



THE UNITING  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA

Thursday, August 22, 2019

From the Moderator's Desk

Dear Friends

I write to you from a very wet and cold Western Cape where, after many years of drought, it seems that we have turned the corner. Our dams are sufficiently full for the year ahead and we are cautiously optimistic that we will be able to see water restrictions eased a little, enabling us to try and bring a little bit of life to our parched gardens.

Since I wrote to you last month, there have been a couple of letters to me, and many questions, regarding the outcome of the mediated settlement in the case of the Rev Prof JLP (Hansie) Wolmarans, especially regarding his status as a minister of the Church. Hansie's status as a minister *emeritus* was put on hold at the General Assembly in 2016 and will have to be decided by the Executive Commission in Port Elizabeth next month. While the disciplinary aspect of the case has been concluded, what continues is our commitment to discuss, debate and deliberate upon the restrictions that our Confession of Faith imposes upon the freedom of conscience provision that we all took in our ordination vows. Whether ordained as minister or elder, we all took a vow in these terms:

"This Church recognizes liberty of opinion on all points of doctrine not fundamental to the faith. But it retains the right in every case to judge what falls within this description and to guard against any abuse of this liberty that may injure its witness, unity or peace."

What we have to determine is the places where the Confession of Faith determines the limits and boundaries of the points of doctrine that are fundamental to the faith. Our Church has always been a place through which various theological currents have continued to flow, both in the history of our former Denominations and in the Uniting Church. Broadly speaking there have always been, and there continue to be, currents that would be described as "evangelical", others which could be described as "liberal" and those which might be described as "liberational / contextual". Each of these theological currents are not unique to our Church but are expressed in ways that are unique to our understanding of what it means to be a Presbyterian and Reformed Church in a Southern African context. Our continued growth and development as a Uniting Church depends on our ability to understand the richness and diversity that comes from each of these respective theological currents and to be able to engage in dialogue with others who adhere to a different theological position sanctioned by a faithful interpretation of Scripture and the application of our Confession. Now that the disciplinary aspects of the case have been settled through mediation, we can return to the on-going conversation about how we interpret our fundamental doctrines in the light of the Confession of Faith. It would be a sad and shameful testimony if we were unable to engage in these discussions in a love-filled dialogue and chose rather to throw insults at one another and cast doubt upon the *bona fides* of our brothers and sisters in Christ who might hold to a different theological position than our own. The acrimonious debates that have taken place in some of our Presbyteries over the last month are testimony to our failures in this regard and for that we must all take some responsibility. Please make this an item of prayer and especially lift up our Executive Commission that meets next month to deliberate on this very important issue. Please remember that at the Executive we do not represent any particular interest group, but we gather to try and discern together what Christ,

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

who is the Head of the Church, is saying to us through the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father. Pray that we will have the humility to hear the opinions of others and the courage to do what is right.

My letter this month is dedicated to our women elders and ministers. While it might seem inappropriate to single out a gender like this, let me say that it causes me great sadness to listen to the experiences of many, if not most, of our women ministers and elders. When, at the 2018 Assembly I planned to have an event "celebrating" four decades of the ordination of women, many of our women leaders pushed back and said that it was inappropriate to celebrate an experience that was, for them, only painful. Having heard this, I think it important that we, as men, must take responsibility for – and repent of – our sexism, bigotry and misogyny, whether covert or overt, that has led to the experience described by our women leaders in the Church. I long for a day when we will acknowledge our cruel ministerial gender stereotypes and our entrenched patriarchy, truly repent of it and shatter the glass ceiling that prevents more women from entering into leadership positions in our Church. I am not sure if quotas actually work, but maybe we are going to have to do something like that in our Sessions, Presbyteries, General Assembly and in our Committees to ensure that women do not remain relegated to an inferior position in terms of numbers and influence. How many of your Session elders are women? How many women Commissioners are there at Presbytery and Assembly? How many women are office bearers in Presbyteries? How many women are members and Convenors of General Assembly Committees? Why, twenty years into union, have we had only one Moderator who was a woman and why are so few women nominated by Presbyteries? I know it is tricky for me to speak about these matters and I risk raising the ire of some by doing so, but I do long for a day when the Church truly is a place where all feel at home.

I came across this some time ago and have slightly amended it. It was originally written by Dr. David M. Scholer, a former professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and entitled "10 reasons Why Men Should Not Be Ordained For Ministry."

10. A man's place is in the army.
9. The pastoral duties of men who have children might distract them from the responsibility of being a parent.
8. The physique of men indicates that they are more suited to such tasks as chopping down trees and wrestling crocodiles. It would be "unnatural" for them to do ministerial tasks.
7. Man was created before woman, obviously as a prototype. Thus, they represent an experiment rather than the crowning achievement of creation.
6. Men are too emotional to be priests or pastors. Their conduct at rugby and soccer games demonstrates this.
5. Some men are handsome, and this will distract women worshipers.
4. Pastors need to nurture their congregations. But this is not a traditional male role. Throughout history, women have been recognized as not only more skilled than men at nurturing, but also more fervently attracted to it. This makes them the obvious choice for ordination.
3. Men are prone to violence. No really masculine man wants to settle disputes except by fighting about them. Thus they would be poor role models as well as dangerously unstable in positions of leadership.
2. The New Testament tells us that Jesus was betrayed by a man. His lack of faith and ensuing punishment remind us of the subordinated position that all men should take.
1. Men can still be involved in church activities, even without being ordained. They can sweep sidewalks, repair the church roof, and perhaps even lead the song service on Father's Day. By confining themselves to such traditional male roles, they can still be vitally important in the life of the church.

Your partner in the gospel



Peter

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