

**THE ROLE OF REFUGEE ESTABLISHED CHURCHES IN THE LIVES OF  
FORCED MIGRANTS:  
A CASE STUDY OF WORD OF LIFE ASSEMBLY IN YEOVILLE,  
JOHANNESBURG**

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**A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Arts  
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Master of Arts**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my beloved God-given wife, Jeannette Nyirabagenzi Nzayabino, and my dear children, Doreen Baraka Nzayabino, Providence Shimwa Nzayabino and David Izere Nzayabino,

To the Buff family, Pastor Sibiya family, Pastor Bizamenyamungu family and Mr. Jean Chrisostome Kanamugire,

I gratefully dedicate this work.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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I would like to thank the Forced Migration Studies Programme for the financial support towards the successful completion of this research.

I also address my gratitude to the pastor of Word of Life Assembly, Rev. A. Kipa, and all the respondents who voluntarily participated in this research.

I also express my deepest gratitude to my wife and children for their humble suffering from my absence during my studies. May God bless you for your loving endurance.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the fervent prayers of the children of God who have been praying for me. This is a result of your prayers. May our Lord richly bless you all.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts in Forced Migration Studies, in the Graduate School for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Vedaste Nzayabino

March 2005

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CASE	:	Community Agency for Social Equity
DRC	:	Democratic Republic of Congo
UN	:	United Nations
UNHCR:		United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WITS	:	University of the Witwatersrand
WOLA	:	Word of Life Assembly

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**CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

**1.1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

In the process of negotiating their livelihoods in host communities, forced migrants – especially those staying in urban areas – have recourse to a wide range of survival strategies, including small business, employment, studies, and use of local assistance channels and remittances from abroad. Alongside these common coping schemes, another form of coping strategy is increasingly taking shape within refugee communities, especially in Africa. That is religion. The emergence and, particularly, the influence of this new coping mechanism within refugee communities has attracted a number of researchers and academics (see theoretical considerations below) to consider religion and spirituality in forced migration studies and debates. Thus, Diana Eck (cited in Gozdziaik 2002:136), emphatically affirms that today, religion is increasingly a subject of study and that people are becoming increasingly aware of the power of religion in their own societies. Interestingly, this trend is clearly noticeable in the field of forced migration where refugees tend to become more religious in the host countries than in their home countries. In United States for instance, Warner (2000:2) reports that (South) Korea is approximately 25% Christian, but 50% of emigrants from that country to the U.S. are Christians, and half of the remainder join Christian churches as they settle into the U.S. The result is that approximately 75% of Korean immigrants in the U.S. are Christian.

Likewise, a similar phenomenon is observed among Burundi refugee youths in Tanzania, among whom Sommers (2001) points out the exponential increase in church membership, especially within Pentecostal refugee churches. According to his findings,

the missionaries from the Pentecostal Church Association of Tanzania (PCAT) in Dar-es Salaam reported that the number of Pentecostal refugees tripled between the mid 1970s and 1992. Another striking fact about this report is that “every Burundi refugee youth interviewed, and nearly the entire Burundi refugee community in Dar-es Salaam attended Pentecostalist churches” (2001:362).

The fact that migrants become more receptive to religion in host communities than in their home countries suggests that religion plays an important role in their lives as migrants. But, despite this observation, little has been written about the role of religion in the field of forced migration. The same concern is raised by Thomas (2003:36-37) during a Special Colloquium held at University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. She remarks that “the extent to which religious assets contributed to the ability to absorb or shoulder the shock (at individual, household or community level) is an important, yet unanswered question”. Therefore, the role of religion in the lives of migrants certainly deserves further investigation.

Particularly, the multiplicity of churches within refugee communities in Yeoville, Johannesburg (more than 50% of the churches operating in that area were established or are headed by forced migrants)<sup>1</sup> is a major motivational factor for the present research. The Word of Life Assembly is one of those churches, and is the object of the present research. The church counts a total of about 450 members, mostly forced migrants (about 95%) from a variety of African countries.

Thus, this research seeks to investigate the role of the Word of Life Assembly church in the lives of forced migrants in Yeoville, Johannesburg, with particular reference to the question of how forced migrants understand the role of the church.

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1 These figures are the result of the researcher’s two-day preliminary survey in Yeoville. During the survey all churches officially operating in the area, irrespective of their denominational streams, were physically identified, and a short contact with some church officials was made to get general information about church leadership and membership status (see appendix 6).

### **1.1.1. Research Question**

The fact that forced migrants often prefer having their own churches leads to the following research questions:

Why are refugee churches established within the host community where local churches already exist? In other words, what is the role of refugee churches within refugee communities? And how do refugees understand the role of the church in their community?

Indeed, refugee churches are not established in isolation. They operate within the community in close proximity to other (host) churches. Some of them, the Ethiopian Global Faith Mission Ministries, for instance, even use the premises of other churches for their weekly meetings and Sunday services. This fact is not incidental. Rather, it suggests that the refugee church has a specific role or mission to accomplish among this particular community, and which, therefore, justifies its establishment. Thus, it is imperative to investigate this phenomenon for a better, in-depth understanding of the role of the church within forced migrants' communities.

The aim of this research is to first, explore factors contributing to the establishment of refugee churches, and then, determine their specific role in the lives of the refugees they serve. That is, ways in which the church responds to the needs of forced migrants. Close attention is focused on exploring ways forced migrants understand the role of the church, and on determining to which extent does the church contribute to the improvement of forced migrant's lives.

### **1.1.2. Hypotheses of the Study:**

The present project tests the following hypotheses: Refugee churches exist alongside host churches because:

1. Refugee established churches are more integrative than local churches. As stated above, refugee churches are established alongside existing local churches. Although having their denominational counterparts within the same area (Yeoville), some of these refugee churches – especially “Pentecostal” or “charismatic” churches – do operate independently from the former. The researcher tests the assumption that the establishment of forced migrants’ churches is symptomatic of a lack of [or difficulty in] integration into these [local] churches. Integration not only refers to integrating with local people, but also to integration with other members of forced migrants’ national communities, groups with whom they may share common values, language and lifestyles (Eyber 2004:74). Both these aspects of integration are in this report.
2. Religion is a coping strategy for refugees. In fact, refugee established churches extend their role far beyond purely spiritual needs to meet other multi-faceted needs of the refugee. As Firth (cited in McMichael 2002:172) argues, religious practice supplies people with patterns for conduct in daily life and in times of crisis, and provides a framework for living in the world. Thus, refugee churches are effective instruments in alleviating the protracted challenges facing urban forced migrants.

### 1.1.3. Rationale of the Study

The merit of this research derives from many reasons. Recent literature deplores the little interest accorded to religion in forced migration studies and its role in the lives of refugees. Researchers have tended to neglect the role of religion and spirituality as a source of emotional and cognitive support, a vehicle of community building and group identity (Gozdziak 2002:137; McMichael 2002:172).

Despite the active role of religion in facilitating the resettlement of refugees (Mamgain 2003: 116) and providing them with a wide range of social services, “public debates about forced migration and displacement on the international and national levels have tended to ignore religious and spiritual issues” (Gozdziak 2002: 137). More particularly in Africa, the same oversight is raised by Sommers (2001:362), who asserts that no aspect of refugee society and culture is as overlooked by researchers and most humanitarian relief agencies as their religious lives.

However, in addition to the apparent role that religion exercises in the lives of forced migrants, there is a close connection between forced migration and religion. Thus, Warner (2000:1) unequivocally remarks that “migration is not random with respect to religion”, and strongly concludes that migration is a *theologizing experience*, just to stress on this link and underline the pivotal role that religion plays in forced migration.

Thus, the present research which is concerned with the role of religion in forced migration contributes to filling in the gap identified above. Whilst recognizing the contribution of other works done in the field of forced migration, such as CASE research (2003), and more especially the Wits University research (Landau 2004) – the most comprehensive and extensive research so far done among forced migrants in the city of Johannesburg – it is, however, noteworthy that religious issues, notably the role of religion, are but rarely and lightly discussed in these studies. Interestingly, from these two prominent works, the church or mosque is ranked among major sources of assistance

available to urban forced migrants (CASE 2003:86-87, 134-141; Wits University 2004:52), but the nature and the extent of this assistance remains undisclosed and unexamined. More significantly, assessing refugees' participation in community organizations, the last study (CASE) reveals that churches or mosques represent the most popular organizations that applicants (refugees) belong to, and recommends that awareness campaigns aimed at refugee communities should probably declare churches' assistance to be successful" (2003:171).

Moreover, if we are to credit the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Art. 1) for having entrenched persecution on the ground of religion among the statutory conditions for [refugee] protection, we are also to deplore the fact that religion has been neglected in the refugee policies. In this regard, Gozdziaik and Shandy (2002:130) also raise this gap issue by saying that the relationship between religious persecution and refugees has been long considered of importance as a root cause of flight, and should be of equal importance in protection *and livelihood* [emphasis added] of refugees. In other words, as the 1951 UN Convention has given full recognition of the importance of religion in including it among the core grounds for refugee status, likewise refugee stakeholders and humanitarian policy makers should recognize and uphold its role in the refugees' lives.

The need to carry out this research has been mainly ignited by both the apparent proliferation of independent churches among refugees' communities in general, and among forced migrants in the area of Yeoville in particular. Thus, it is believed that the study brings forth substantial empirical data, susceptible to informing both policy makers and the host communities about the role of the church in forced migrants' community.

#### **1.1.4. The Word of Life Assembly Background**

The Word of Life Assembly was established in December 2000 by Reverend Alves M. Kipa, a pastor from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Word of Life Assembly is an independent Pentecostal church. Though closely working with Rhema Bible Church in Johannesburg, and notwithstanding its affiliation with the International Federation of Christian Churches (IFCC) – a large independent church association – the Word of Life Assembly remains financially and structurally autonomous vis-à-vis these two entities. This administrative autonomy seems to be the trend of most of the Pentecostal churches.

Rev. Kipa is the sole founder and also the senior pastor of the church. He received the calling to establish a church years ago when he was a missionary to Angola. The calling became real when Kipa left another Pentecostal church that belonged to a Congolese bishop, Daniel Moteba, in Johannesburg Park in 2000. According to Kipa (interview, 21/5/2004), the church started at his own flat he was renting in Hillbrow, and then moved to the Protea Hotel in Berea. After some time, the church moved to a hall at Hillbrow Street in Berea. The hall was opened to other churches that could use it by means of paying affordable rentals. The church had grown up to about 100 members later on in 2001, when it moved to Yeoville, corner Hunter and Kenmere Street.

The church has presently about 450 full members from various nationalities in the following approximate proportions: Congolese 95%, South Africans 2%, Angolans 1%, others 2%. The last component, “*others*”, includes mainly Christians from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Republic of Congo, and Rwanda.

As these figures show, the Word of Life Assembly church is essentially composed of foreigners (about 98%), predominantly refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (about 95%).

#### **1.1.4.1. WOLA Infrastructures and Assets**

The church owns a property at corner Kenmere and Hunter Street (about 6,000m<sup>2</sup>), which formerly used to be a Jewish Centre. The church has already paid the deposit towards the purchase of the whole property and is paying monthly installments thereof.

The property comprises of an old church building with a double-volume auditorium (about 1,000 seats). On northern part of the building, there is a pastor's office (about 36m<sup>2</sup>), the church administrator's office (about 16m<sup>2</sup>) and a small waiting room intersecting the two offices. The southern side of the building essentially comprises bathrooms and a small store room. The centre also includes two more double-story buildings, relatively very close each other. Apart from the rooms occupied by the Sunday school, the crèche and the "Agence Grace Business" (a Congolese-owned freight agency), and some church members that the church accommodates, about five big rooms in the north building remain empty – probably because they are in a need of a general renovation and equipment. Anyway, even though most of the corridors are dark, some families seem not to bother staying in a room with home-made room dividers and without adequate lighting.

The south building comprises of two halls that are rented by the Global Faith Mission Ministries, an Ethiopian Christian church, and a common vast and unequipped kitchen used by some families staying inside the building.

Global Faith Mission Ministries was established in 2003 by an Ethiopian pastor, Rev. W.H. Meron. In an informal interview with one of the pastoral team members, the researcher was told that Global Faith Mission Ministries flows from the same denominational stream as WOLA, and that both churches virtually confess the same faith. Asked why then the two churches could not merge into one to subvert financial costs – the Ethiopian church rents the WOLA's hall it uses – the respondent replied that they cannot merge because most of the members speak neither English nor French. He insisted that this was the main reason why they started their own church. The Ethiopian



church services are exclusively held in '*Amharic*', the native language of the majority of the members in that church. In contrast to WOLA, Ethiopian service at Global Faith Mission Ministries is relatively shorter and less noisy than the Congolese service at WOLA. Even though the two churches are so close (about 10m distance), WOLA high-volume speakers and amplifiers far overpower echoes from their Ethiopian brethren.

The WOLA open parking seems more than enough for both WOLA and Global Faith Mission Ministries, even on Sundays. It is particularly during the November WOLA Convention 2004 that the parking was filled to its capacity.

WOLA owns two computers – one in the pastor's office and the other in the administrator's office. Three main items in the pastor's office seem to catch the attention of a visitor: a modest carpet, two wooden chairs and a large shelving structure that still needs to be filled with some more books. There is no photocopy machine. The fax machine does all: faxing and photocopying. The church does not have access to land telephone line. Nevertheless, the communication with WOLA remains possible, because both the pastor and the administrator have got cell phones.

WOLA is run by 8 full time staff, including the senior pastor, assistant pastor, church administrator, youth leader, 2 evangelists, musician and a cleaner. The last two staff members are South African citizens. The administrator's office also shelters a small bookstore where audio tapes and video cassettes of famous Congolese preachers and gospel singers, French and English Bibles and a few Christian books can be purchased at a reasonable price. The bookshop items seem to be one of the main sources of income of the church. At every Sunday service and Friday evening service, the one who gives announcement – and sometimes the pastor himself – will make sure to advertise the prices of tapes and videos, and repeatedly encouraging people to buy. Shortly after the WOLA Convention 2004, the pastor announced that all Sunday services would be video-recorded, and strongly urged members to purchase video cassettes.

#### **1.1.4.2. WOLA Vision and Mission**

WOLA's vision is "to teach the Word of Life with simplicity and understanding that we may approve things that are excellent"<sup>2</sup>. In order to carry out this vision, WOLA is committed to the following:

- To pray on a daily basis that God's blessings be upon each member
- To minister the Word of God to equip members for the work of the ministry
- To organize Bible study, Biblical seminars and Conventions
- To counsel and help those in need
- To evangelize

The member's part is mainly to regularly pray for the church, financially support the church, and attend all meetings.

#### **1.1.4.3. Yeoville**

As already stated above, WOLA is established and operates in a place called Yeoville, North-East of Johannesburg. The choice of this site by WOLA was not incidental. In fact, Yeoville is reputed to be one of the popular urban areas in Johannesburg for migrants. With loud music and high volume microphones, WOLA has become one of the popular foreign churches in Yeoville. This makes WOLA strategically fit into the heart of the busy and noisy Yeoville, just next to Raleigh, the main and busiest street in Yeoville. The streets are full of people from early morning until late in evening, speaking diverse foreign languages – some with strange accent, others with strange loudness. Congolese women can be easily identified from this varied mass in their traditional clothes *vitenge* and *wigs*, by anyone who is acquainted with Congolese culture.

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2 The vision and mission of WOLA appear on the back of the monthly church program which is distributed during Sunday service. See appendix No 5

In the streets, the population is essentially Black and young. White people are hardly to be seen in this congested area. From time to time, I could see some white faces at the *Time Square*, the most popular pub in Yeoville (about 200 km from WOLA). When I curiously asked about them I was told that most of these Whites are researchers who have made appointment with their clients (informants) to meet at this well-known and ever busy place.

Being located in proximity to Yeoville shopping centre, WOLA enables Congolese retailers at Yeoville market to shortly close their stands and rush to church to attend a 30 minutes prayer session, which is held daily from 12:00 to 12:30. The church is open 7 days a week. Even though the pastor is not all the time in his office, but at least the church administrator (a Congolese) makes sure to be there full time. Even though most of the time I could not get inside his small office to bid him a good morning, yet I was able to see the administrator's Mercedes Benz parked in front of his office, every time I passed by the church.

The church yard is never deserted throughout the day. There are always people going in and out of WOLA premises, exchanging greetings in French and or Lingala. For the first time, I thought these people were WOLA members staying on the premises. After enquiring from one of the WOLA members, I was told that some are tenants who are renting rooms, and others are coming for some other business with the Congolese Freight Agency, "Agence Grace Business", which operates within the premises of WOLA ( to be discussed later).

Being unknown to many of them, especially before I was officially introduced to the whole congregation in October 2004, a church member could *suspiciously* greet him in English, and immediately change the greeting into a welcome hug accompanied with a Congolese most respectful greeting *bonjour papa*, after introducing myself as a French-speaking refugee. Since then, people started to be more and more confident and open to me.

Few days before interviews started in November, I was excited to see for the first time a white figure in the compound of the church. For the sake of the representativeness of the study I was very happy to include this figure in my sample. But the excitement soon turned into illusion when I learned that the new face was not a WOLA member. She was only there for the sake of the crèche that she runs at the church. Even though, during the informal interview on 21<sup>st</sup> May, the pastor indicated that the church comprises people from all races, including Blacks, White, and Indians, yet since I started attending services at WOLA (from June to December 2004), I only saw one white pastor, Rev. John Bendixen, who had been invited together with other guest speakers at the WOLA Convention which was held from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> November 2004. Briefly, services at WOLA are 100% Black, mainly refugees from the Republic Democratic of Congo (about 95%).

#### **1.1.4.4. Worship at WOLA**

The first time I attended the church service (23<sup>rd</sup> May 2004), I followed from far the sound of the loud music characterizing the Congolese music. Towards the entrance of the building, there was no need for me to check on the big signboard to be sure whether I was entering WOLA. Songs in the Lingala language and the high speed rhythm of accompanying guitars and drums tell all. There are cars in the parking lot, but the majority of members come to church on foot. Anyway, most of the members stay in the vicinity of the church. A number of expensive cars in the parking lot indicates diversity of social-economic status among WOLA members.

Worshippers enter the church through two main doors. Two ushers in uniform (a multicoloured shirt made of a Congolese material ‘kitenge’) stand up at each entrance to welcome and usher in all comers. Children are conducted to a Sunday school in a separate building. Each congregant is given a paper containing the church’s vision and mission and a monthly church program. Once inside the auditorium, you can choose any seat from four rows of pews. You can also decide to go up-stairs and sit in the upper

level of the auditorium. But, unless on special event, such as during the November WOLA Convention 2004, there is no need to climb up stairs since the ground level pews are hardly full. Through an inner door from the waiting room, the senior pastor enters the auditorium alongside with a deacon carrying his Bible and sermon's notes.

Every Sunday, only one service, of about 3 hours is held at WOLA. About 300 people attend the service. Interpreters (generally three) from French into English and *vice-versa* rotate throughout the whole service. The service starts at 9:30 a.m with a 30 minutes intercession. During intercessions, the prayer leader announces, one by one, various prayer items, including praying for many people to get saved, the church service, the pastor and his sermon, the sick and the poor, the peace to reign in South Africa and in home countries, and blessings upon the businesses of the members among many other items. After intercessions, the congregation enters another half hour of lively worship and praise led by one of the choir members. The church choir is very active during this sensational second part of the service. Hands up, or alternatively clapping them, all members enjoy dancing in harmony with the loud songs in Lingala, French, Swahili, English or Zulu. Apart from dancing in rhythm with the instruments, a visitor will, however, not be able to join the congregation in singing, because there is neither running electronic message board (or an overhead projector) to display songs, nor hymnal books. Worshippers in WOLA know their songs by memory. Interestingly, even South African choir members sing well in French and Lingala. When it is time for offering, one of the church elders steps to the pulpit to talk about offering. He emphatically challenges and exhorts the congregation to generously give while expecting blessings from God. Then, two big baskets are placed in front of the pulpit where members individually bring their offerings. Now comes the crucial part of the service: the sermon, or the Word of God. The senior pastor, A. Kipa, together with his interpreter climb up the pulpit, and the whole congregation vividly applauds. During the message, everybody is quiet to listen to the highly amplified preacher's voice. The sermon is delivered in French and interpreted into English. Throughout the sermon the preacher receives acclamations and shouts from the congregation whenever he says something interesting or special. Towards the end of

the message, the pastor normally invites people who need special prayers or who have needs to come forward and pray for them. Immediately after the closure of the service, visitors are called up together to fill in visitor's cards and share more with ushers and/or elders. The rest of the congregation slowly flow out the auditorium towards the parking where hugging and chatting take their course. The pastor himself hurries out and gives hugs to as many as possible, calling almost each member by his/her name. The greeting title is always either "*papa* so and so..." (for men), or "*mama* so and so..." (for women) before he wishes you God's blessings.

#### **1.1.4.5. Prosperity Gospel**

The explanation of the concept of *prosperity gospel* becomes relevant and useful in understanding the church service in general, and the nature of messages preached at WOLA in particular. As stated above, WOLA is one of many independent churches where the "theology of prosperity" is frequently preached. Prosperity teachings and practices involve the instrumentalization of the sacred of religions of difference to obtain secular ends (Woodhead 2000:174). According to the prosperity gospel, material wealth and prosperity are signs of God's blessing, and the material lack a sign of God's disapproval of faithlessness (Germond 2004:11) or a curse from the devil.

Thus, being a former graduate of the Rhema Bible Training Centre<sup>3</sup> – a Bible school that belongs to Rhema Bible Church in Rustenburg, Johannesburg – the pastor of WOLA seems to strongly believe in prosperity theology.

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3 See P. Germond 2004: Dynamics of Power and Discourses of Gender at Rhema Bible Church, Johannesburg – Unpublished paper. In this paper, Germond indicates that the prosperity theology is part of the Rhema experience. He quotes Mc Cauley, the senior pastor of Rhema Bible Church: "If anybody wants you to tell you that God does not want to bless you, they are lying. The reason why I believe in prosperity more than ever is because God uses us to alleviate poverty....Nobody can persuade me that God doesn't want His people to have more than enough!" (p.11).

Messages of prosperity were particularly predominant during the WOLA Convention held in November 2004. The theme of the Convention was “Creating with God”. In line with this theme, almost all the sermons preached during the week were encouraging members to “speak” blessings upon themselves. The central truth was that God is ready to bless their *positive* faith. Thus, for instance, interpreting the discourse of Jesus to his disciples when sending them out “The harvest is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Luke 10:2, New King James Version), the pastor told the congregation that “The year 2005 is a year of plenty blessings”. “If you have not opened a bank account, it is time to open it now”, “if you do not have a driver’s licence, it is time to get it now”, “if you have not applied for a job, start preparing your C.V., because next year God is going to bless your businesses, bless you with cars and jobs”<sup>4</sup>.

#### **1.1.4.6. The Democratic Republic of Congo in brief**

As stated earlier, WOLA is almost entirely (more than 95%) made of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the countries of Great Lake region in the central Africa. Since the last decade the large part of this region has been the theatre of protracted socio-political conflicts that have produced large-scale influxes of refugees abroad.

Although the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly named Zaïre in 1971 by the then President Mobutu until May 1997, is endowed with immense economic resources – notably its vast mineral wealth – the country’s economy has been characterized by protracted instability.

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4 The message was preached by pastor Kipa during WOLA Convention which was held from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2004.

In June-July 1994, the nation's problems were compounded by an influx of hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees from the neighboring Rwanda. In 1996 and 1997, rebels led by Laurent Kabila and supported by Rwandan and Ugandan forces launched a politically and ethnically-linked war and captured much of the Eastern part of the country. The rebels' influence did not take long time to go as far as Kinshasa the capital city, forcing the then government to start political negotiations with them. In May 1997 Kinshasa fell into the hands of the rebels and Laurent Kabila was enthroned as the President of the new country, renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo. This would seemingly be the end of the conflict, but it was not so. Rather, the war showed another side of the coin. Thus, in 1998, another group of rebels backed by Rwanda and Uganda rose up against Kabila and advanced towards Kinshasa. In July 1999, a cease-fire agreement between the two belligerents was officially signed in Lusaka, Zambia. Noteworthy that this agreement, in fact, did not stop the growing conflict, for it has been sporadically violated by either party. In January 2001 President Laurent Kabila was assassinated, and his son, Joseph Kabila succeeded him. Meanwhile the anti-Kabila group went on with the conflicts and in April 2003 another peace deal that called for a power-sharing and a new constitution was signed in Pretoria, South Africa. Again, despite the peace deal, fighting among factions continues, especially in the eastern parts of the country, causing deaths and massive displacements within and out of the country until now.<sup>5</sup>

According to the interviews the majority of refugees at WOLA come from Kinshassa, the capital city of DRC and Lubumbashi, one of the main towns in the South-East of the country.

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5 This is an extract from the Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (2003) on the Democratic Republic of Congo, at <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0813218.html>  
Also, see BBC News (2004/06/03), at <http://www.newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/c...>



## **1.2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Although religion has not been given the attention it duly deserves in the studies of forced migration, it has not been entirely ignored in the refugee debates, especially in the circles of contemporary researchers.

As Eck (2000) observes, religion is now increasingly in public view, not only as a matter of practice, but as a subject of study, because people “are becoming increasingly aware of the power of religion in their own societies and the world” (cited by Gozdzia 2002:136). However, if one is to agree with Eck’s optimistic postulate that the public is getting interested in religion in general, Gozdzia cautions that the same cannot be said about the refugee field. He affirms that “public debates about forced migration and displacement on the international and national levels have tended to ignore religions and spiritual issues” (2002:137). It is exactly this particular lacuna that has inspired and motivated the choice of the topic under investigation.

The first section discusses literature which presents religion as an identity of a social group. The second section critically evaluates the literature on religion and the phenomenon of integration. The last two sections respectively explain the demarcation between Independent Churches and Mainline Churches, and the rise of Pentecostal movement in Africa.

### **1.2.1. Religion as an Identity of a social group**

As stated earlier, there is a close link between forced migration and religion. This postulate is implicitly substantiated by Sol (1982:38) in saying that “when the people move, the church moves”. In other words, Sol believes in *continuity* of religion by further explaining that refugees in reality move from one ecclesiastical jurisdiction to another – and pastoral service to refugees in this situation amounts essentially to an effort of co-

ordination. Warner (2000) holds a similar view in saying that the role of religion – both as an identity immigrants bring from the home country and a mode of social participation in the host country – cannot be neglected. He emphasizes that religion is typically salient for migrants.

The power of religion to shape the identity of individuals is further put forward by Gunn (2002:16), in asserting that “as identity, religion is less a matter of theological beliefs than it is an issue of family, culture, ethnicity, and nationality”. Gunn insists that ethnicity and religion are closely associated. The present study has rather revealed that, as far as the Congolese community is concerned, religion is more intimately associated with culture and nationality than ethnicity.

This last argument – religion as an identity – has mainly inspired the researcher to hypothesize that religion is an effective instrument of integration. The researcher also drew from Gozdziaik’s declaration that “for most refugees and immigrants, religion helps define their identity” (2002:130), and from Wagner (1995) who states that religion refers to the deepest commitment and deepest identity of a person or group.

Furthermore, most of the readings agree that religion offers emotional and spiritual healing. Religious beliefs and rituals help refugees to recover from trauma (Gozdziaik 2002:131,142), and provide them a degree of psychological support and emotional benefits in the face of the challenges of urban life (Agadjanian 1998: 292, 298).

Additionally, discussing the issue of ‘prosperity religion’ preached in many churches today, Schneider and Dornbusch (cited in Woodhead and Heelas, eds. 2000:187) observe that religion promotes success, brings happiness, satisfaction and emotional security, and wealth. In fact, concurring with Zetter (1999:61), churches are well-placed to respond in the early stages of forced displacement because, for a newcomer, religious institutions are easily identifiable and more accessible than any other institutions in a [foreign] host community.

A similar conclusion was reached by Dyrness et.al., (2002:5) in his study on the impact of religious congregations in California (United States of America) on the community at large. The study argues that “temples, synagogues, mosques, and churches are often the first places that people turn to for social services and, thus, they have a natural connection to the needs of the community”.

### **1.2.2. Religion and Integration**

As previously highlighted in the formulation of the working hypotheses of the present study, a central question is of integration of refugees into host churches. It is important to note here that, with regard to forced migration, the concept of integration is to be investigated in its dual aspect. That is integration with local people, and integration with other members of forced migrants’ national communities or groups with whom they may share common values, language and lifestyles (Eyber in Landau, ed., 2004:74).

The fact that refugees were not able to integrate into host churches, mainly due to linguistic and spiritual barriers (see chapter 3), led the researcher to further investigate whether the effort of integration sought within a host church is more easily achieved within a refugee church, namely the Word of Life Assembly. It is essential to remember here that the church comprises members from various African countries, including South Africa. Moreover, it is important to note that the church is dominantly composed of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Thus, the researcher examined how different groups of refugees, as far as both nationality and culture are concerned, interact and are integrated within WOLA church. More specifically, the researcher investigates whether WOLA, a refugee church, achieves its integrative role with regard to its multicultural members.

In fact, as discussed in the previous section, the close association of religion with the culture and nationality (Gunn 2002) becomes real and very strong within WOLA. For,

indeed, members who do not have same cultural identity with the predominantly Congolese members have, to a certain degree, a problem of integration into WOLA. In other words, there are levels of integration within WOLA, as far as socio-cultural background of church members is concerned. Even if it can be said that refugees are well integrated in WOLA, they are, however, not integrated alike.

Thus, during the investigation, the researcher has identified four levels of integration, as far as integration of multinational refugees into WOLA church is concerned. The first three levels refer to integration of refugees into the church. The fourth level refers to the integration of the refugee church as an entity into the host community at large.

#### **1.2.2.1. Four Levels of Integration**

##### **Integration as a refugee**

The first level of integration consists, for a refugee, in integrating into a refugee community as a whole. This integration is generally achieved when a refugee finds a church where other people sharing *same common* [refugee] status are. This stage of integration is fully achieved within WOLA, which is essentially a refugee church.

##### **Religious integration**

The second level of integration is achieved when a refugee feels *spiritually* assimilated into the [WOLA] community. That is the messages or sermons that are preached in the church, to a greater extent, meet the expectations of the members, and contribute to their spiritual growth. It is implied here that refugees would delight to hear messages that directly or indirectly address their multifaceted and multilayered needs. Almost all respondents mentioned the preached Word of God among things that are special about WOLA. This level of integration is, to a large extent, also achieved within WOLA.

### **Cultural integration**

The third level of integration is achieved when a refugee is *culturally* integrated into the group or community he joins. During the investigation, the researcher found that this level was not fully achieved within WOLA church, especially with regard to minority church members from other nationalities than Congolese. The researcher concludes that the latter group of church members maintains its membership within WOLA because there is tolerance in respect of the third level (cultural integration), inasmuch as the first two levels – integration into refugee community and *spiritual* congregation – are, at least, fulfilled.

Refugees who are strongly culture oriented will strive to look around for another refugee church that would culturally accommodate them. This is one of the reasons why most of foreign churches in Yeoville are commonly called after nationalities of their leaders or members, such as *Cameroonian* church, *Ethiopian* church or *Nigerian* church, etc.

### **Integration of the Refugee church itself**

As indicated above, while refugees seek to integrate into WOLA, likewise, the latter seeks and strives to integrate into the host community. In other terms, as far as refugee church is concerned, not only church members are to integrate into host community and/or churches, but the [refugee] church itself – labelled thus as a ‘foreign’ entity – is to seek its own integration into and approval from the South African community in general, and host faith-based institutions in particular.

During an informal interview on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2004, Rev. Kipa, indicated that the church comprises people from all races, including Blacks, White, and Indians, yet shortly, when the researcher started attending WOLA services he did not see a White or an Indian face in the church, apart from one White pastor who had been invited to preach at WOLA Convention in November 2004. In fact, the researcher could not easily and immediately

realize that, by stating that WOLA is a “multiracial” church, the pastor wanted to show that his church is well integrated into South African society.

Briefly, the researcher was not aware of this hidden aspect of integration. Even though the church counts about 98% of foreign migrants, yet it does not accept to be referred to as ‘*refugee*’ church or ‘*foreign*’ church. Thus, the researcher understood the reason why during the first contact on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2004, the pastor significantly underestimated Congolese membership by reducing it to only 40%, and increasing rather South African attendance rate to 20%. The researcher’s participant observation (from June to December 2004) within the church virtually revealed different figures (about 95% Congolese, and about 2% South Africans). In addition, the researcher also understood the reason why WOLA public tracts, including the big informative sign board pitched at the 90° corner Hunter and Kenmere street, and its monthly activity program – regularly distributed during Sunday service – are exclusively written in English language, even if about 98% of the members speak French. All this underlines the effort sought by WOLA, a refugee church, to integrate itself into the host community while facilitating and maintaining integration of refugees within it.

### **1.2.3. Independent Churches vs. Mainline Churches**

As this study examines a Pentecostal church, it is imperative to briefly review the literature concerning the Pentecostal movement.

Mainline churches represent the “established” churches, such as the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic (Garner 2000:318). They are mainly characterized by continuity and orthodoxy (Synan 1997:293). Ideologically Independent Churches, mainly Pentecostals, in contrast, put emphasis on the present action of the Spirit in the Church through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Synan 1997: 291), and on the practices, such as divine healing, exorcism, prophecy, revelation, and speaking in tongues (Anderson &

Pillay 1997:227). At WOLA, the ministry of healing, or ‘therapeutic evangelism’ (Woodhead 2000:155), and speaking in tongues are given a particular importance. The pastor and some of interpreters speak in tongues, especially during Sunday service.

Moreover, the gospel of prosperity, which is increasingly preached in many churches in Africa, is a significant component of the theology of independent churches (Woodhead 2000:210). More particularly in South Africa, Woodhead points out that the gospel of prosperity is being promoted in many churches in South Africa, especially in the flourishing Rhema Bible Churches founded in South Africa by Ray McCauley. According to the gospel of prosperity, wealth and success are signs of God’s blessings. Prosperity theology is also taught at WOLA (see church background).

Noteworthy, however, that as Sommers (2001:367) indicates, the term pentecostalist refers not only to Pentecostal churches as such, but also to related churches such as the Assembly of God and assorted evangelical churches where a number of the practices mentioned above are observed.

Apart from this ideological distinction, the two main trajectories also differ in the ways they are established. In fact, the establishment of independent churches seems to be easier than that of mainline churches. Sommers (2001:363) alludes to this distinction when he asserts, for instance, that “Pentecostalism proved far more portable than Catholicism”. The establishment of an independent church can result from a unilateral initiative (a personal calling) – and this is the case of the church under investigation (see below: church background) – while the establishment of a mainline church branch is decided by a corporate ecclesiastic body, to which it remains organically subordinate. This seems to be the chief reason why, in all mainline churches identified in Yeoville, there is no single church that was established or is headed by a migrant.

#### 1.2.4. The Rise of Pentecostalism

As Martin (2001:52) affirms, Pentecostal or Evangelical Christianity is one of the fastest growing and most significant religious developments in the contemporary world. It is second only to the worldwide Islamic revival (2001:53). More particularly in Africa, Pentecostalism is the second (after urbanization) major demographic trend that is reshaping the continent (Gifford 1994 cited in Sommers 2001: 348). In South Africa, it is reported that, by the early 1990s, at least 6,000 Pentecostal-type churches, comprising some ten million people were identified (Anderson & Pillay 1997:233). Thus in Africa, observes Cox (cited in Sommers 2001:362), “Pentecostal congregations are quickly becoming the main expressions of Christianity”. He adds that “[T]hese churches give people a sense of dignity, a place in a community of friends which often stands as a surrogate for an extended family fractured by mobility and change” (2001: 362). It is also said that Pentecostals provide a community which helps the urban dweller build a survival network (Ogbu Kalu, cited in Sommers 2001:363).

As stated in the study’s objectives, the researcher empirically establishes to which extent the Word of Life Assembly, being as well an urban Pentecostal church of this nature, accomplishes this role commonly assigned to community-oriented Pentecostal churches.

In conclusion, most of the readings present religion as a social phenomenon which shapes social identities, and offers psychological support and emotional benefits. With regard to religion and integration, not only refugees are to integrate into the church (WOLA), but equally the [refugee] church itself is to integrate into the South African community, especially with host faith-based institutions. The process of this *dual* integration is explained in the four levels of integration identified within WOLA. Also this section established the distinction between independent churches and mainline churches with reference to their structural and doctrinal aspects.

The next chapter discusses the methodology adopted by the present study.



## **CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

The determination of the role of the church among forced migrants' community uses qualitative methods. As Oakley (cited in McMichael 2002:174) argues, qualitative methods allow exploration of the quality of experience through the study of meanings and processes. In other words, qualitative methods take into account respondents' opinions and feelings about the topic under investigation. Thus, since this is an explorative study, it requires special methods of sampling, data collection and analysis that are discussed below.

### **2.1. MAIN TASKS**

In order to determine the specific role of a refugee established church within a forced migrants' community, the following key goals were pursued:

1. The researcher sought to determine why forced migrants attend the services of the Word of Life Assembly church. The data collected in this regard reflect the picture of forced migrants' understanding of the importance of the church in their lives. The researcher also wanted to determine whether the church exists to meet only spiritual needs or, whether it extends its activities in other spheres of the refugees' livelihoods. Both the information from interviewees and the analysis of the church activity plans with regard to assisting the refugee community guided the researcher to validate the hypothesis that religion is a coping strategy for refugees, in that refugee established churches extend their role far beyond spiritual needs to meet multi-faceted needs of the refugee.

2. The researcher empirically verified whether refugee churches are established because of difficulties faced by integration into existing local churches. The data collected in this respect helped the researcher to verify the hypothesis that refugee established churches are more integrative than local churches. For this reason, the primary task was to determine reasons why forced migrants choose to join the church under investigation rather than a local church. More importantly, the researcher investigated whether the forced migrant had attended any other [local] church before joining the church under investigation. Once it was established that the informant transited through a local church, the reasons why he or she left this church were immediately noted. The data collected in this regard, to a greater extent, virtually inspired the researcher to validate the hypothesis enunciated above.

## **2.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this research, qualitative methods were essentially used. This is a case study which requires extensive investigation and analysis of the importance and role of the church among forced migrants' community. The nature of the leading research question itself suggests an explorative study.

In order to attract key informants and get more information thereof, interviewees were kindly asked to freely relate their migratory history. In fact, it is generally admitted that refugees become more open and comfortable to share about their migratory history than anything else touching their lives. The scheduled open-ended questions (see appendix 4) were solely formulated to tactically step in-between so as to guide the respondent towards predetermined main points that are not being touched in the story.

Thus, to understand the role of a refugee established church in the life of a forced migrant the researcher followed the procedures described below:

- The first part of the research design consists of getting background information. In this regard, respondents were particularly asked to share with the researcher how they left their home country and how they became established in South Africa, with particular emphasis on how and when they joined the Word of Life Assembly church. Respondents were also asked whether they had been to any other church(es) in Johannesburg or elsewhere in South Africa before joining the WOLA, and why they left the previous church(es). The information collected here was particularly paramount as to explore both the assertion that “when people move, the church moves” (Sol 1982:38), and the premise according to which refugees tend to become more religious in the host countries than in their home countries (Warner 2000:2).
- The second step aimed at refugees’ own understanding of the role of the church established in their midst. In order to determine the place of the church in assisting refugees among other local refugee service providers, respondents were especially asked from where they received their first assistance. Respondents were also asked whether they receive any assistance from the WOLA, and were requested to describe the nature of the assistance. More particularly, the pastor was asked to describe the mission of the church, and whether the church has any program to meet physical needs of the members. In addition, subjects who attended other churches outside WOLA were asked whether they receive any assistance from those churches. Furthermore, assuming that church assistance may extend beyond material support (see hypothesis 2), other forms of assistance were further explored by asking respondents where they would go for help in case of marital problems, sickness, trauma, rejection or abuse by the family or neighbourhood. The pastor was particularly asked to mention main concerns of the members brought to him during counseling sessions. Lastly, interviewees were asked whom they would contact when they need a job, and with whom they would share their personal matters or needs.

- The last part of the research schedule was designed to measure the integrative role of the church. In this regard, participants were asked about the reasons why they would not attend other local churches around, whether there would be any difference or similarity, in terms of worship, between their home church and Word of Life Assembly, and for parent respondents, whether they would allow their English-speaking children attend a Sunday school at a local church. South African respondents attending WOLA were further asked about how they feel about attending church services with many foreigners. They were also asked whether there would be anything they do not like in the church or something they would like the church to improve. By including this particular group in the research schedule, the researcher specifically wanted to determine whether South African members experience the same problems in integrating in foreign churches. Lastly, all participants were asked to mention the language(s) they are able to speak, and to tell the researcher what makes WOLA so special for them.

Before interviews were conducted, participant observation was done through church service attendances, informal visits with some of the church members, and more particularly, through the researcher's active participation in a one week Convention organized by WOLA during the first week of November 2004. During the period of observation (from May to November 2004), the researcher built tangible trust with church leadership and members. For instance, during November 2004, upon request from the senior pastor the researcher trained WOLA Sunday school teachers on how to evangelize children (a 3 day training). The researcher himself is a qualified child evangelist. This socializing process was particularly made possible by the fact that the researcher, himself, is part of the refugee community at large, and speaks the languages of the subjects (mostly French, Kiswahili, English, Kinyarwanda and Kirundi).

### **2.2.1. Site selection**

The present research was based and conducted at one of the refugee established churches, named the “Word of Life Assembly”, located at corner Kenmere and Hunter Street in Yeoville, Johannesburg. The site (Yeoville) has been chosen on the grounds that Yeoville is reputed to be one of the urban areas in Johannesburg where many migrants reside, and where numerous “guest” churches operate (more than 50% of the churches operating in that area were established or are headed by forced migrants). The Word of Life Assembly is one of those churches. The church was independently established by a pastor from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rev. Alves M. Kipa (see above for more details about the church background). Finally, the size of the church, in terms of church membership rate and denominational affiliation (a Pentecostal church) were also deciding factors in this selection. The church counts a total of about 450 members, mostly forced migrants (about 98%) from different African countries, predominantly refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (about 95% of the total).

### **2.2.2. Population of the Study**

The population group under investigation included forced migrants aged eighteen and onwards who are full members of the Word of Life Assembly church, irrespective of their involvement in the activities of the church. For the reasons explained above (see research design), the population also comprised a small number (four) of South Africans, full members of WOLA. The founder of the church, the senior pastor, was also interviewed in this study. This potential person-resource particularly provided information regarding the historical background of the church as well as its mission in the community it serves.

For the purposes of this research, the terms “*refugee*” and “*forced migrant*” are referred to in their broadest sense to include both recognized refugees and asylum seekers, i.e. those still waiting to be officially recognized as refugees. Both concepts are thereby used

interchangeably. The reason for this conceptual relaxation is that, apart from the four South African citizens, the population researched is essentially composed of both recognized refugees and asylum seekers, falling under the common denominator of being concurrently a forced migrant and a member of the “Word of Life Assembly” church in Yeoville.

### **2.2.3. Sampling Frame**

The selection of interviewees took place during Sunday church services where both men and women, aged 18 and onwards were chosen for the sample. At the end of each church service, the researcher selected five people from the congregants (full members of the World of Life Assembly) in accordance with the proportions indicated below. Since it was practically inconvenient to interview all of them during the remaining half-day – after a long church service (often more than three hours), only one person among five was interviewed at a time, and an appointment was made with the rest to meet in the course of the following week at a convened place and time. For the sake of representativeness, the stratified sampling consisted of 45% women and 55% men, and this, which is in accordance with the membership percentage, i.e. respectively 45% and 55%).

The researcher interviewed a total of 20 church members including the senior pastor or the founder of the church. Thus, with respect to these proportions, 11 men and 9 women – including 4 (2 men and 2 women) South Africans attending the same church – were interviewed.

#### 2.2.4. Data Collection

The collection of data presented in this study consisted of a semi-structured face-to-face in-depth interview schedule, comprising open-ended questions (see appendix 4). This technique is appropriate for this qualitative study, since it allows interviewees to express themselves in their words.

The interview schedule comprises five sections briefly described below.

- The first section aimed at gathering background information about how the subjects left their home countries, their religious background, and how they learned about the Word of Life Assembly.
- The second section of the interview schedule consisted of collecting data on how respondents themselves understand the role of the church. In this respect, respondents were particularly expected to describe any assistance – be it material, spiritual, or otherwise – they actually receive or expect from the church.
- The third section aimed at gathering information on the integrative role of the church and the level of integration of refugees into local churches. Thus, respondents were asked about, for instance, their language abilities, the reasons of not attending other [local] churches, and what makes *their* church special.
- The fourth section contained special questions for the pastor of WOLA. This key informant was especially expected to provide information about how he got a vision to establish a church among refugees, the mission of the church, church assistance program, main problems facing the church members, and whether the overall spiritual state of the church members influences him in preparing sermons.
- The last section of the interview schedule contained questions reserved for South African citizens, full members of WOLA. The researcher expected to get comparative data regarding the phenomenon of integration for the sake of a balanced interpretation of data collected from a Congolese predominant congregation.

The interview-guiding questionnaire was elaborated in English and translated into French. Thus, the interviews were conducted in either of these two languages, according to the respondent's choice. Most interviews were conducted in French (65%). It is, however, noteworthy that, at the discretion of the respondent, some interviews consisted of a simultaneous mixture of French and English. Before the interview was conducted, each interviewee was briefly informed about the aim of the research, and ensured of the confidentiality of the information provided. With the exception of one respondent who had her interview at her residence, all other interviews, upon interviewee's proposition, were conducted at Word of Life Assembly church. This spared the researcher from many inconveniences, in terms of time, unease in identifying respondents' residence and unnecessary resulting costs. Moreover, conducting interviews at church – an open/public place – built trust and inspired motivation into prospective respondents who were able to see their church mates willingly participating in interviews. Most of interviews (65%) were tape-recorded upon consent of the respondent (see appendix 2). The taped interviews generally took less time (about 20 minutes) than unrecorded interview sessions (almost 1 hour). Unrecorded interviews were hand written down on interview-guiding questionnaires as the respondents expressed themselves. Similarly, tape-recorded interviews were later manually and transcribed from the tape to the interview-guiding questionnaire. The last exercise in data gathering was to read through the content of every transcript, and write key themes or main points that emerged from each interview on the interview cover sheet (see appendix 3). This process substantially helped the researcher in latter stages of data analysis and interpretation. Interviews were intensively conducted over a period of about one month (from 15 November to 9 December 2004). The participant observation was done over a period of six months (from May to November 2004).



### **2.2.5. Ethical Considerations of the Study**

The present study adheres to the Wits University ethical standards of a social research. All participants in this study were above 18 years old. Statistically speaking, the respondents' age group is 27-46. Besides, upon respondent's request, interviews were conducted in a convenient and safe place – the church. In fact, the researcher had, in advance, informed the respondent that the choice of avenue for interview remained entirely at his or her discretion. Moreover, at the beginning of each interview session, subjects were duly informed about the research, notably its purpose and an approximate length of the interview. Also, interviewees were informed that participation in the interview was voluntary. All interviewees who took part in this study signed a consent form that the researcher prepared (see appendix 2), as a formal agreement to participate in the interview. Furthermore, the researcher assured the interviewees that the information they provide would be treated as confidential, and that anonymity would be guaranteed in that the name or any other personal details would not be mentioned in the final report without their permission. Finally, interviewees were promised that, on request, the researcher would offer them the feedback on the final conclusions of the research. Other ethical standards the researcher complied with are detailed in the subject information (see appendix 1).

### **2.2.6. Limitations of the Study**

Although not affecting the substance of final data and findings, some limitations are, nevertheless, to be fairly raised with regard to this study.

First of all, due to logistical and time constraints, the researcher does not claim to have covered all that is needed to be studied regarding the role of religion in forced migration. In fact, [contemporary] religious institutions are becoming so complex and multi-functional (Warner 2000:4) that a short-term and under-resourced research, such as this, would not exhaustively investigate their multi-faceted role.

Furthermore, most of the numerical data herein recorded, especially those concerning church membership, are but rough estimations from the pastor. The church does not keep statistical records of its members, and as a result, any change affecting the membership in terms of mobility is not recorded.

Finally, dealing with religious matters is a delicate task. Sometimes, church leaders tend to present a good picture of their congregation. They also tend to spiritualize their work, and this sometimes leads to the camouflage of the real state of the church affairs. For instance, during the first informal interview with the leadership of the church under investigation the researcher was told that Congolese church members are about 40%, but later on, when the researcher started attending Sunday services in this church, he could realize that this figure had been significantly underestimated.

## **CHAPTER III: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

The present study explores the role of a refugee established church within the host community where local churches already exist. In other words, this study aims at determining the role of refugee established churches in the lives of the refugees they serve. Based both on the general information and personal experience in the matter – the researcher himself being a refugee – and more particularly on the substance of the reviewed literature, the researcher argued that refugee established churches are more integrative than local churches, and are effective instruments in alleviating protracted challenges facing urban forced migrants, by extending their role far beyond purely spiritual needs to meet other multi-faceted needs of the refugee.

Thus, close attention is focused on exploring ways forced migrants understand the role of the church, and on determining to which extent does the church contribute to the improvement of forced migrant's livelihoods.

### **3.1. PROFILES OF THE RESPONDENTS**

The data presented in this study were collected from a total of twenty interviewees – eleven men and nine women – full members of the Word of Life Assembly church in Yeoville, Johannesburg. The key informants were the founder and senior pastor of the church, and church elders. Among the respondents, there are thirteen (eight men and five women) refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), two (one man and one woman) refugees from Angola, and one female refugee from Ivory Coast. Also, four South African citizens (two men and two women) full members of WOLA were interviewed. About 65% of the respondents hold a position in the church, mostly choir

members and church elders. Among the respondents, nine are married and stay together with their partners, and two are single parents. The age group for all respondents is 27-46. Most of the respondents reside in Yeoville (80%, and 20% stay within WOLA premises), Hillbrow (5%), Bertrams (5%), and elsewhere (10%). Most of the respondents (about 70%) arrived in South Africa in 1997 and joined WOLA between 2000 and 2002. All respondents previously belonged to a church – mainly Pentecostalist churches (75%) before leaving their home countries. This fact confirms Sol's finding which reveals that "when the people move, the church moves" (1982:38).

The majority of those who did not belong to a Pentecostal denomination in their home country, and who are now members of WOLA belonged to a Roman Catholic Church. Asked why they have changed their denomination, apart from one respondent who indicated to have changed her home denomination (Roman Catholic) to Pentecostal (WOLA) for marriage reasons, other respondents evoked spiritual reasons to justify their denominational change. They argued that their denominations could no longer appropriately satisfy their new [spiritual] needs in exile.

A similar finding was reached by Agadjanian (1998:293) in research conducted among refugee women in urban Mozambique. The study reveals that some Catholic and Mainline protestant members as well as refugees who did not declare any religious affiliation admitted that they sometimes attended a "*Zione*" or another "*healing*" church meeting to participate in the healing sessions. Note that Pentecostal or '*charismatic*' churches (Synan 1997:293) are sometimes commonly referred to as 'healing' churches (Garner 2000:320; Anderson and Pillay 1997:227); the main reason behind this label being the emphasis on the ministry of the gift of both spiritual and physical healing within these churches.

### **3.2. ROLE OF WOLA**

While the first section describes the profiles of the subjects of this study, the present section discusses the data concerning the phenomenon of integration of refugees into local churches.

#### **3.2.1. Church and Local Integration**

As stated above, the researcher argued that one of the reasons why refugee churches exist alongside local churches is the lack of integration of refugees into these [latter] churches. The data collected in this regard strongly confirm this hypothesis in ways discussed below. This section also examines the second aspect of integration, that is integration with other members of forced migrants' national communities or groups with whom they may share common values, language and lifestyles (Eyber 2004:74). In other words, the researcher investigates whether the effort of integration sought within a host church is achieved within a multicultural refugee church, namely the Word of Life Assembly.

##### **3.2.1.1. Level of Integration of Refugees into Local Churches**

Asked whether the respondents had been to any local church in Johannesburg before joining WOLA, and if so, why they have left the church, the following data were gathered from 9 respondents who have been to other church(s).

***Table 1. Reasons for leaving local churches***

Reasons for leaving			
Transport	Language	Spiritual	Xenophobia
1	3	4	1

From the table, 60% of the respondents had been to at least one local church before joining WOLA church. Among the major reasons that made the respondents leave the local church, language and spiritual problems are dominant. In other words, the concerned refugees could not *linguistically* and *spiritually* integrate into local or domestic churches as well as they could at WOLA.

Almost all the respondents who, at no point, did not attend any local church (40%) are actually those who, prior to leaving their home country had some contacts with family members or friends attending Word of Life Assembly church. These were immediately ushered and welcomed into the church (WOLA) without transiting through any other local church.

The respondent who raised the issue of xenophobia linked the latter to the fact that, within the [local] church he previously joined, black church members were overlooked with regard to responsibilities and positions in the church.

A quite similar xenophobic barrier to integration was raised by Shandy (2002:217-8) in his study among Nuer (Sudan) Christians in America. The study revealed that, in their process of integrating into existing American Christian churches, for some church members the Sudanese newcomers were unwanted and burdensome intruders causing dissent within the church. In addition, the study reported that Sudanese pastors who ministered to congregations in Africa found their credentials and achievements devalued in the United States.

### 3.2.1.1.1. Language as barrier to integration into local churches

In order to establish whether language has an impact on the integration of forced migrants into local churches, respondents were asked to mention languages they are able to speak and understand. In addition the same respondents were asked to indicate the language they comfortably use when praying individually. The data thereof are summarized in the following tables.

**Table 2. Language proficiency**

		French	Lingala	Swahili	English	Portuguese
		<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	8	8	3
*Not Asked	5					
**n	15					

\* This includes the pastor and the four South African respondents

\*\* The numbers do not add up to 20 because respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.

**Table 3. Language used in individual prayer**

		French	English	Other
		<b>11</b>	2	2
*Not Asked	5			
n	15			

\* This includes the pastor and the four South African respondents

From the data in *table 2*, all the respondents speak French fluently. Even the three respondents (Angolans) who officially speak Portuguese declared and demonstrated that they are conversant in French. Consequently, it seems pertinent to conclude that language – in this case, English or any other local language – is a major barrier to integration of a predominantly French speaking refugee community into South African churches. For

indeed, though the table above (*table 2*) shows that 53% of the respondents can understand and speak English at the time interviews were conducted, it is, however, noteworthy that most of these respondents arrived in South Africa between the period of 1997 and 2002. In other words, it can be said that these respondents are now able to speak English because they have been in South Africa for quite some time, and had the opportunity to learn the language and practice it – mainly through sermons’ interpretation and/or at their business places. Thus, being originally French speakers the researcher implies that these respondents could hardly, if at all, speak or understand English upon arrival in South Africa.

On the other hand, respondents who cannot speak and understand English (47%) are either Portuguese speakers (28%) who had first to learn French or Lingala (the main languages spoken in Democratic Republic of Congo), or French speaking respondents (all from DRC) who recently arrived in South Africa, specifically since end of 2003 (72%).

To sum it up, both groups of respondents – those who can now speak English and those who cannot speak and understand English – have had language problems in integrating into *domestic* churches where English and/or local languages are traditionally used, at least at the earlier stages of their settling in Johannesburg.

Furthermore, the fact that the majority of the respondents (about 74%) feel more comfortable to use French when praying individually (*table 3*) would give room to conclude that these respondents would not feel spiritually fully integrated in a church where French is not used.

It is the same [language] problem that hindered Ethiopian refugees joining WOLA, and rather prompted them to start their own church (Global Faith Mission Ministries) in one of the halls of WOLA in 2003. In an informal interview with one of the pastoral team members, the researcher was told that Global Faith Mission Ministries flows from the



same denominational stream as WOLA, and that both churches virtually confess the same faith. Subsequently, asked why then the two churches could not merge into one to subvert financial costs – the Ethiopian church rents the WOLA’s hall it uses – the respondent replied that they cannot merge because most of the members speak neither English nor French. The Ethiopian church services are exclusively held in *Amharic*, the native language of the majority of the members in that church.

Language as a major obstacle to integration was equally raised in earlier research carried out by Macchiavello (2003:20) among refugees in Kampala (Uganda). The study shows that, whilst English speaking [refugee] preachers had a better chance of finding assistance and work from local churches, the French speaking preachers, in contrast, enjoyed the advantage of being able to work for their own refugees’ community, for which no English was needed.

Similarly, in the aforementioned study done among Nuer (Sudan) Christian refugees in America it was found that “in churches where there are pastors from other countries, the English-speaking pastor is always the senior pastor; the other-language pastor is paid less” (Sheila, cited in Shandy 2002:217). And as a result, the frustrated pastors alternatively resort to establishing their churches among [Sudanese] refugee community in the same way as the French-speaking pastors in Kampala (see last paragraph above).

#### **3.2.1.1.2. Religious barriers to integration**

Among the reasons that make respondents who have attended a local church before joining WOLA church, spiritual concerns are ranked first. Furthermore, when asked to mention the reasons which make them not to attend other [local] churches around, a significant number of the respondents (about 28%) evoke spiritual reasons. Similarly, when asked to mention something which makes their church (WOLA) so special to them (p.44), most of the respondents (80%) indicated the “preached Word of God” (spiritual

aspect). In other words, it is predictable that, according to *table 1* even for those respondents (33%) for whom language was not an obstacle to integration, some of them would ultimately leave the local church for spiritual reasons. That is, the messages or sermons preached in those [local] churches seem, to some extent, not to meet the spiritual needs and expectations of the refugees. Asked to mention what makes Congolese to join WOLA in a big number, the pastor consistently pointed out a couple of things, namely the ‘preached Word’ and the ‘language’ (French).

Exploring the root causes leading to this spiritual imbalance becomes vital for the researcher. Asked whether the overall spiritual state of his church members influences him in preparing his sermons, Kipa plainly declared that, “though most of the time we receive messages from God and from the readings, we are also sensitive to what is happening in the communities. We cannot preach messages that do not directly concern the flock”, he added. In other words, knowing very well the state and status of his congregation – the pastor will selectively prepare sermons conducive to the overall socio-spiritual state of the congregants. Thus, asked about the kind of sermons or themes that he thinks are the most helpful to the members, the pastor stated that the main target in his sermons is “to teach people to have faith in Jesus, and trust that God will provide for their needs” (interview 30/11/2004). Likewise, in local churches refugees would like to hear sermons that directly or indirectly touch their particular situation, but this may not happen for a couple of reasons.

First of all, the local pastor may not be aware of their multi-faceted needs in order to appropriately address them through preaching. Thus, the pastor will prepare general messages addressing general issues of his heterogeneous audience, without considering refugees as an isolate spiritual group. At WOLA, the diverse needs of the refugees are emphatically addressed through the *gospel of prosperity* that is very often preached in this church (see church background).

Secondly, most of these local churches are so big that the presence of visiting refugees becomes unnoticeable or invisible. At WOLA, however, some respondents mentioned that the pastor is open to everybody, and knows each and every church member by name.

In conclusion, these two factors are likely to make refugees in search of social integration and spiritual restoration, feel socially and spiritually marginalized. Consequently, the refugee leaves the church for another one that will, to a large extent, accommodate his needs and expectations. Most of the respondents who declared to have attended services in a local church before joining WOLA (see table 1) have successively been to more than one [local] church.

#### **3.2.1.2. Integration within Word of Life Assembly**

As previously highlighted in the formulation of the working hypotheses of the present study, the concept of integration – in the context of forced migration – was to be investigated in its dual aspect. That is integration with local people, and integration with other members of forced migrants' national communities or groups with whom they may share common values, language and lifestyles (Eyber 2004:74).

The previous section examined the first aspect, that is, the integration of forced migrants into host churches, and concluded that such integration has not occurred due to a number of factors discussed above.

The present section investigates whether the effort of integration provided within a host church is achieved within a refugee church, namely the Word of Life Assembly church. In other terms, the researcher examines how different groups of refugees, as far as nationality is concerned, interact and are integrated within WOLA church. More specifically, the researcher investigates whether the WOLA, a refugee church, achieves its integrative role with regard to its multicultural members. It is essential to remember

here that the church comprises of members from various African countries, including South Africa (see church background).

#### **3.2.1.2.1. Socio-cultural relationships within WOLA**

The members of WOLA are mainly forced migrants from various African countries with different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, the researcher wanted to know whether integration within WOLA could be achieved, despite the national and cultural diversity of its members. In other words, the socio-cultural relationships between members were investigated through measuring levels of integration of different nationalities within the church. Thus, asked to mention what is special about WOLA, the following data were gathered:

***Table 4. Special features within Word of Life Assembly***

	Unity	Preached Word	Mutual support	Home language	Good pastor
	4	16	4	6	13
*n=20					

\* The numbers in the table do not add up to 20 because respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.

#### **3.2.1.2.2. Levels of Integration in WOLA**

Asked whether there would be any difference, in terms of worship between the respondent's home church and WOLA church, 73% of the respondents declared that there is no difference, especially with regard to language, songs, dances and preaching. Respondents who found some differences (27%) are mostly members of other

nationalities than Congolese. This suggests that members who do not have the same cultural identity that the predominantly Congolese members have, to a certain degree, a problem of integration into WOLA. In other words, there are various levels of integration within WOLA, as far as socio-cultural background of church members is concerned. Even if it can be said that refugees are well integrated in WOLA, members are not integrated alike.

For this particular reason, the researcher identifies three levels of integration, as far as integration of multinational refugees into WOLA church is concerned.

The first level consists, for a refugee, of integrating into a refugee community as a whole. This integration is generally achieved when a refugee finds a church where other people sharing the *same common* [refugee] status are. This stage of integration is fully achieved within WOLA, which is essentially a refugee church.

The second level of integration is achieved when a refugee feels *spiritually* assimilated into the [WOLA] community. According to table 5 where 80 % of respondents mentioned the preached Word of God among things that are special with WOLA, this level of integration is, to a large extent, also achieved within WOLA.

The third level of integration is achieved when a refugee is *culturally* integrated into the group or community he joins. During the investigation, the researcher found that this level was not fully achieved within WOLA church, especially with regard to minority church members from other nationalities than Congolese. The researcher concludes that the latter group of church members maintains its membership within WOLA because there is tolerance in respect of the third level (cultural integration), inasmuch as the first two levels – integration into refugee community and *spiritual* congregation – are, at least, fulfilled. In parallel, refugees who are strongly culture-oriented will strive to look around for another refugee church that would culturally accommodate them. This is one of the reasons why most of foreign churches in Yeoville are commonly called after nationalities

of their leaders or members, such as *Cameroonian church*, *Ethiopian church* or *Nigerian church*, etc.

#### **3.2.1.2.3. Integration of South African members into WOLA**

As almost all refugee respondents have experienced the problem of integrating into host churches, South African members at WOLA do also encounter the problem of integration, although not in the same degree and manner.

Contrary to refugee respondents – of whom none attended any other local church after joining WOLA – only one South African respondent has not been to any other local church, unless specially invited. Other respondents declared that they sometimes go to other local churches; one of them even admitted that he occasionally gets material assistance from those churches.

Furthermore, asked how they feel about attending church services with many foreigners, almost all the respondents promptly declared not having any problem, in principle. However, their comments do reveal problems of integration into WOLA church. For instance, one [South African male] respondent brought up a cultural problem, when he interpreted the fact that “Congolese sisters do not like to be touched on by a brother in Christ” as a sign that the sisters in WOLA “do not like and trust me”, he explained.

Moreover, commenting on the same question, another respondent (female) from the same group declared that “the only problem we have lies with the foreign women who do not feel comfortable when we are around; they tell us to not wear short skirts, and command us to cover whatever...Maybe”, she added, “they think that we are going to *take* their husbands”.

This statement reveals, to some extent, an underlying problem of integration of South African ladies, who naturally do not see any problem of wearing shorts in a church, into a [Congolese] community culturally and religiously used to wearing long clothes, more particularly in a church. As de Voe (2002:238) notes in her study of young Somali women refugees in the United States of America, “clothing, as a *cultural* phenomenon, acts as a significant identifier on an individual...[and] both communicates one’s membership in a certain ethnicity and, at the same time, denies, membership in other ethnic groups”. Thus, culturally speaking, if clothing seems not to mean a lot in a multiracial and multicultural South African society, it nevertheless signifies a lot for a Congolese society where clothing tends to be one of the main cultural identifiers. During church services, for instance, a quick glance at the congregation would be enough for an informed observer to especially distinguish Congolese women from the rest of the group, in their well-known long clothes commonly called *vikwembe* in Swahili or *maputa* in Lingala.

In addition, asked about anything South African respondents do not like in the church, or something they would like the church to improve, one respondent complained about too loud music in the church. This is another cultural barrier for South African members to fully integrate into a ‘Congolese worship’ traditionally characterised by loudness in prayer, praise and worship.

Moreover, some respondents complained about the way interpretation of sermons (from French into English) is done. They declared that there seems to be many interesting things which the preacher says in French and which make people to laugh, but when interpreted into English they become much less interesting. According to the same respondents, a separate English service would be helpful. The two critiques – cultural and linguistic – once again reveal a limited integration of this particular group into a predominantly French-speaking community.

Other indicators of a limited of integration of South African members into WOLA are strongly implied in following statement.

One respondent plainly indicated that he feels isolated in WOLA. Though he affirmed that the pastor is very friendly to him, the respondent, nevertheless, deplored the fact that the rest of the church members do not care about him. He said that some brethren do not even greet him, and added that “those who greet me are those who truly know God”.

To further stress the issue of lack of support to South African members in general, the same respondent gave an instance of a musician visitor from Democratic Republic of Congo who performed during the WOLA Convention which was held during November 2004. The respondent indicated that the Congolese musician received far more applause and support than his counterpart South African musician – “and he is our church member!” he emphatically added.

Moreover, asked about what they would like the church to improve, some respondents suggested that the church should show transparency in providing assistance to its members. In this regard, one respondent indicated that his fellow church members from DRC, who are unemployed like himself, seem to have no problem as to food and clothing. In other words, the respondent suspects that some Congolese church members may somehow get some assistance from the church, only because they are Congolese. The researcher considers that such a judgement is a further indicator of a lack of integration, or at least a limited integration of South African church members into a refugee established church like WOLA, and the function of the church into the lives of forced migrants.

The last, but not the least, evidence of the problem of integration of South African members into WOLA is drawn from the statement of one respondent (female) before interviews were conducted. When she was contacted to arrange for an interview, she was very excited to take part in the interview, and hastily told the researcher “I will also tell



my neighbour” – who is another South African lady and a WOLA member. “She also has got some complaints about the church”, she promptly added. Note that this statement was given before interviews were conducted, and that the researcher never told interviewees that his research aimed at identifying problems they might be facing within the church. As stated earlier, the ultimate aim of this study is to explore and determine the role of the refugee churches in the lives of the refugees they serve.

In conclusion, the researcher finds it relevant and pertinent to ask the following question with regard to South Africans who are members of WOLA church. If South African members encounter such problems of integration within WOLA, why then do they keep on attending this [foreign] church? The researcher argues that the direct and indirect advantages that South African respondents have within WOLA far outweigh the aforementioned problems.

On one hand, all the South African members who were interviewed are members of the church choir. This position is quite so significant for them. In fact, when respondents who have been to other churches before joining WOLA were asked to give reasons why they left those churches, some of them said that they left because they were not given opportunity to exercise their talents. During Sunday services, and more particularly during worship time, South Africans are given pulpit to proudly sing their “Zulu” worshipping songs with which the French-speaking congregation is familiar.

On the other hand, asked to mention what makes WOLA a special church for them, all respondents unanimously state the “Word of God” or “sermon” that is being preached in the church. Thus, South African members are also *spiritually* integrated.

Finally, as stated under the profiles of the respondents, apart from those who are employed, South African respondents who are unemployed are given accommodation within the premises of the church, free of charge. The researcher was further informed by

the pastor that the church also accommodates another South African family – which did not take part in this study.

In this section the data reveal that forced migrants could not integrate into local churches. Spiritual and linguistic reasons have been identified as major obstacles to socio-religious integration into those churches. The second part of the section examined the integration of both multicultural refugees and South African members within the Word of Life Assembly. It was found that such integration was, in principle, achieved among members who, in general, share the same common [refugee] status and relatively similar experiences, namely Congolese refugees. With regard to South African members, however, the data reveal that their integration into WOLA remains virtually limited, mainly due to socio-cultural reasons. It is, nevertheless, argued that South African members keep on attending the refugee church because, on one hand, they feel *spiritually* integrated, and on the other hand, some of them have some advantages that mitigate their isolation sentiment.

The following section investigates other aspects of the role of the refugee church towards its members.

### **3.2.2. Activities and Services within WOLA**

As suggested in the study's hypotheses, refugee established churches exist alongside local churches because refugee churches are more integrative than local churches, on one hand, and because refugee churches are strategically well placed to meet particular and multi-faceted needs of the refugee, on the other hand.

In the previous section, field data confirmed that the establishment of independent refugee churches alongside local churches is a result of a lack of integration of refugees into these local churches. Spiritual and linguistic barriers were identified as major causes

behind this problem. Subsequently, the researcher investigated whether such integration sought within local churches was achieved within a refugee church. Thus, it was found that the refugee church, namely the WOLA, achieves this integrative role, notably as far as refugee church members are concerned.

In addition to the integrative role that was discussed above, the study further revealed that the Word of Life Assembly offers a wide range of services and activities to the immediate community of Yeoville in general, and to its members in particular.

The present section gathers and discusses the data regarding the place of the church in assisting refugees. More particularly, the study revealed that WOLA essentially offers its members a range of material and social assistance and pastoral counseling. In addition, WOLA has become a place where religious and socio-cultural identities are easily built and maintained among members, and where social networks are woven among refugees themselves, and between refugees and their home country.

### **3.2.2.1. Place of Church in assisting refugees**

In order to determine the rank of WOLA among other possible means or channels through which refugees get assistance (money, food and accommodation), respondents were asked to mention from whom they received their assistance.

**Table 5. Source of assistance**

		Church	Family	Friends	Never received assistance
		7	4	3	1
N	15				
*Not Asked	5				

\* This includes the pastor and the four South African respondents

From table five, it appears that the church is at the front line in responding to the welfare of forced migrants in the preliminary stages of their flight, especially in assisting with food and temporary accommodation. The pastor said that he receives at least two new refugees a month in search of emergency accommodation before they can join their relatives or friends in the city of Johannesburg or elsewhere in South Africa. This pattern is also seen elsewhere, such as in Central America and the United States, where some churches receive an overwhelming number of refugees. For instance, Stanczak and Miller (2002:42) reported that one church in East Los Angeles and one of its nonprofit organizations, house up to fifty men a night who have crossed the border.

Furthermore, similar findings were reached in some recent studies, notably the National Refugee Baseline Survey done by CASE among refugees staying Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. In this study, Churches/mosques are ranked first among the main sources of assistance for newly arrived refugees (2003:87). Moreover, assessing refugees' participation in community organizations, the same study revealed that "churches or mosques represent by far the most popular organizations that applicants [refugees] belong to", and emphatically recommended that "awareness campaigns aimed at refugee communities should probably enlist the assistance of community churches or mosques to be successful" (2003:171).

#### **3.2.2.2. Material assistance to church members**

The material assistance that members receive from Word of Life Assembly church mainly consists of liquid money (financial), food parcels, and accommodation within the church premises.

Asked whether they receive any assistance from WOLA, 52% of the respondents declared to have regularly or occasionally received material support from the church. Respondents who do not receive assistance from the church (47%) are those who are

normally having remunerated jobs (about 31%) or being supported by family members or relatives with whom they stay (nearly 16%). Some respondents from this last category stated that they normally get their support from their respective families in DRC.

The nature of material assistance received from WOLA is summarized in the table below.

**Table 6. Nature of material assistance received from WOLA**

		Financial Aid	Food parcels	WOLA Accommodation
		10	10	5
*Not Asked	1			
**n	19			

\* This includes the pastor

\*\* The numbers in the table do not add up to 19 because respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question. In other words, one respondent may concurrently qualify to receive more than one kind of assistance

Most of the respondents who receive financial support from WOLA declared that they receive money as a contribution towards rentals, or towards transport for church choir members to enable them to attend choir practice meetings during the week. Other respondents stated that they received a once-off financial support towards wedding expenses or medical fees.

It is important to note here that the funding for this assistance comes from WOLA budget, which is mainly made of tithes and offerings from church members as well as rental income from *Agence Grace Business* and the *Global Faith Mission Ministries* which use WOLA premises.

Food parcels are distributed within the context of a special program, named “*WOLA Foundation*” which, according to the pastor, aims at “feeding the hungry within and out of the church, in the process of alleviating poverty in our area”. The food parcels are given to [some] church members quite regularly once a month. The parcel often contains 750ml of cooking oil, 2.5kgs of maize flour, 1kg of sugar, 500g of spaghetti, 1 kg of salt, 1kg of sugar, 1kg of beans, and 1 fish tin (500g).

With regard to accommodation, WOLA has got two double-story buildings in the church yard where about twenty church members including six South Africans stay. Concerning newcomers, the pastor indicated that, when the church premises are full and cannot accommodate them, he urges church members to offer them shelter until they are able to settle themselves or get hold of the contacts they had prior to their journey.

Moreover, asked whether the church has any specific program to help members meet their physical needs, the pastor stated that the church has recently initiated a big project called “*Soup kitchen*”. He emphatically added that the target for the year 2005 is to feed a total of about 450 families a week. The church has already started a fundraising drive towards this community-based program. The pastor indicated that both the church and the community of Yeoville-Berea at large are targeted in this huge feeding project. He further said that the church has got the program to train people on how to run small businesses to sustain their families, and thus, alleviate poverty in the area. In fact, the pastor himself is qualified in Business Management, and has been running his own business in his home country (DRC). This was further confirmed by some respondents who declared that they received strong support and insights from the pastor as to how to set up small businesses.

Asked about how the church helps members who are in need of employment, the pastor indicated that the church has set up a special department which deals with unemployment by providing advice, paying registration fees for vocational training, and assisting with

transport money those who go for job interviews. He also added that the church is organizing a fundraising to support tertiary education for refugees.

### 3.2.2.3. Pastoral Counseling

Besides the material assistance, the Word of Life Assembly also holds counseling sessions on behalf of its members. During the investigation, it was found that even many other people, mostly from refugee community, who are not members of WOLA come to consult the pastor for counseling. Asked to whom they would go for help in case of any particular problem (see *table 7* below), respondents were more likely to go to the pastor than to anybody else; the main reason justifying this choice being that, some argue, the pastor is a ‘wise’ and ‘trustworthy’ person.

**Table 7. To whom would you go in case of following problems?**

Problem		Would seek help from				
		Pastor	God	Family	Friends	None
	Marital	10	0	1	0	4
	Financial	9	4	3	1	3
	Job	7	2	0	5	1
	Trauma/Abuse	6	4	0	0	0
	Personal	5	4	4	1	0
*n=15						

\* This includes the pastor and the four South African respondents. Also, the numbers in the table do not necessarily add up to 15 because some respondents did not experience the problem, and others gave more than one answer to this question

The findings revealed that respondents are more likely to consult the pastor when they have financial problems (about 67%), and when marital conflicts arise between partners (60%). In this last case, with the exception of one respondent, all other married

respondents stated they would defer their marital problems to the pastor. Otherwise, some of the respondents (about 27%) would even prefer not to tell anyone else at all about their [private] marital problems.

These results were further confirmed by the responses the pastor provided when asked to mention the main concerns brought to him during counseling sessions. Money issues – rentals, school fees for primary school pupils and dowry (*lobola*) – and marital problems were put first. Nevertheless, other important issues, such as unemployment and documentation problems for new asylum seekers were further reported among major concerns that members brought to the attention of the pastor. In his weekly program, the pastor has set up two days (Tuesday and Thursday) for counseling. The pastor receives at least 10 counselees a day, excluding those who, following the emergency or urgency of their cases, consult him beyond his time-table. People are counseled individually in the pastor's office.

#### **3.2.2.4. WOLA and group identity building**

During the investigation, it was revealed that the Word of Life Assembly has, to some extent, become a place where both religious and socio-cultural identities are built or maintained among some members, specifically Congolese. These group identities are particularly negotiated through daily worship in mother tongues (Lingala and/or French) and cultural activities and parties organized at WOLA. Asked about the social activities, the pastor stated that every Saturday there is a team of church members which goes on a *social* visit to other church members. He also mentioned that during December of each year the church organizes social events whereby all church members meet together to share food and drinks in order to get to know each other. Socio-cultural identities are also constructed and maintained through active participation of the church in wedding celebrations and funerals. These important activities are typically performed according to the Congolese culture. The researcher had opportunity to witness two marriages that took place during interview period.



Furthermore, for a number of respondents WOLA has become a family in a foreign city. Similarly, in his study among Burundian and Rwandese refugees in Tanzania, Sommers (2001:362 citing Cox), concluded that churches give people a place in a community of friends which often stands as a *surrogate* for an extended family fractured by mobility and change. Thus, asked to give the reasons for not attending other churches around, many respondents made statements, such as “I am comfortable with *my* church”, “this is *my* church”, or “I do not need another church”.

Moreover, asked whether they would allow their children to attend a Sunday school at other [local] churches, all parent-respondents to this question declared that they would not allow their children to attend a Sunday school at another church. Differing reasons were given to justify the refusal. Some parents argue that they are dubious about what their children would learn in those churches. Others would like to have their children around them in the same church for close supervision and control. Other respondents in this category claim that the church is for them another family where children must spiritually grow and learn the *mentality* and *culture*. Thomas (2001:2) asserts that “religion remains a property of groups, and is especially talked about as the core of culture”. Furthermore, one respondent emphatically affirmed that, “it is within WOLA where our children easily adapt to the [Congolese] homogenous environment which prevents them from being aggressive”. Another respondent further indicated that the church (WOLA) “prepares children for a future adaptation to their [Congolese] culture the day they would go back home, because they will have evolved in an environment which is quite identical to *theirs*”.

In fact, from this particular group of respondents, it appears that the church remains the sole place – besides public schools and *all-nations* flats (some name them thus) – where children are not in contact with other foreign children, who may put their [Congolese] culture and identity at risk. In other words, it is particularly within the refugee church where both religious and socio-cultural identities among refugees are negotiated, and where the risk of acculturation can be minimized towards children.

Thus, in a bid to adequately achieve this indirect role, the refugee church, in addition to its primordial spiritual mission, will likely seek to become more culturally and traditionally accommodative as well. That is why, for instance, when asked whether there would be any difference, in terms of worship between the respondent's *home* church and WOLA church, 73% of the respondents declared that there is no difference, especially with regard to language, songs, dances and preaching. Moreover, the issue of clothing raised by Congolese women within WOLA against South African members – as discussed above – constitutes underlying evidence that cultural identity is given an important place in a refugee congregation.

#### **3.2.2.5. WOLA and social networks among refugees**

Another important role that WOLA plays on behalf of its members is that it helps establish informal networks between local refugees on one hand, and between refugees and their home country on the other hand. This is done mainly through inviting pastors from the Democratic Republic of Congo to come and preach at WOLA. For instance, during the WOLA Convention that was held from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2004 – and which the researcher quite regularly attended – special visitors including preachers and singers came from DRC. This was an opportunity for some refugee members to interact with the visitors who indubitably brought them lots of news from home country and some Congolese special food and clothing items (*'vitenge'*). Moreover, as indicated earlier, asked how they knew about the WOLA, most of the respondents declared that they did through their relatives and friends, of whom most were members of WOLA. In other words, most of the migrants leave their home country after connections and contacts have been established with relatives or friends living in Johannesburg. Similarly, the role of the church in helping an asylum seeker in his process of leaving the country of origin and settling in host country, Dyrness (2002:8), in his study on the impact of religious congregations on the Community in California, further disclosed that “religion is the port of entry for immigrants to America”.

Another important point that seems to weave and facilitate transnational networks between [Congolese] refugees and their country of origin is the Congolese-owned freight agency, trading under the name of “Agence Grace Business” which operates within the premises of WOLA. During interviews, when approached for information, the owners of the business preferred not to talk to the researcher, albeit his formal introduction. Later on, the information obtained from a third party revealed that the agency facilitates connections between Congolese immigrants and their home country, more particularly in terms of informal import and export of products between South Africa and DRC is concerned. Thus, it is not surprising to find at Yeoville market – where many Congolese retail – several Congolese products, mostly food, such as aubergines, *fufu* (cassava flour), *pondu* (cassava leaves), *mbisi ya ko kauka* (dried fish), and clothing items.

Additionally, it is logical to assume that respondents who declared to receive financial support from their families in DRC are more likely to make use of this transnational channel, of which access becomes relatively easy because of its strategic location.

On the other hand, social networks among church members themselves cannot be underestimated. For instance, asked to whom they would go for help when in need of employment (see *table 7*), most of the respondents are more likely to consult the pastor and or friends [brethren]. In fact, it is through these networks that some refugees have managed to get jobs or insights for entering the business market.

In conclusion, chapter three gave a more detailed presentation and analysis of field data collected from respondents, members of WOLA. At this level, the integrative role and diverse ways through which the church contributes to the welfare of its members were identified and extensively discussed. The next chapter summarily presents the findings of the study and suggests further areas for future research.

## CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

As stated in the introductory chapter, the present study seeks to determine the specific role of the refugee established churches within the host community where local churches already exist. The study hypothesized that refugee established churches exist alongside local churches because refugee churches are more integrative than local churches on one hand, and because refugee churches are well placed to meet multi-faceted needs of the refugee on the other.

With regard to integration, the results of the study substantially validate the above hypothesis, in that the refugee church, more particularly the Word of Life Assembly (WOLA) in Yeoville, has been able to integrate refugees who could not otherwise integrate in local or domestic churches in Johannesburg. The study revealed that most of the respondents (60%) have been to at least one [local] church before joining WOLA church. Language and spiritual problems have been identified as the major reasons that made the respondents leave the local church. In other words, the concerned refugees could not *linguistically* and *spiritually* integrate into local or domestic churches where English and/or local languages are traditionally used, at least at the earlier stages of their settling in Johannesburg. It is noteworthy that even for those respondents (33%) for whom language was not an obstacle to integration, some said they left the local church for spiritual reasons. This leaves room to conclude that the messages or sermons preached in those [local] churches, to some extent, do not meet the spiritual needs and expectations of the refugees. Thus, asked to mention what makes Congolese join WOLA in a big numbers, the pastor concisely pointed out a couple of things, namely the ‘preached Word’ and the ‘language’ (French). Similarly, when asked to mention something that makes their church (WOLA) so special to them, most of the respondents (80%) indicated the “preached Word of God” (spiritual).

It is also important to note that, as far as respondents are concerned, and in contrast to public opinion, xenophobia is not ranked among the main barriers to integration into host churches.

After exploring the problem of integration of refugees into local or domestic churches, the second focal point was to investigate whether the effort of integration sought within a host church is achieved within a multicultural refugee church, namely the Word of Life Assembly. In this regard, it was found that, in general, refugees are well integrated into WOLA. Nevertheless, such integration is not practically complete for all WOLA members. Indeed, integration is achieved among members who, in general, share the same common [refugee] status and relatively similar experiences. In other terms, the degree of integration largely remains dependent on the members' socio-cultural backgrounds. Thus, the study revealed that refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – the predominant group – are more integrated than other nationalities in the church, especially South African members. With regard to South African members, for instance, the data revealed that their integration into WOLA remains practically limited, mainly due to socio-cultural differences (clothing, music, language, etc.). This situation led the researcher to point out four levels of integration within WOLA church as far as members are concerned; that is, integration of a refugee into a *refugee* community, *religious* or *spiritual* integration, and *cultural* integration.

It is, nevertheless, argued that South African members more likely keep on attending the refugee church because, on one hand, they feel *spiritually* integrated, and on the other hand, some of them have some advantages – such as being a member of the church, accommodation and other forms of assistance – that would mitigate their feelings of isolation.

Thus, it can be briefly implied that a refugee will not fully integrate until he has got his 'own' church, in which he feels linguistically, socially, culturally and spiritually integrated. That is why many foreign churches in Yeoville are commonly named after the

nationalities of their leaders or members, such as *Cameroonian church*, *Ethiopian church* or *Nigerian church*, etc.

The study also pointed out the fourth level of integration, that is, integration of the refugee church itself. In this regard, it was revealed that, as far as refugee church is concerned, not only church members are to integrate into host community and/or churches, but the [refugee] church itself – labelled thus as a ‘foreign’ entity – is to seek its own integration into and approval from the South African community in general, and host faith-based institutions in particular.

Furthermore, besides the integrative role, the study revealed that, in an attempt to meet the diverse needs of its members, the Word of Life Assembly offers a wide range of special services and activities, notably material and social assistance, and pastoral counseling. Moreover, WOLA has become a strategic place where religious and socio-cultural identities are easily built and maintained among members, and where social networks are interwoven among refugees themselves and between refugees and their country of origin. In addition, the study particularly revealed that the refugee church (WOLA) is quite concerned about the welfare of its members. In this regard, the study revealed that WOLA plays a big role in connecting new asylum seekers to their families and friends in Johannesburg and elsewhere, and in helping them to settle in the world of small businesses. Some respondents praise the pastor for his constructive counsel in personal business management. One respondent stated that “our pastor does not want to see any church member sitting down without doing something”. Thus, in almost every sermon or prayer – which the researcher has attended during the participatory observation – the pastor never failed to urge church members to set up in business, and asking God to bless their businesses.

In addition, the present study confirmed the assertion that migration is a *theologizing experience*. Forced migrants tend to become more receptive to religion and actively involved in church activities in host communities than in their home countries. Refugee

members at WOLA are not reluctant to even close their survival businesses at Yeoville market in the middle of the day, in order to attend a daily 30 minutes service at the church. In fact, having gone through traumatic experience, the forced migrant feels the need of a place where he can find solace and regain the hope for the future. The study has confirmed that the church constitutes a powerful source of psychological and emotional support. It is particularly through the ministry of healing – both physical and spiritual healing – and the preaching of the prosperity gospel that the [refugee] church attracts many refugees living in protracted situation. A sermon which directly addresses the situation of refugees and guarantees abundant material blessings from God offers emotional and sociological security to the hopeless refugees.

Finally, the study confirmed that the church (WOLA) is the first institution to which settled refugees – not only newcomers – go for help in times of crisis. In fact, churches are easily identifiable and accessible by newcomers into a foreign country, and likely more receptive than secular refugee service providers.

### **Research Implications and Areas for Future Research**

In spite of the limitations mentioned above, the researcher certainly believes that the findings of this research pave a way for other subsequent studies of this nature. For instance, since this research is conducted only within an independent church, a similar study would be paramount within a local mainline church, since the two denominational streams may have different approaches and policies with regard to their role in the community. During the investigation, it was also discovered that a number of forced migrants living in the area of Berea and Yeoville join local mainline churches, such as Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches identified in Yeoville. This category, however, did not fall within the scope of the present research.

Moreover, given the comprehensiveness of the concept *religion*, and based on the findings of this study which strongly agree with Sol's argument that "when people move, the church moves" (1982:38), it is pertinent to consider that, among forced migrants, there are those who still practice traditional religions in host communities. The role and influence of these religions among the refugee community remain behind the stage and, therefore, it would be interesting to investigate those forms of religion.

In this regard, a greater engagement with sociology of religious literature might yield more interesting results.



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**The Role of Refugee Established Churches**

**Subject information** *(to be read at the beginning of each interview)*

My name is Vedaste Nzayabino. I am conducting a research for the purpose of my Master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS), Johannesburg.

The purpose of this study is to determine and understand the role of the church in the lives of the refugees they serve. More particularly, I want to know how the Word of Life Assembly responds to the needs of its members.

To be able to carry out the interview, you have to give your consent. You should only give consent if you are happy to be interviewed. The interview is completely voluntary. Should you choose not to participate, there will be no consequences whatsoever.

Moreover, if during the interview you want to end it, or do not want to answer any question (s), you are free to do so at any time. I will just finish the interview or move to the next question. If you do give permission, I would like to tape the interview. However, if you are not comfortable with this, then I will just take notes of your answers. The whole interview will take about an hour.

The information that you provide will be treated as confidential, and your anonymity will be guaranteed in that your name and any other personal details will not be recorded nor be mentioned in the report without your permission. As soon as the study is completed, both the notes and tapes will be destroyed. Since I am a student, I do not promise any remuneration for your participation. However, I do highly appreciate your participation and interest in this interview. If you would like to receive a copy of my final report, I will take your mailing address at the end of the interview.

Do you have any question about what we have discussed so far?

Should you agree to take part in this study by participating in the interview, please sign the following consent form.

Thank you for your cooperation.

**The Role of Refugee Established Churches**

**Consent Forms for Interview**

**Consent Form for participation in research**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to take part in the research conducted by Vedaste Nzayabino on the Role of Refugee Established Churches in the Lives of Forced Migrants. I have read the subject information and fully understand its contents.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Consent form for recording interview**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby give my consent to Vedaste Nzayabino to tape my interview with him as part of his research on the Role of Refugee Established Churches in the Lives of Forced Migrants.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Role of Refugee Established Churches

## Interview Schedule Cover Sheet

### **INTERVIEW DETAILS**

**Name of Interviewee:**

**Position in the Church:**

**Language:**

**Taped: Yes**      **ف**      **No**      **ف**

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Phone/cell Number:**

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Place:**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

**Age:**

**Nationality:**

**Race:**

**Gender:**

**Marital Status:****Number of Children:****Religious Affiliation:**

### COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW & KEY THEMES

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**The Role of Refugee Established Churches in the Lives of Forced Migrants:  
A Case Study of Word of Life Assembly in Yeoville, Johannesburg**

## **Interview Schedule**

### **Section A: Background information**

1. Can you please share with me how you left your home country and how you established yourself here in South Africa?
2. What is your country of origin?
3. How long have you been in South Africa?
4. Have you ever been married? If yes, how many children do you have?
5. What was your religion/denomination in your home country?
6. When did you join the WOLA?
7. How did you know about the WOLA?
8. Why did you decide to change your denomination?
9. Have you ever been to another church in Johannesburg or elsewhere in South Africa before joining WOLA? If yes, would you like to tell me what made you to leave that church?



**Section B:                      Understanding the role of the church**

10.     Where did you go when you first arrived in South Africa?
11.     Would you like to tell me from whom you received your first assistance?  
          What was the nature of this assistance?
12.     Where or with whom did you stay for your first month after arriving in South Africa?
13.     Do you receive any assistance from the WOLA? If yes, would you like to tell me what kind of assistance you receive?
14.     Do you sometimes attend services at other churches around? If yes, do you receive any assistance from this (those) church (es)?
15.     Can you please tell me to whom you would go if you had a financial problem or no food in the house?
16.     Can you please tell me to whom you would go when you have problem in your family or with your partner?
17.     Have you ever felt stressed, traumatized, rejected or abused in your family or neighbourhood? If yes, where did you go for help?
18.     With whom do you feel comfortable to share your personal matters or needs?  
          \_\_\_\_\_ Why?
19.     Whom do you contact when you need a job? \_\_\_\_\_ Why?

**Section C. Church and Integration**

22. Which language(s) can you speak?
23. Which language do you like to use when praying individually?
24. Tell me what makes you to like this church. What is special with this church that you can't find in other churches?
25. Can you please tell me what makes you not to attend other local churches around?
26. Is there any difference, in terms of worshipping between your home church and Word of Life Assembly?
27. Are your children attending the Word of Life Assembly's Sunday school?  
  
If yes, would you allow your children to attend a Sunday school at a local church if they can speak and understand English? Why?

**Section D:                      Questions for the pastor/church founder**

1.        Can you please tell me how you had a vision to establish the WOLA church?
2.        Tell me more about the mission of your church.
3.        Have you ever been a pastor or member in any local church in Johannesburg or else in South Africa?
4.        What motivated you to choose this area (Yeoville) for your ministry?
5.        When and where were you officially ordained to be a pastor?
6.        What was your occupation in your home country?
7.        Do you have any other secular occupation outside the church?
8.        According to you, what makes Congolese to attend the church in a big number?
9.        Does your church have any program to meet physical needs of the members? Tell me more about it?
10.      In your preaching, what kind of sermons/themes do you think are most helpful for the flock?
11.      How do you prepare your sermons? Does the overall spiritual state of your church members influence you in this preparation?
12.      What kind of spiritual and social struggles do you think they affect your church members?
13.      What are the main concerns brought to you during counseling sessions?
14.      How does your church help members who are in need of a job or accommodation?

**Section E:            Questions for South African church members**

1.     When did you join the WOLA? \_\_\_\_\_
2.     How did you know about the WOLA?
3.     Have you ever been to another church in Johannesburg or elsewhere in South Africa before joining WOLA? If yes, would you like to tell me what made you to leave that church?
4.     Why did you decided to change your denomination/church?
5.     Tell me what makes you to like this church. What is special with this church that you can't find in other churches?
6.     Can you please tell me what makes you not to attend other local churches around?
7.     How do you feel to attend church services with many foreigners?
8.     Do you receive any assistance in addition to your own earnings?
9.     Do you receive any assistance from the WOLA? If yes, would you like to tell me what kind of assistance you receive?
10.    Do you sometimes attend services at other churches around? If yes, do you receive any assistance from this (those) church (es)?
11.    Is there any thing you don't like in the church, or something you would like the church to improve?



## LIST OF CHURCHES OPERATING IN YEOVILLE, JOHANNESBURG

1. Russian Orthodox  
Cnr Harrow Rd & Hunter Str.
2. Celestial Church of Christ (Eglise du Christianisme Céleste) [*foreign*]  
Jesus is the Lord Parish  
82 Harrow Rd
3. Christian Pentecostal Mission International – Dominion Chapel [*foreign*]  
122 Louis Botha
4. Saint Aidan’s Church (Anglican)  
Cnr Cavendish Rd & Regent Str.
5. St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church  
43 Cavendish Rd
6. Grace Family Church  
122 St. Georges Rd.
7. Bellevue Baptist Mission Church [*foreign*]  
138 Hunter Str.
8. Celestial Church of Christ, [*foreign*]  
Voice of the Lord Parish  
118 Hunter Str.
9. Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s witnesses [*foreign*]  
Bellevue Congregation  
113 Hunter Str.
10. Jesus Mountain of Miracles Ministries International, Inc. [*foreign*]  
A Place Where Miracles Happen,  
105 Hunter Str.
11. St. Marks Church Halls  
50 Kenmere Rd.
12. United Church  
Cnr Kenmere Rd & Frances Str.

13. Global Faith Mission Ministries (Ethiopian church) [*foreign*]  
Crn Kenmere Rd. & Hunter Str.
14. Word of Life Assembly (WOLA) [*foreign*]  
Crn Kenmere Rd. & Hunter Str.
15. Yahwe Nissi Gospel Ministries [*foreign*]  
243 Fortesque Rd & Hunter Str.
16. Dynamic Faith Church [*foreign*]  
243 Fortesque Rd & Hunter Str.
17. Jesus Christ is the Lord Universal Church  
Raleigh Str.
18. Nazareth house  
Crn Harrow Rd. & Webb Str.
19. Les Assemblées Chrésiennes [*foreign*]  
Crn Cavendish Rd. & Becker Str.
20. Celestial Church of Christ – Eglise du Christianisme Célèste [*foreign*]  
Mercyland Parish  
90 Becker Str.
21. Message of Life Church [*foreign*]  
77 Yeo Str.
22. Dynamic Faith Church [*foreign*]  
Crn Fortesque Rd. & Hunter Str.
23. Church of Johannesburg [*foreign*]  
Crn Fortesque Rd. & Yeo Str.