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MCSA ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS UNIT FIRST THURSDAYS NEWSLETTER

Fourteen

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Greetings and Peace be with you.

**FIVE YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS 2015- 2020 FOLLOWING JESUS, THE SWALLOWS
WAY REVISED 30 AUGUST 2020**

One of the great football clubs in South Africa were left wandering for FIVE YEARS IN THE soccer WILDERNESS from 2015- 2020 FOLLOWING being relegated from top flight soccer in the South African Premier Soccer League (PSL) to the National First Division (NFD) until it sunk into the lowest of the professional soccer leagues known as the Motsepe league. Even in this lowest league the once mighty Birds were faced with being relegated to the amateur leagues. The remnant determined members; players and some of the management were not going to let this happen. They paid players from their own pockets; lobbied influential business people; organised a supporter fundraising scheme and managed to buy a club in the NFD. The woes continued. Once back in the NFD they were again face with relegation to the Motsepe league once more.

In stepped David Mogashoa and hired coach Brandon Truter and things turned around. On the 30 August 2020 it all went down to the wire, with Swallows shading it by a difference of 1 goal against rivals Ajax Cape Town. (Who still stand a chance of promotion in the play offs – we wish them well). Thanks to Kagiso Malinga two goals which contributed to their famous 3-0 win over Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila FC at Makhulong Stadium on 30 August 2020.

Swallows in the doldrums in 2015 became Swallows the Glad Africa (NFD) champions and automatic promotion back to the PSL on 30 August 2020. Five years in the wilderness – during the time of wilderness an article was written for MCSA news mouthpiece, New Dimension titled SANIBONANI FOLLOWING JESUS, THE SWALLOWS WAY – 29/11/2018. In this article we looked at the difference between a supporter and a follower and card-carrying member. These became valuable lessons for those who desire the tough road of being a Christ-follower and indeed also a valuable lesson for on the road of ecumenical relations.

The New Dimension article read as follows:

TO BE A SUPPORTER

To be a supporter of a sports club is like the person standing in the crowd of onlookers when Jesus was preaching the Sermon on the mount and they only heard ‘blessed are the ‘cheese-makers’ instead of “blessed are the peacemakers.¹ Your relationship with the club is distanced. A supporter will seldom if ever go the stadium and watch the game from the ‘safety’ of their lounge on TV. A

¹ Monty Python; “Life of Brian”

supporter has a shallow commitment. If you don't like the way they perform you merely move away or seek another club to support.

WHEN YOU ARE A CARD-CARRYING CLUB MEMBER

When you are a card-carrying club member, then you are true member, fan and supporter all in one. You will follow the club wherever they may sit on the League table. You will joyfully renew your membership every year no matter the cost. If they are relegated you will follow the club. When everyone abandons the club, one remains a resolute member. Others tempt one to change allegiances and join another club. Some sneer; some pity one, some give encouragement at the demise of the club. But the true member lives in hope and takes action to revive the club to its former glory days. This will take time. But glimmers of hope began to appear when committed supporters and a remnant management found a new owner and coach.

This has been my journey with the maroon and white Jerseyed club **Moroka Swallows from SOWETO founded in 1948** now known as **Swallows FC**. I first became aware of the Dube Birds when, in 1979 I worked with the club's reserve Goalkeeper. I have been a card-carrying member together with my daughter since I took her to her first stadium match at the age of eight.

Once giants in the PSL, at the time of writing this article in 2018 the team was lying third in the Motsepe League. A group of unknown young talented players formed the new team. At the helm was little-known coach Isaac Mphasane. We give thanks for seasoned and committed member **Moses Mzimkhulu Mbamba at SWALLOWS FC** who kept us die-hard fans and members informed daily of fixtures and results through social media.

From this five-year journey in the soccer wilderness a parallel (or parable if you like) emerged on how to follow Jesus the Swallows way. It needs for us to do three things:

To be **Committed** no matter what comes our way. 'Stand firm'² says Paul to the church in Thessalonica. In dark days remain a follower, remain committed, don't abandon the club; don't abandon God. When Swallows face relegation from PSL and then NFD, many ran away to other clubs. But the faithful remained. We need to be well resourced to achieve this. Members and Fans were able to buy shares or more accurately the right to vote at R350 each. This has been achieved because of the commitment of the Swallows members and fans. When faced with the likelihood of suffering the cross, do we abandon our belief in God?

To **Communicate** that hope is still alive. Thanks to Moses who took the initiative to keep us updated. He helped us keep hope alive. Thanks to faithful preachers and ministers who week after week keep hope alive as they expound that we are to "hold fast the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter."³ In today's terms it is by word of mouth and social media.

To seek the right **Combination** of players to bring us back to the NFD and then the PSL. Not everyone can be a striker, we need defenders; mid-field game makers; a good last line of defence, and a goalkeeper.

The church is made up of various combinations of members, those who are set aside as Pastor, Priest and Prophet, those who are effective door, society, communion, circuit stewards. Those who are administrators. A defender is often not a good striker and thinks defence. In the same way a ministers primary calling is not administration (even though at times this seems to be the plumb-line against which ministry is measured) A church that does not confuse its roles of gifting and maintains good combinations of people will score many kingdom goals.

² 1 Corinthians 16:13

³ 2 Thessalonians 2:15

Up the beautiful Dube Birds. amaSwai Swai for life.

Up the God of abundant Grace. amaJesu Jesu for life.

WORKING TOWARD ECUMENICAL UNITY THE SWALLOWS WAY:

Most of what was said above applies to the individual members' commitment to a single church or denomination. Yet the club owner of the church universal calls us beyond the narrow confines of denominationalism.⁴

The ecumenical journey toward unity of a fractured church needs to firstly identify and name its divisions and challenges. COVID 19, through the establishment of Local Ecumenical Action Networks has brought these into sharp focus. The divisions remain:

- Denominational/Doctrinal
- Racial disparity favouring whites
- Gender disparity favouring males
- Socio -economic disparity.

The South African based Church Unity Commission⁵ has been walking in the wilderness for more than fifty years with some results around issues of Ministry; Ordination of women and is yet to come to some semblance of agreement around episcopate oversight (Bishops; Moderators)

A remnant has remained committed to ensuring the journey continues. However, the remnant has been largely driven by a liberal white male ethos; which replicates all CUC member churches.

In recent years a new Secretary General, Rev Sikawu Makubalo, is at the helm. and the broader necessary questions of the Euro-centric nature of church divisions on an African landscape is the growing healthier narrative.

Is this the Swallows moment when they changed ownership and coach that led them to the PSL?

Will the CUC, having identified that it had wrong combinations; now begin to find new players to turn the CUC around?

Metaphorically speaking The CUC has moved from the Motsepe league to the Glad Afrika NFD division. Will the CUC have the resilience and stamina to reach the PSL; the Unity league?

Will the CUC find the appropriate commitment; communication and combinations?

Only time and choices of players at this juncture will tell?

Up the beautiful Dube Birds. amaSwai Swai for life.

Up the CUC ama-Unity Unity for life

Up the God of abundant Grace. ama-Jesu Jesu for life.

Peace be with you...

Warm regards

Rev Mike Vorster

MCSA Director of Ecumenical Affairs

⁴ John 17; Ephesians 4

⁵ <https://churchunitycommission.org>