



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

25th February 2016

PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE MODERATOR OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

TO THE BODY OF CHRIST IN THE UPCSA

Dear Friends

I write to you after receiving a lot of correspondence from some of our congregations, individual ministers and elders in our church. These different groups have raised their dissatisfaction on the matter relating to the confession of faith and human sexuality. They were also unhappy by the silence of the General Secretary and the Moderator of General Assembly on the statements made in Newspapers and other media platforms. The General Secretary and the Moderator responded to the concerns raised by writing and also by visiting some of the concerned groups, where possible.

As I write this pastoral letter, may I refer all of us to Chapter 1 of Manual of Faith and Order, Section 1 – The church: *“The church has been called into being by the will of God, who gathers all people into a fellowship in Christ, which is created and sustained by the power of Holy Spirit. Its purpose and function is to bear witness to the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to all who do not yet believe in him, to build up in faith, hope and love those who already believe and to proclaim his sovereignty over the world.*

The church is holy because it is of God, and not of human creation. It is Catholic in that God of his love calls all people to share in its membership. It is apostolic in that it is built upon the foundation of the apostolic teaching.”

Many denominations around the world have been seriously affected by their decisions relating to issues of human sexuality. Some of these churches are

Tiyo Soga House
28 Rhodes Ave, Parktown, 2193
PO Box 96188, Brixton 2019
Tel: +27 11 727 3500
Fax: +27 11 727 3506
Email: gensec@presbyterian.org.za

PBO 18/11/13/1612
Moderator : Rt Rev ME Ramulondi BA Hons
General Secretary: The Rev L Mpetsheni PGDSS MTh
Clerk of Assembly : The Rev WV Mkhungo DipTh
General Treasurer : Mr R Johnson MCom(UP) MIRMSA

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facing threats of some of their congregations breaking away from the membership of the denomination. The UPCSA is not spared from these challenges.

I appeal to all peace and unity loving followers of Christ in our church to exercise patience in dealing with the issue of human sexuality. As the UPCSA, maybe, we did not engage the entire Church enough to have robust dialogue on the complexity of human sexuality. There is a need for an open and frank dialogue on this subject. Within the UPCSA we have divergent convictions and theological views. I am deeply distressed by the manner in which these different views are negatively affecting our relationships in our church. The fellowship of believers is key to our witness as a church. It takes a moment to destroy the relationships that have been established over a long time. It may as well take decades to repair a damaged relationship within the body of Christ.

The General Secretary and the Moderator have wrestled with the issues as they came and have never found an easy way of resolving the challenges facing us, specifically in the area of human sexuality. The General Secretary communicated with the relevant Assembly Committee to look at the matter and present a report to the coming General Assembly in July within the bounds of the Presbytery of Amathole in East London. It is our view that the General Assembly is the relevant platform where all concerned groups can be afforded an opportunity to express their views and help the church to come up with the position on the matter of human sexuality.

Finally, let us not forget that regardless of sexual orientation, all human beings are created in the image of God and that Christ died for them all. I hope that we will not conclude this matter without having listened to the voices of those who feel marginalized and excluded in the fellowship of the membership of our church.

I believe that we need to avail ourselves to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and allow the Spirit to work in all of us. Christ loves us all and he expects us to do the same to one another.

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Let me leave with the words of Paul to the church in Corinth. I Cor. 13: 1-13 *"If I speak in the tongues[a] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, [b] but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love".*

I pray that God will guide us and give us peace as we think about these things.

"To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy — to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!" Amen

Yours in Christ.



The Rt Rev Mukondi Ramulondi
MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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