic socio-economic impact on the lives of the people.

### COVID-19 wreaks havoc

South Africa’s pre-COVID economy was on its longest downward spiral since World War II. In 2019, ratings agency, Moody’s, downgraded the country’s sovereign credit rating to junk status. The economy was in a mess and was not growing at a rate that would absorb the majority of job seekers. Enter COVID-19. The pandemic exacerbated a situation that was already dire. It severely battered the economy. *Statistics South Africa*, the national statistics agency, reported a jobs bloodbath as a result of the lockdown, as companies closed one after the other.



The informal sector, which employs the majority of the people in our catchment area, was hardest hit. No work because of the lockdown meant no income for those who earn their livelihood from the sector. The R350 (\$23) COVID-19 relief grant from the government was awfully inadequate to meet even the most basic needs of families. The loss of income worsened poverty and seriously impacted household food security in the country. Already in 2019, 11% of the population was suffering from hunger. South Africa's lockdown, which was one of the hardest in the world, left many households on the brink of starvation. The measures implemented to flatten the COVID-19 curve, steepened the curve of economic recession. The pandemic has left in its wake a trail of

destruction whose effects will be with us in a long time to come. According to a UNDP study, South Africa's economy will need at least 5 years to return to pre-COVID levels.

Conscious of our mandate of being light of the world covered by a dark cloud of the pandemic, with the accompanying poverty and hunger, we quickly sprang into action, mobilizing resources and foodstuffs so as to show Christ's love to people who were on the verge of starvation. We could not dim our light at that critical moment of great human need. That would be similar to putting our lights under a bushel, something contrary to our Christ-given mandate.



*Some of the foodstuffs that were distributed to the needy throughout the year.*

### Shining the light during the pandemic

To alleviate the plight of the church members during this very difficult time, BMC, with the generous financial support of the BUMC, purchased food hampers containing basic foodstuffs for all its registered 126 members at a combined cost of over R100 000. During the entire lockdown period, the Society partnered with a local bakery to give loaves of bread twice weekly to members of the community who needed it without regard to their denominational affiliation, reaching over 400 people every week. Our gratitude goes to the BUMC for the funding that enabled us to lighten the burden on the shoulders of our members and the community at large.

## Ministering during the pandemic

The hungry continue to come to the church to collect bread. In these tough times, some have attested that many times this has been their only meal of the day. The Society also purchased food humpers for each of the 113 learners at the pre-primary school. As the virus was still new, there was a lot of ignorance, myths and misinformation about it. To counter this misinformation, the Society also organised an awareness-raising campaign for members of the community and distributed hand



sanitisers and toiletries to over a hundred households.

*The table below shows the number of households that received food parcels during the pandemic.*



Item	Households reached	Frequency
R800 Food parcels	126 households	once-off
R400 Food parcels	113 learners + staff	once-off
Bread	+/- 400 households	weekly

## A growing church

From the original seventy founding members who left the Howick Society in 2007, BMC has experienced substantial growth over the years with around 120 members now calling the Society their spiritual home. Whereas initially members came from Tumbleweed and surrounding communities, now some members from far and wide have made BMC their spiritual home. Statistics of the church membership for the past years show growth.

Because of the growing number of members, Pastor Sizwe Sigwaza was appointed as Pastoral Assistant, to make pastoral visits to members. By the time he left at the end of November, he had visited all members.



More encouraging is the steady rise in the number of the youth and children who are joining the Society from non-Methodist families. This suggests that the future of the Society is bright. While our church services are not as big in number as other societies, they continue to be a source of hope and blessing to many who are touched by our worship services, revivals and other spiritual activities that are aimed at forming an alternative community on earth. BMC has become a very vibrant spiritual home of Methodists and an envy of many societies in the Circuit.



The lockdown adversely affected the activities of the organisations of the church since they could not meet or do their outreach activities. Despite these limitations, the Women's Manyano and the Young

Men's Guild (YMG) embarked on some limited outreach work. The Women's Manyano went to Ixopo and donated shoes to identified needy children. The YMG visited the family of Chief Mkhize who had been shot dead in front of his family, to grieve with the family and offer their condolences.



## Resocialising the boy child

Gender-based violence (GBV) has reached pandemic levels in South Africa. It is even worse in poor areas such as Tumbleweed. Women's bodies have become crime scenes. Estimates indicate that a woman is murdered every 3 hours in the country. This makes South Africa one of the most dangerous places for women on earth. What is worse is that much of the violence is perpetuated by the women's intimate partners. Cases of GBV surged during the lockdown, making GBV a "pandemic within a pandemic." Wanting their light to shine on this issue, the YMG visited schools in the neighbourhood, speaking to boys about this scourge. Their theme, "Raising the boy child," came after the realisation that for long, efforts to end GBV have focused on the girl children, telling them how "not to get raped or abused" by a man. Adopting a new strategy, the YMG spoke to boys about respect for themselves and for girls and how they can play an active role in ending GBV.



As part of its ministry, BMC raises awareness on environmental issues. To this end, members of the YMG planted trees at the site of the new school, to teach the learners and members of the community of the need to green their environment.

### Strengthening the partnership with BUMC

Efforts continued to be made to solidify the partnership between BMC and BUMC even more during the period under review. The generosity of the BUMC enabled BMC to feed the starving during a very difficult time.



*Members of the YMG plant trees at the site of the new school.*

In 2021, BMC hosted Mr Hugh Queener on his visit to South Africa. He rejoiced at the site of the new school. It is our prayer that the partnership will grow from strength to strength. It is difficult to think of what we could have been without this partnership.



*Mr Queener poses for a photo with Rev Prof and Mrs Kumalo at BMC.*

# BRENTWOOD PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL

## Introduction

The long-term impact of quality early childhood education is astounding. Research shows that a child's early learning experiences are crucial determining factors for predicting his/her success in school and in later life. Quality pre-school education helps to lay a strong foundation for the children's physical, mental, emotional, and social development that prepares them for life. Investing in pre-school education puts young minds on a promising path for lifelong learning and future success in the workplace. Pre-school has the ability to nurture caring, capable and responsible future citizens.

Important though pre-school education is, the reality is that many children, particularly those from low-income families, do not have access to quality early childhood education. Yet, these are the ones who tend to reap the most benefits from early childhood education. They, in particular, need to get off to a good start in life. One way to help these children is to place them in quality early education programmes. All children deserve to get off to a good start in life.



## School of choice

The Brentwood Pre-Primary School was established by the BMC with the financial support of the BUMC in 2010, to provide quality early childhood development to the children of the community of Tumbleweed. The school opened its doors with only 20 learners from the Tumbleweed community and two teachers. They were learning in the guard room which had been converted into a classroom. Just two years later, the number of learners had nearly doubled.



*Pastor Sigwaza teaches learners how to pray.*



## The place to be

From those humble beginnings, the school now averages 113 learners per year, has five qualified teachers, four support staff and four well-resourced classrooms.

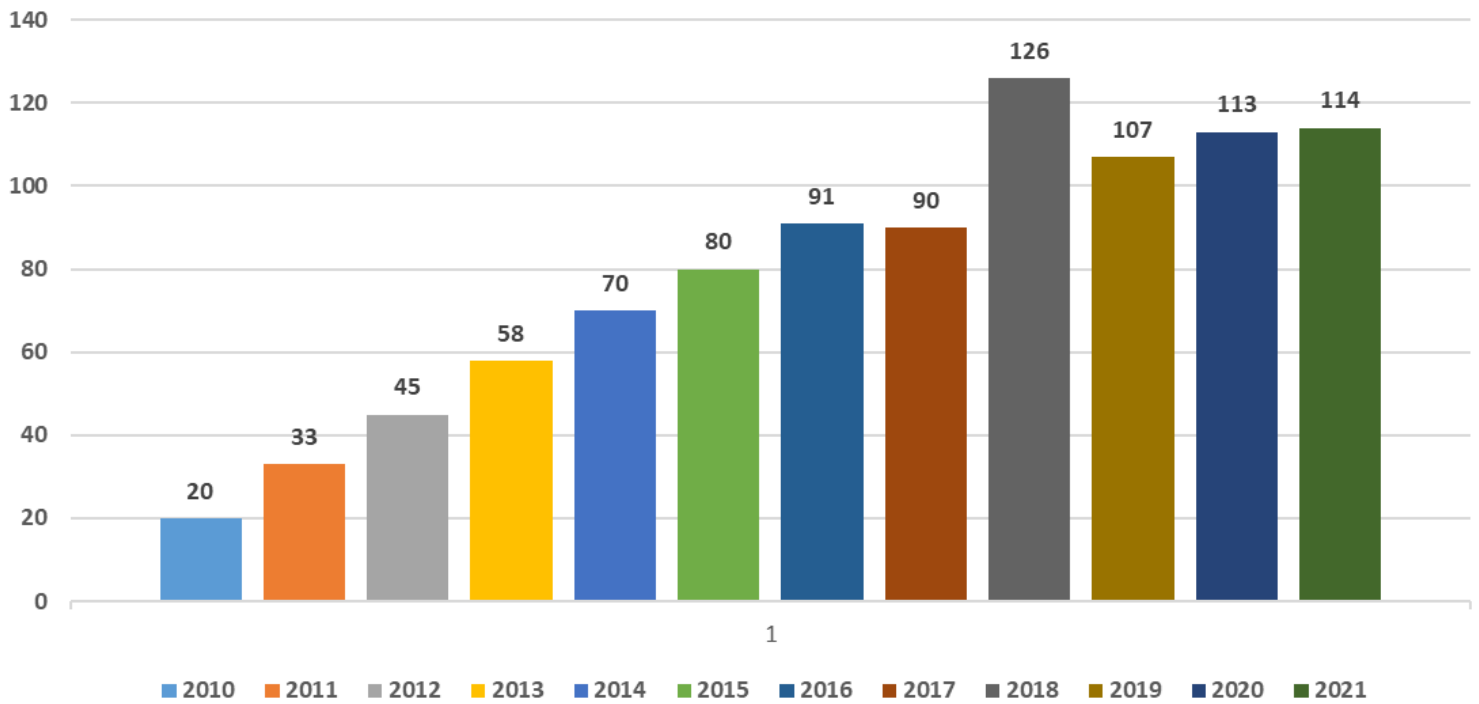
The school has become very popular with parents bringing their children from as far as Kaarlkloof and Mafakathini. In slightly over a decade, it has become the best and most popular institution of its kind in the area. It has better facilities and a larger playground than other schools in the area. Its academic programme is geared to facilitate numeracy and literacy among learners. Graduates find it easy to transition and to do well in primary school.



Furthermore, the use of English as a medium of instruction ensures smooth transition to Tembelihle Primary School, our feeder school, whose medium of instruction is also English. Finally, in a community in which children and young people are more often than not involved in crime and substance abuse, the Methodist ethos is a major attraction. During the lockdown while the learners could not go to school, the hardworking teachers ensured that they give learners weekly homework so that learning could continue.



## Enroment figures since 2010



### Ending child hunger and keeping the kids in school

Although South Africa is reportedly nationally food secure, the reality, however, is that relatively high levels of household and individual food insecurity exist. Many South Africans are vulnerable to food insecurity. The Department of Basic Education has noted that millions of children arrive at school hungry each day. This is even more pronounced in underprivileged communities such as the ones served by Brentwood Pre-Primary School where probably the school meal is their only real meal a day. For this reason, the pre-school provides hot nutritious meals to all the learners every school day. A meal at school goes a long way, not only in motivating the learners to go to school but to keep them focused in the classroom as well.



## Feeding learners during the pandemic

During the lockdown, the BMC, through the generosity of the BUMC and local partners, provided all the learners with food vouchers worthy R400 per learner. Throughout that period, all learners were also supplied with bread twice a week. Even if they were not coming to school, it was important that they be supplied with food because most of them were already vulnerable even before the pandemic and also because most of the breadwinners had lost income as a result of the lockdown. We could not abandon the children we value so much in their greatest moment of need.

Partnerships with local supporters were forged and strengthened. Supermarket chains, such as Woolworths and Spar, as well as bakeries also made donations of bread, dairy products and other groceries to this noble cause of educating and taking care of the welfare of the learners. The school also ensured that all learners come to school in complete uniform. Through partnership with a manufacturer, needy students were identified and provided with uniforms. Members of the church donated branded masks to the learners who could not afford.

*The table shows BMC's efforts at feeding the learners.*

Item	Learners	Frequency
Hot meal	All learners	Every weekday
R400 Food parcels	All learners + staff	Once-off
Bread	All learners	Twice weekly



## New home for Brentwood Pre-Primary School

From its founding in 2010, the pre-primary school has been operating from the church premises. That brought with it a fair share of challenges. There is no ample space for the learners to play in. The church premises at times become congested. Furthermore, the increasing demand of places by prospective learners had been giving us sleepless nights. Every year, we had to make the hard decision of turning away some children. We felt that we were, in a way, denying them a solid start in life. We began to think and dream seriously about finding our own premises where there would be ample space for children to play in and that would also permit us to enrol all children who came to us.

Our prayers were answered when a sizeable piece of land close to the church was offered to us to buy. With the generosity of the BUMC and other partners, we purchased the land. Construction has already started and more fundraising initiatives are happening. By the grace of God, our plans to build a well-equipped learning and play-centre for the children will come to pass.

We continue to be amazed by the light that this little church is shining on the lives of the people of Tumbleweed and surrounding communities. It has lived up to its motto: “We are the light of the world.” In such a short period of time, the church has recorded positive growth in the number of members. Through its robust yet humble ministries, it has touched the lives of the vulnerable, poor and marginalised. That way, it has become one of the most socially-active societies in our Synod. During the pandemic, the church has been visible, shining its light, giving hope and love through food supplies. Our children continue to be nourished by our children's programmes. Through the Youth and Children's Ministry, we continue to nurture the children and youth to be responsible, active and spirit filled citizens. Our pre-primary school continues to reverse the legacy of illiteracy. We never cease to thank God and our partners for helping us to touch the lives of so many people in such a short space of time.

