

Probationers' Conference March 2011

The Probationers of 2011 had their first of two conferences at the Rocky Valley Conference Centre, owned by the eGoli Presbytery of the UPCSA. 10 Probationers attended; 9 from South Africa and one from Zimbabwe.



9 of the 10 Probationers in relaxed mode.

The Conference Theme was: **“The Church belongs to Christ”**

This theme was selected because it is easily forgotten that the basis of a person's ministry begins and ends with God. It is God who calls people into the ministry; it is God's people who need to be ministered to and it is God's Word that needs to be preached. Without these fundamentals in place it is a small step to begin speaking of "my ministry"; "my congregation"; "my calling" and "my sermons" etc. The scriptural basis for this theme is the understanding that at the Ascension Jesus did not vacate the world and hand over His ministry to the disciples and those who would follow in their footsteps. Rather, it is clear from the account in the Acts of the Apostles that Jesus continues to minister through the Holy Spirit and the disciples were commissioned to be "witnesses" of Him (Acts 1:8). A witness is one who does not speak on his/her own authority but one who speaks of what he/she has **seen** and **heard**. In short, an important facet of ministry is to discern where God is already a work.



This was supported by an examination of the Minister's Primary Duties (as contained in the Manual of Faith and Order 16.1). It comes as a surprise to many that a Minister's primary duty is not first and foremost to preach but rather to be faithful in the study of scripture and prayer and then to lead a holy life. Only then does preaching follow.

Probationers examining the manual of Faith and Order

Preaching experience is needed in the ministry. In order for preaching to be God's Word it needs to be preceded by a sound exegesis of a passage of scripture. Each Probationer was therefore allocated a passage of scripture to prepare and to present as an exegetical exposition rather than in the form of a sermon. The passages of scripture allocated were all questions that God asked of people. Sample questions included: "Who told you that you were naked?"(Gen.3:11); "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"(John 8:10); "Cain, why are you angry?"(Gen.4:6); "Who do you say that I am?"(Luke 9:20); "Why did Sarah laugh?"(Gen.18:13); "Why were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"(Numbers 12:8); "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?"(Acts 9:4). Each presentation was followed by an in-depth discussion on the potential of the text and its relevance for people living modern times.



Times of open and relaxed discussion were often enjoyed.



Rev Jaco Bester teaching on the Confession of Faith

As the UPCSA belongs to the family of Reformed Churches, ministers in training need to be familiar with its theology. A study on our recently adopted Confession of Faith was led by Jaco Bester who himself was a Probationer in 2009. He entitled his presentation "A Faith Worth Confessing" and briefly looked at the historical background to the UPCSA Confession; a fairly detailed look at the Confession itself with a special emphasis on how it traces the progression of Redemption; how the Confession can be a living document that challenges us to think critically about the issues that surround us.

Other topics that formed an important aspect of the conference include:

1. Ordination Vows: Eddie Germiquet
2. A fresh look at the sacraments: Neil Meyer
3. Trauma counseling: Prof. Maake Msango
4. Church polity & church records: John McKane
5. The contents of the Manual of Faith and Order. Each Probationer prepared and presented a chapter on the Manual. This exercise opened the eyes of Probationers to the value of the Manual as a guide to empowering the Elders and members of a congregation to take ownership of their responsibility in the ministry that takes place in the Church. Ministry is not a one-man-show.
6. A visit to Diepsloot and a presentation on the ministry relevant to poor and displaced people: Mukondi Ramulondi.
7. Presentation of various personal testimonies by ministers of the UPCSA.
8. A visit to the Central Offices of the UPCSA so that the function and responsibilities of each person can be more clearly understood and appreciated. The General Secretary; Ministry Secretary; Chief Financial Officer and Accountants; Clerk of Assembly and Presbytery Liaison Officer as well as the HIV/Aids Officer together Personal Assistants and Receptionist all had an opportunity to explain their own role in the functioning of the Central Office.



Probationers with the General Secretary of the UPCSA, Rev Dr Jerry Pillay

9. A visit to Constitutional Hill also took place. It is not only the historical importance of the place that is of interest but also the significance of the Constitutional Judges having to interpret the Law for its practical application being compared to the role of Ministers who interpret God's Word for the understanding and application by congregants. If Judges take their responsibilities of hermeneutics seriously then how much more should ministers do the same when it comes to their calling by God.



Time of singing in St Mark's, Yeoville, led by the Probationers

The Ministry Secretary Rev Dr Eddie Germiquet in discussion.





Rev Prof. Maake Masango teaching on trauma counseling.



Rev Neil Meyer being thanked for his insightful teaching on the meaning of the sacraments.

The Church of the future will also need to be involved in attending to the physical needs of people before trying to preach the Gospel. "You cannot preach to a hungry person." said Rev Ramulondi.



Observing the carpentry projects in the resettlement village of Diepsloot.



Rev Prof Hansie Wolmarans (on the left) shared his testimony of growing up in Apartheid South Africa and his personal journey of liberation from prejudice.



The Moderator of the UPCSA, Rt. Rev. Dr. George Marchinskowski came and did the closing service with words of challenge, encouragement and commissioning. He also celebrated the sacrament of Holy Communion.



In addition to the seriousness of the Conference there was much time left to enjoy fellowship and to build bonds of friendship that would last.

Madoda entertaining his fellow Probationers with his imitation of politicians.



Simon Mbanjwa (Pholela); Simon Mohwibitsoane (East Griqualand) and Nathaniel Kohler (Pretoria).

Probationers who attended this conference:

Kohler, Nathaniel
Kobo, Fundiswa
Mohwibitsoane, Simon
Mfene, Mzwamadoda
Mbanjwa, Simon

Motebele, Linsby
Mkentane, Walter
Noti, Thabo
Van Heerden, Wayne
Zinduru, Knowledge