



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

November 12, 2018

From the Moderator's Desk

Dear Friends

This has been a very interesting and engaging month. It was a great privilege to have been invited to visit the Presbytery of eGoli, in the first of my Presbytery visits. The visit began with an opportunity to address an ordinary meeting of the Presbytery, to see the Presbytery in action and to make contact with various ministers and elders in the Presbytery.

The next two days were taken up with an invitation to attend and address the Inspire Conference at eMseni, hosted by the Mission and Discipleship Committee. It was an honour to have been invited by Theo and the M&D Committee and to have been able to participate in the Conference together with delegates from all across the denomination. It was stirring to see the willingness of people wanting to grapple with what it means to be missional.

It was during the Inspire Conference that the interactions with congregations in the Presbytery of eGoli began. All-in-all I was able to meet with, have contact with, join with, preach in and or visit projects associated with, 12 of the 31 congregations in that Presbytery. My thanks to the ministers, elders, members and friends of St Mungo's, St Magnus, Diepkloof Zone 3, Diepsloot, St Stephens, Trinity, St Columba's, Midchurch, 4Ways, Mayfair, St John's and Moletsane for their hospitality and generosity in engaging with me. In addition to this, it was a great privilege to share with various members of the Presbytery at a reception hosted by George and Sascha Marchinkowski at their home. My thanks also to George and Sascha for hosting me in their home, to St Mungo's for logistical assistance and to Brendon Asch who acted as my *ad-hoc* chaplain for the duration of this first half of my visit to the Presbytery.

In each setting, whether large or small, township or suburb, I was struck by congregations grappling with what it means to be missional in their specific context. There is not one congregation that believes that it has all the answers, but also there did not seem to be one congregation that is just seeking to keep the doors open and the lights on. For example, I was honoured to visit the Mayfair congregation as the guest of the Rev Dr Calvin Naidoo, and saw a congregation surrounded by 15 mosques and a Hindu temple, all of which used to be churches and were bought by these other religious communities. Calvin was offered money for his church building but did not take it, since there are only three Christian churches left in Mayfair and, if they did so, it would further weaken the already weakened Christian witness. Calvin was telling me that his church is full on Sunday morning, but they have real financial challenges, especially to maintain a building that is beginning to show signs of wear and tear. They are a mission station under threat and the question is, "What can we do to help them to stand firm for the gospel?" In some formerly-white suburban congregations, it is delightful and encouraging to see mixed congregations where the former members have opened their arms to welcome people of other cultural and ethnic groups with the result that the congregations have been transformed and are now a sign of hope for all communities in our country and across our denomination. Township congregations, too, are aware of the great needs, but also the huge opportunities for mission on their doorsteps. Even those congregations that are economically challenged are doing what they can to contribute to the assist their communities in whichever way they can.

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PBO 18/11/13/1612
Moderator: Rt Rev Dr PD Langerman Bth Mth DMin
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Clerk of Assembly: The Rev WV Mkhungo DipTh
General Treasurer: Mr R Johnson MCom (UP) MIRMSA

It was a wonderful to see congregations who have committed to various socio-economic projects over a prolonged period. In a world where so many Christians seem to parachute in, take a few photos, give a cheque, and then ride out, the involvement of congregations with organizations over ten or even twenty years is an encouragement to others. Real involvement and deep friendships have been established between congregations and organizations that continue to be a witness to many of us about how to engage in responsible outreach.

One point of concern is that it seems that the Johannesburg Metro has decided to try and squeeze NPO's for rates on the flimsy argument that these are not religious institutions. Guild Cottage, for instance, has been hit with a rates bill for R 33 000 a month. It seems that other organizations have been billed for rates as well and this needs to be addressed.

The visit ended with a very special trip to Thornybush. Sally and I, together with Alastair and Joanne Anquetil, Jaco and Jacqui Bester, Tony and Helena Robinson, Martin and Sharilyn Tel (Martin is musical director at Princeton who presented the annual St Columba's lecture) spent three wonderful days in this very special place. My thanks to St Columba's for the invitation and for making the trip possible - it was a very special treat.

On Sunday the 18th, I was invited to preach and preside at the closing service of the Men's Fellowship at 4.30 am. I was struck again at the passion of our Fellowships and Associations in taking time in their annual conferences to pray right through the night asking for God to intervene in the life of our denomination and communities.

This last week I was invited to attend, together with the General Secretary, the Clerk of Assembly, the Convenor of the Business Committee and the CFO, a meeting with the LOC of the Presbytery of the Central Cape. We visited various venues that have been identified as venues for the celebrations of our 20th anniversary celebrations in September 2019. We assessed the state of readiness and I was impressed by the work that has been done by the LOC in preparing for the anniversary celebrations next year. We need to mobilize and organize to make sure that next year is a landmark in the life of our denomination. The venues, especially the stadium where the celebrations will take place on Saturday, are large venues and we need to make sure that we fill these stadiums for these events. It would be wonderful if all Presbyterians would make an effort to attend the party, from townships, rural areas and suburban congregations and to paint PE red, white and blue for that week in September.

I closed the week with a meeting with the Motsepe Foundation, together with 32 other religious and Christian leaders looking at the planning for the National Day of Prayer on the 25th November 2018 at the FNB Stadium. I reflected at that meeting that there were, according to some estimates, around two million people at the recent "It's Time" event, and I wondered whether there would be anything like this number at the event in November. I trust that we will support this and take the opportunity to pray for South Africa. It would be wonderful if our brothers and sisters in Zambia and Zimbabwe would take the opportunity to pray for us on that day in their congregations

Your friend and fellow partner in the gospel



Peter

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