



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

6th August 2018

From the Moderator's Desk

Dear Friends

It has been exactly a month since the General Assembly began on Friday 6th July 2018 at eMseni. I wanted to reflect on the Assembly and bring you up to date with some of the happenings in the Denomination since then.

The Local Organizing Committee, under the direction of Royden Blackwell did an amazing job of getting things ready for us. There was a sense of excitement as Commissioners and guests started arriving on Friday and were welcomed by the Welcoming Team. The eMseni staff were also immensely helpful in dealing with questions and requests during our stay at their Centre. It really was the most wonderful location for an Assembly, with almost enough accommodation for all the Commissioners to be able to stay on site; a meeting venue that was fast-tracked so that it could be used for our Assembly; a beautiful chapel for our morning devotions, our special Wednesday event and our Valedictory services and great food, of course.

The Induction Service on Saturday 7th July was hosted by St Andrews, Presbyterian Church, Benoni, my home congregation. It was a special privilege to be inducted in the congregation in which I was raised. My parents joined that congregation when I was two years old. I went to Sunday School there, came to know Jesus as my personal savior there and was confirmed there. I received my call to ministry (and worked through the initial understanding of that call with Bill Webster who was my minister growing up) in that congregation. I was invited by Bill to preach my first sermon ever in that congregation. At my induction there were people present who taught me in Sunday School, people who had known me for almost fifty years. It was also a special privilege to have my high school Latin teacher present – Mr. Fred Barnicoat – as my special guest, together with my wife Sally, my parents, and all our children, as well as John de Lange and Wayne Rossouw, two elders from Durbanville. George Marchinkowski presented me with my Moderatorial Gown, which was his gown gifted to me. The elders from Durbanville, presented me with the gifts from the congregation: my Moderator's Stole and my Doctoral Gown.

On Sunday we held the Assembly service at Benoni High School, the school which I attended and from which I matriculated in 1984. The Benoni high School Pipe Band played at my special request. I was a member of that band while at school and we won the South African Junior title in my matric year, so it was a treat to have them play. The venue was filled to capacity with almost 1 000 people, with many of the surrounding congregations joining us for this special morning service.

It was in that service that I addressed my theme for these two years, "Live your Legacy". I used the image introduced by Stephen Covey in his book, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" where he invites the reader to imagine that you are going to the funeral of a loved one. As you arrive at the church, you notice the people, the music playing quietly, the flowers, you see the faces of friends and family talking or maybe crying softly. You feel the sorrow of loss mixed with the joy of remembering the one who had died.

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The casket is at the front of the church and as you walk up and look inside you see that we are the person lying there – it's your funeral you are attending. As you wait for the service to begin, you notice that there will be four speakers. The first a member of your family; the second, one of your closest friends; the third, a work colleague and the fourth, a member of your congregation.

Covey asks these questions: "What would you like each of these speakers to say about you and your life? For what kind of son, husband and father or daughter, wife and mother would you like to be remembered? As what kind of work associate would you like to be remembered? As what kind of church person do you wish people to remember you?"

As we prepare to celebrate our 20th Anniversary next year, I want us to give some thought to the kind of Church we are going to pass on to the generations that follow us. We have all received a heritage from the past and we leave a legacy to those who follow us. We can do very little about the past, but we can decide what legacy we wish to leave to those who will follow us, and we can begin to live that legacy right now. That is my challenge to the UPCA: Live your legacy, don't just leave a legacy. Each morning during the Assembly, in the devotional session, we explored this topic – what we receive as a heritage from the past and what we should leave as a legacy to the generations that will follow us.

At the Assembly service we also received a message from the Rev Dr Des van der Water from the UCCSA, with whom we are committed to seek unity. The Rev Khethang Posholi of the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) also addressed the Assembly on the memorandum of understanding that has been signed between our two denominations. The LEC also sent fifteen observers to this Assembly and they participated fully in our Assembly to learn more about the consensus-model of decision making.

The business of this Assembly was quite remarkable in a number of respects. Four decisions stand out for me:

1. The Assembly decided that two issues that had taken up the time of the Assembly and the AARP over the last number of years, in the Presbyteries of Amathole and East Griqualand, were now to be considered as being fully and finally dealt with.
2. The Assembly received the Pool Commission report on the "Informal Procedure" in the Hansie Wolmarans matter and the matter is now firmly back in the hands of the Court of General Assembly.
3. The Assembly ruled that the eight associations must become four by September 2019. This will coincide with the 20th anniversary celebrations that will take place in Port Elizabeth in September next year. The mechanics of deciding how to do this was left to the General Assembly Working Group on Associations (GAWGA) to work on.
4. The Assembly continued to support the mediation process that is taking place between the Presbytery of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Presbytery Schools Trust and the Education and Training Committee of General Assembly to try and resolve the issues that have arisen around the schools in Zimbabwe.

In all of the matters which came before the Assembly, I believe that there was, and is, a genuine desire to seek the will of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we as a Church submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ.

The Assembly also marked the four decades of the ordination of women. There was a Women's Consultation on Wednesday afternoon of the Assembly, led by Lydia Neshangwe, one of my chaplains. A statement was issued by the women leaders of our Church as a consequence of this Consultation. We held a wonderful event on Wednesday evening where there were soloists, choral items and dancers. The main address was delivered by our guest speaker and special guest of the Moderator, the Rev Charity Majiza, the first woman ordained

in the former RPCSA. The Rev Majiza celebrates the fortieth anniversary of her ordination this year and it was profoundly moving to hear her speak about her experiences of coming into ministry and the struggles that she had to endure as part of her journey through these forty years. It was an honour to have her and her husband, Graeme McInty attend the entire Assembly.

The Valedictory Service is always a highlight for me as we celebrate these saints who have served Christ and the Church so faithfully all these years. This year we marked the retirement of seven of our ministers and I encourage you to read their tributes in the Assembly Papers and to give thanks to God for their faithful witness to the goodness of God.

The closing service of the Assembly was held at the Gateway Community Church, where, after the sermon and communion, the Rev Dr Sipho Mtetwa was invited to address the Assembly as the Moderator Designate. Following the service, we processed to the site of the new Tiyo Soga house and dedicated the new buildings to the glory of God.

I must pay tribute to both Lydia and Tony Robinson, my chaplains who worked so hard to make the Assembly flow as smoothly as it did.

Since the Assembly, there has been much activity. I continue to chair the Church Unity Commission, and the Commission turns 50 this year. We are planning a major event in September and so I have met with the Planning Team to look at how that is coming together. The Central Committee of the CUC also met in July to deal with the on-going work of the CUC.

The GAWGA also had their first meeting after the Assembly and there are plans in place to guide the process of bringing the Associations together as directed by the Assembly. I attended the first Association AGM post the Assembly this last weekend as the UPCS Women's Fellowship (UPWF) held their 16th AGM in Somerset West. What a joyous occasion it was and how encouraging to see how the UPWF, through their Executive, their Central Committee and their membership are committed to seeing the Assembly's instruction come to fruition.

As you continue to serve Christ and his people, may I ask that you give some thought to your legacy: What legacy do you wish to leave your family? What legacy do you wish to leave to the next generation in your congregation, your Presbytery and in the Assembly? What, then, is preventing you from beginning to live and act that way right now?

I remain your friend and pastor



Peter