

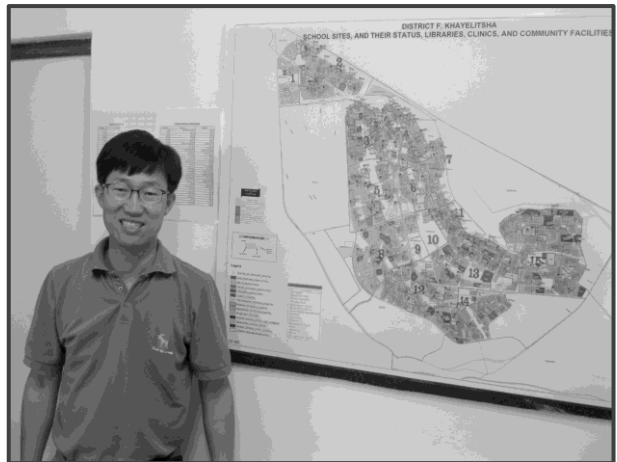
## Urban Ministry in Khayelitsha, South Africa

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Presently over fifty percent of the world's population lives in urban centres, and this figure is growing rapidly. We are witnessing an incredible demographic shift world-wide. This is also having tremendous impact upon missions and ministry in the rural areas and also on the urban centres.<sup>1</sup>

Many people around the world have heard of at least two of the large townships in South Africa: Soweto or Khayelitsha. Both are large population settlement areas. Soweto is near Johannesburg and Khayelitsha is on the Cape Flats in Cape Town. Both are urban centres of an unique variety historically, which is not my focus here. However, I do want to focus upon the reality and challenges of mission today in the light of the urbanization of Africa by reporting on one urban ministry in Khayelitsha.

A large urban informal township or “suburb” such as Khayelitsha (Xhosa for “new home”) is an urban-magnet, bedroom community on the edge of another major urban centre, Cape Town. It constantly attracts newcomers from well beyond its own border; many from the Eastern Cape Province migrate here for work as well as others from countries such as Zimbabwe or other African nations. Within such communities today the traditional mainline churches are very few in number. The majority of churches belong to the grouping known as African Initiated Churches (AICs, sometimes also called African Independent Churches).<sup>2</sup> In fact, Khayelitsha has an es-



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<sup>1</sup> Two very helpful chapters on urbanization in Africa and spirituality are Wilber O'Donovan's, "The Ugly Side of Urbanization" and "Cultural Crisis and Death in the Cities," in *Biblical Christianity in Modern Africa* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2000), 40-73.

<sup>2</sup> See the book brief on *Mission in an African Way* in the *Haddington House Journal* 13 (2011): 99.

timated population of anywhere between 800,000 to 1,000,000 and 85% of the existing churches within its boundaries are AICs. The question is, “What about the training of the leaders of these majority churches in such an urban environment?” The statistics are hard to ascertain, but likely 80-85% of the leaders have not had Bible college instruction or in-depth mentoring.

In 2001 a Korean mission was founded in Khayelitsha on an ecumenical and evangelical model to help train African leaders. From this mission, “African Leadership for the Kingdom”, the Africa Theological College and several other ministries such as an extensive children’s ministry, youth work, camp work, etc., have emerged. Africa Theological College runs a two-year

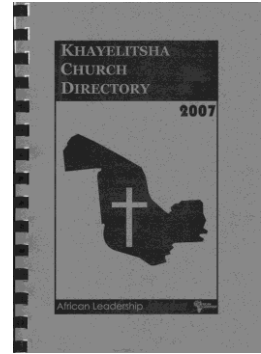


training programme. Classes are conducted Monday through Thursday evenings from 5:30-8:00 p.m. in the heart of the Khayelitsha community. Khayelitsha is presently “divided” into fifteen suburbs or divisions, and Africa Theological College is strategically located in Ilitha Park near the Khayelitsha Train Station, which is situated in quite a central area of Khayelitsha. A facility has been built with two classrooms, a small library and a meeting room.

The vision of Africa Theological College “is to train and produce local church leaders who transform the lives of the people in Khayelitsha through the gospel of Jesus”. The centre in Khayelitsha may be viewed as the mother and there are various satellites across Southern Africa each with local leadership, such as in Soweto. The two-year curriculum primarily uses a twelve-book series. This series covers the Old and New Testaments, how to preach

the Bible, Bible doctrine, personal spiritual life, church administration, teaching techniques and methods, history of the church, evangelism and discipleship, how to interpret the Bible and how to counsel people biblically.

No doubt there are many other colleges which could be selected and upon which we could report. However, I believe this single spotlight on Africa Theological College is challenging and informative. We learn about the global missions community, we learn about the urban context for training, we learn about the numerical presence of the AICs, we learn about the methodology being used by one training ministry, and we learn that Kingdom work is proceeding.



*A classroom at Africa Theological College, Khayelitsha, South Africa*