

KOKERBOOM

A SERVICE OF THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH IN NAMIBIA



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The Vision Behind Kokerboom

Led by Dr. Zack Pienaar

At the heart of Kokerboom is Dr. Zack Pienaar, a Namibian practical theologian, church consultant and congregational development leader committed to helping smaller congregations become healthier, more discerning and more faithful.

Kokerboom carries the conviction that congregations are not strengthened through quick fixes, imported programmes or activity for activity's sake. They are strengthened through prayerful listening, theological reflection, honest conversation and careful attention to context.

Through his work with pastors, church councils and local congregations, Dr. Pienaar guides churches to ask deeper questions:: Who are we? Where are we going? What story has shaped us? What gifts has God entrusted to us? Where is God already at work? And where is God calling us now? How can we participate in the Missio Dei?

Kokerboom is therefore more than a service. It is a guided process of discernment, accompaniment and renewal, shaped by pastoral wisdom, practical theology and a deep belief in the beauty and calling of smaller congregations. Kokerboom also guides congregations to develop a missional ecclesiology.

"The future of a congregation is not found only in more activity, but in deeper discernment of God's calling."



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THEOLOGY

A theological frame means looking for how congregations reveal knowledge about God.



NAMIBIA: THE CONTEXT WE SERVE

Namibia's congregations live across vast distances, diverse regions, languages and histories. This context matters: the work of discernment must begin with place.

825,229 km²

Vast arid and semi-arid land

3,022,401

Population, 2023 Census

3.7 people / km²

Sparse settlement and distance

49.5% / 50.5%

Urban / rural communities

Every congregation lives somewhere. Kokerboom begins by listening to that place, its people, memory, distance, language, resources and calling.

Sources: Namibia Statistics Agency 2023 Census; World Bank Namibia country overview.

Small Churches Are Beautiful

Across Namibia, many smaller urban and rural congregations carry the faithful work of the church in communities that are changing, growing, diversifying and facing new pressures. Some are small in number, but rich in memory. Some have modest resources, but deep relationships. Some carry heavy responsibility, but remain faithful, present and willing to discern.

In many churches, pastors and church councils are asking honest questions: How do we remain faithful in a changing world? How do we serve our community with wisdom and courage? How do we discern what God is calling us to be and do?

Kokerboom was established for this journey. We believe smaller congregations are not failed versions of larger churches. They are communities of faith, called by God, placed in specific urban and rural contexts, and entrusted with gifts that matter.

Small churches are not less than. They are places where God's mission can still be seen, heard, and lived.



ECOLOGY

The congregation's social environment: its neighbourhood and region, as well as its denomination, networks and other institutions.

A Ministry for Healthy Congregations

Kokerboom is a congregational consultation and development ministry of the Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia, guiding churches toward renewed health, deeper discernment, and faithful participation in God's mission.

Established in 2024, it serves local congregations, pastors, church councils and church leaders by helping churches discover and live their God-given missional identity.

Our focus is especially on small congregations. We believe small churches are beautiful, not because they are without challenges, but because they often carry the church's faithfulness in deeply human, local and relational ways.

Our work is rooted in practical theology, particularly congregational studies: the lived practice of worship, leadership, relationships, decision-making, community presence, pastoral care, history, culture and calling.

A healthy congregation is a creative, resourceful and faithful community that understands its unique identity, clarifies its calling, nurtures meaningful relationships, and serves its context with courage, wisdom and hope.



AT A GLANCE

Name: Kokerboom - A Ministry for Healthy Congregations

Established: 2024

Focus: Congregational development and missional theology

Audience: Small congregations, pastors, church councils

Service model: Consultation, facilitation, training, research, conferences, accompaniment

Partner: Verburg Charity Foundation Netherlands



CULTURE

The culture of a congregation is its identity, its life together: the activities it does, its artefacts, habits, symbols and stories.



Helping Congregations

Discover Their God-Given Missional Identity

Kokerboom exists to facilitate processes that help small congregations discover and live their God-given missional identity.

This mission is rooted in the conviction that every congregation has a calling. That calling is not copied from another church. It is not imported from a programme. It is not reduced to a strategic plan. It is discerned through prayer, conversation, theological reflection, honest listening and careful attention to context.

Kokerboom helps congregations ask: Who are we? What story has shaped us? What gifts has God entrusted to us? Where is the Spirit already at work? How can we participate more faithfully in the Missio Dei?

EQUIPPING LEADERS. STRENGTHENING CONGREGATIONS.

Kokerboom strengthens small congregations through annual conferences, leadership training and practical guidance for pastors, elders and deacons.

These gatherings create space for learning, encouragement and shared discernment, while supporting congregations with research, leadership development and growth processes that help them serve their communities with renewed confidence.

Kokerboom helps congregations move from asking, "How do we survive?" to asking, "Where is God calling us now?"



RESOURCES

The raw materials of congregational life, including: its members, building, reputation, history, its gifts and financial assets.

Rooted in the Missio Trinitatis Dei

Kokerboom's work is shaped by the theology of the Missio Dei - the mission of God. The church does not create God's mission. God is already at work in the world. The calling of the church is to discern, embody and participate in that mission faithfully.

A healthy congregation is not simply one with many members, strong finances, full programmes or impressive buildings. The deeper question is whether the congregation is becoming a faithful, discerning, loving, adaptive and a missional community.

Congregational health is spiritual, relational, theological, practical and contextual. It is communal discernment under the guidance of the Spirit.

The future of a congregation is not found only in better activity, but in deeper discernment of God's calling.

Luke 4:18–19

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed.





THEOLOGY

A theological frame means looking for how congregations reveal knowledge about God.

What We Believe About Congregations

Kokerboom begins with a hopeful and respectful view of the local congregation. We do not see congregations first as institutions in decline. We see them as communities of faith with memory, gifts, relationships, wisdom and calling.

We believe every congregation is creative, resourceful and whole. Every congregation is unique. Every congregation requires tailored solutions.

Congregations need safe spaces for conversation. Congregations can be healthy, adaptive and sustainable. Congregations thrive when they clarify their gifts and calling. Healthy congregations strengthen communities. Congregations thrive through Spirit-led wisdom.

*We do not begin with what a congregation lacks.
We begin by listening for what God has already entrusted to it.*

Kokerboom creates safe spaces where leaders from different denominations can gather without borders or barriers. These spaces encourage honest conversation, shared learning and mutual support, helping church leaders discover common ground and strengthen one another across denominational lines.



KOKERBOOM

EIGHT GUIDING PRINCIPLES



1. Wholeness

We believe every congregation is creative, resourceful, and whole.



2. Uniqueness

We believe every congregation is unique and requires tailored solutions in order to thrive.



3. Conversation

We believe it is essential to create spaces where congregations can have honest, meaningful conversations.



4. Health

We believe congregations can become healthy, adaptive, and sustainable.



5. Calling

We believe congregations thrive when they clarify their unique gifts and calling.



6. Impact

We believe healthy congregations are better equipped to make a difference in the world.



7. Community

We believe that when congregations thrive, communities thrive.



8. Wisdom

We believe congregations thrive when they utilize wisdom, knowledge, and understanding under the guidance of the Spirit.



WHOLE • UNIQUE • CONVERSATIONAL • HEALTHY • CALLED • IMPACTFUL • COMMUNITY-ROOTED • SPIRIT-GUIDED

For the life of the Church and the flourishing of communities.

Consultation, Facilitation, Training, Research and Accompaniment

Kokerboom supports congregations through services designed to strengthen congregational health, missional identity, pastoral leadership and the equipping of church councils.

Congregational Consultation: structured listening, reflection, analysis, discernment and planning. Congregational Analysis: understanding strengths, vulnerabilities, leadership patterns, worship life, community relationships and missional opportunities. Missional

Discernment: asking where God may be calling the congregation now. Training in

Congregational Practice: leadership development, church council empowerment, adaptive ministry, community engagement and practical tools for renewal. Support for pastors and church councils. Conferences and learning gatherings. Research and theological reflection.



Kokerboom serves congregations by helping them listen, understand, discern, learn and act.



PROCESS

The congregation's 'way of doing things': its decision-making, leadership, morale, power dynamics and patterns of relationship.

THE KOKERBOOM MINISTRY CYCLE

A CONTINUOUS RHYTHM OF LEARNING, ACCOMPANIMENT, COLLABORATION AND RENEWAL.



A CONTINUOUS CYCLE OF LEARNING, COLLABORATION, EQUIPPING
AND TRANSFORMATION.

A Journey of Listening, Discernment and Renewal

Kokerboom does not use a one-size-fits-all formula. Every congregation has its own story, place, people, leadership, wounds, hopes, resources and calling.

The process generally follows a clear journey: listening to the congregation's story; understanding the internal life of the church and wider context; discernment through theological reflection and prayerful conversation; learning through tools, frameworks and theological language; action through practical next steps aligned with gifts and capacity; and accompaniment as the congregation implements, evaluates, adapts and grows.

The aim is not to create more activity. The aim is to form congregations that can discern and respond faithfully.



Religious Landscape in Namibia

Namibia is one of the most Christian countries in Africa.

About 10%

African traditional religions

About 1–2%

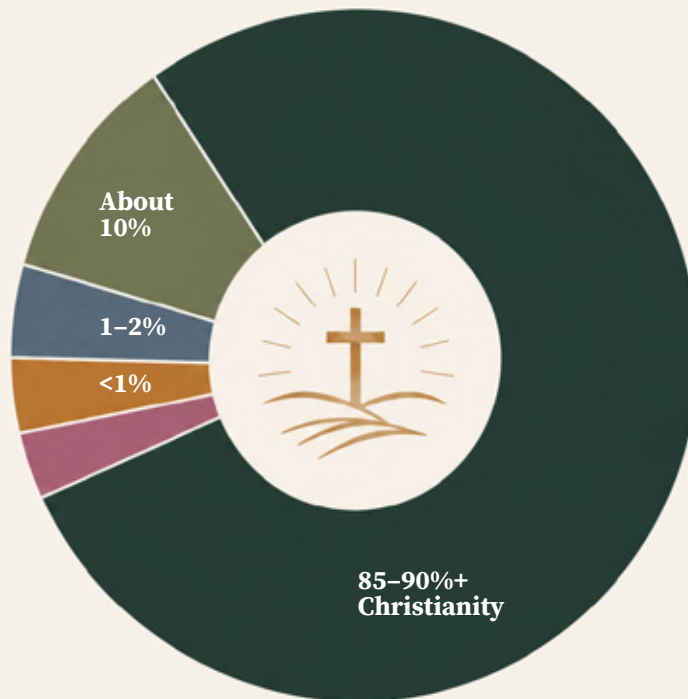
No religion / atheist

Less than 1%

Islam

Very small minorities

Other religions



Christianity 85–90%+

African traditional religions About 10%

No religion / atheist About 1–2%

Islam Less than 1%

Other religions Very small minorities

Indicative figures compiled from public demographic summaries and the Namibia Demographic and Health Survey (2013).

Christianity spread widely across Namibia during the 19th and 20th centuries through German, Finnish and other missionary efforts. Faith communities established churches, schools, hospitals and social services that continue to shape communities to this day.

Lutheran churches form the largest Christian tradition in Namibia. Many other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church also have a strong and faithful presence.

The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia guarantees freedom of religion, belief and conscience. People of different faiths and convictions generally live and work together in peace and mutual respect.



WITHIN CHRISTIANITY



Protestant churches
about 65%



Roman Catholic Church
about 20–23%

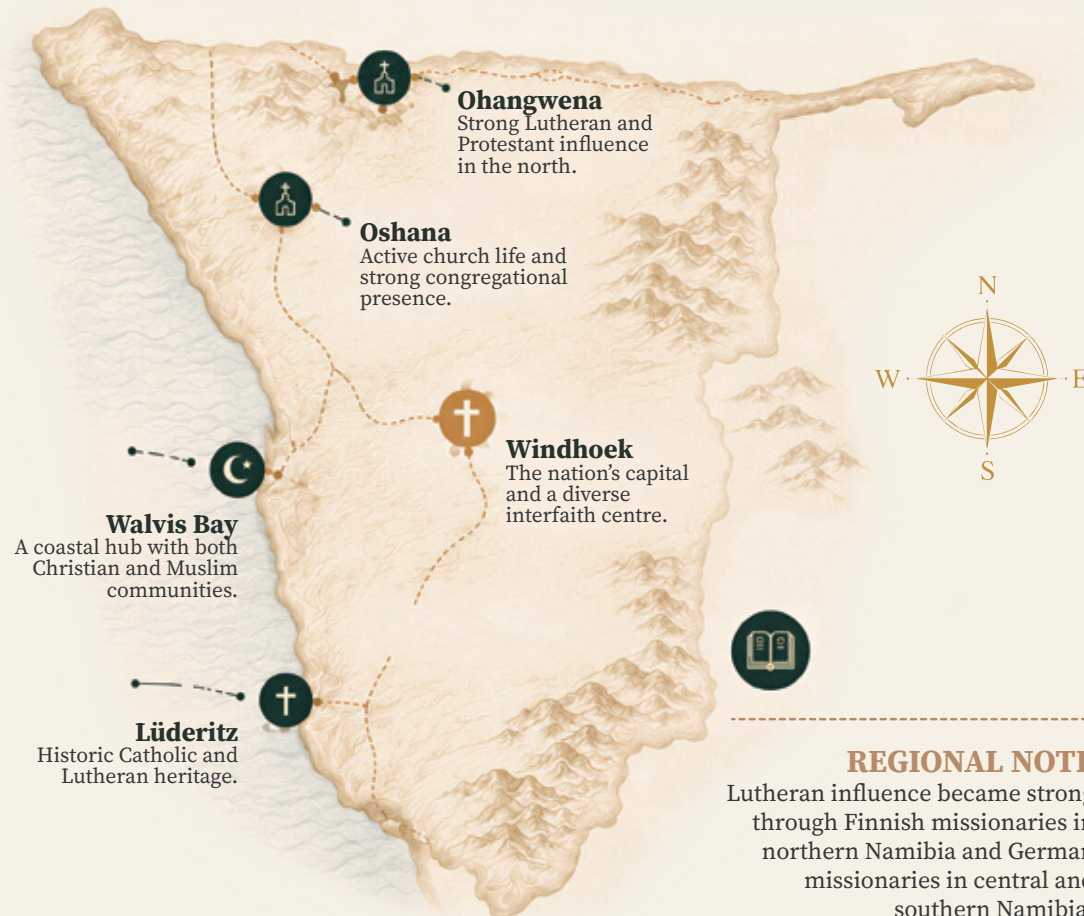


Lutheranism
remains the largest Christian tradition.



General Overview of Faith in Namibia

A diverse religious landscape shaped by history, place and community.



REGIONAL NOTE

Lutheran influence became strong through Finnish missionaries in northern Namibia and German missionaries in central and southern Namibia.

KEY POINTS AT A GLANCE



Largest Christian denominations: Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Dutch Reformed, Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.



The Roman Catholic Church is the second-largest Christian tradition in Namibia.



Some Namibians combine Christianity with traditional beliefs, especially around ancestors, healing practices and cultural rituals.



Traditional beliefs are more common in some rural communities and among groups such as the Himba and San.



Namibia's Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and different faith communities generally coexist peacefully.

Source: World Religion Database (2023); Pew Research Center - Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa (2020); Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (1990)



Challenges of (Small) Congregations

Congregations today face many challenges — spiritually, socially, financially, and culturally.

What is a congregation? The church is:

- ◇ A sent community,
- ◇ Called to be present in the world,
- ◇ Bearers of hope, reconciliation and justice,
- ◇ And participants in God's work outside the church building.

1. Decline in Membership Engagement



Fewer people attend worship services regularly, especially younger generations. Many feel alienated from organized religion.

2. Generation Gaps



Older and younger members often have different expectations about worship, music, ministry, and being a church.

3. Financial Pressure



Congregations sometimes struggle to finance salaries, maintenance, and ministry projects due to declining contributions.

4. Leadership Burnout



Pastors and church leaders experience emotional and spiritual exhaustion, especially where there are high expectations and little support.

5. Change and Resistance to Change



Congregations often want to grow, but change brings uncertainty and conflict.

6. Digitalisation and Technology



The church needs to learn how to be relevant in a digital world with online worship services, social media and new forms of communication.

7. Cultural and Social Changes



Societal values are rapidly changing around identity, family, sexuality and authority, and congregations struggle with this.



8. Lack of Discipleship

Many people remain culturally connected to church without deep spiritual growth or faith formation.



10. Unity and Conflict

Personalities, power dynamics, and different visions sometimes cause divisions within congregations.



12. Missional Identity

Many congregations ask, “Do we exist only for ourselves, or are we sent to the world?”



14. Balance Between Tradition and Renewal

How does a congregation maintain its identity and heritage but at the same time remain open to the new work of the Spirit?



9. Community Poverty and Social Distress

Communities are often confronted with unemployment, addiction, violence, loneliness and trauma in their communities.



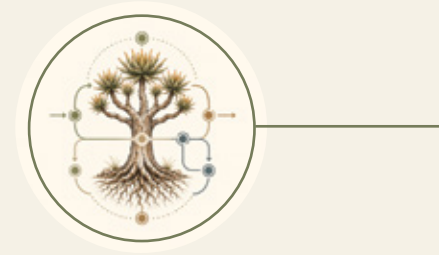
11. Relevance in a VUCA World

In a world that is changeable, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, people are asking new questions about faith and meaning.



13. Loss of Trust in Institutions

People trust institutions less in general — including the church — especially after scandals or disappointments.



One can summarize these challenges as the tension between:

◇ Conservation and renewal

◇ Community and individualism

◇ Tradition and relevance

◇ Stability and movement

The Gift of the Small Congregation

In a world that often measures success by size, speed, numbers and visibility, small congregations can easily feel overlooked. But the kingdom of God often works differently.

Small congregations are places where people are known by name. They carry memory. They hold communities together. They are close to the grief, joy, struggle and hope of ordinary people. They are often present where large institutions are absent.

The question is not whether every small congregation can become large.
The better question is: How can small congregations become strong, healthy, faithful and missional?

The strength of a congregation is not measured only by its size, but by its faithfulness to God's calling.





Rooted in Scripture.
Listening to our world.
Discerning God's call.
Accompanying one another.
Flourishing together.



KOKERBOOM

For the life of the Church
and the flourishing of communities.



Kokerboom is made possible through the support, partnership and shared commitment of the Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia, Verburg Charity Foundation in the Netherlands, GZB — De Gereformeerde Zendingsbond in the Netherlands — and local congregations.

Kokerboom



BOU KLEIN
STERK GEMEENTES

Dr. Zack Pienaar believes:

“Churches become healthier and more faithful when they function less like organizations trying to preserve themselves and more like communities learning to participate in God’s ongoing work in the world.”

Prof. Mark Lau Branson



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